

the

next step

review of the Revolutionary Communist Party

No 51 September 1984

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Len, the left, the law



Support striking miners



John Sturrock (Network)

Fighting for the right to work

the next step

No. 51 September 1984
monthly review of the Revolutionary Communist Party

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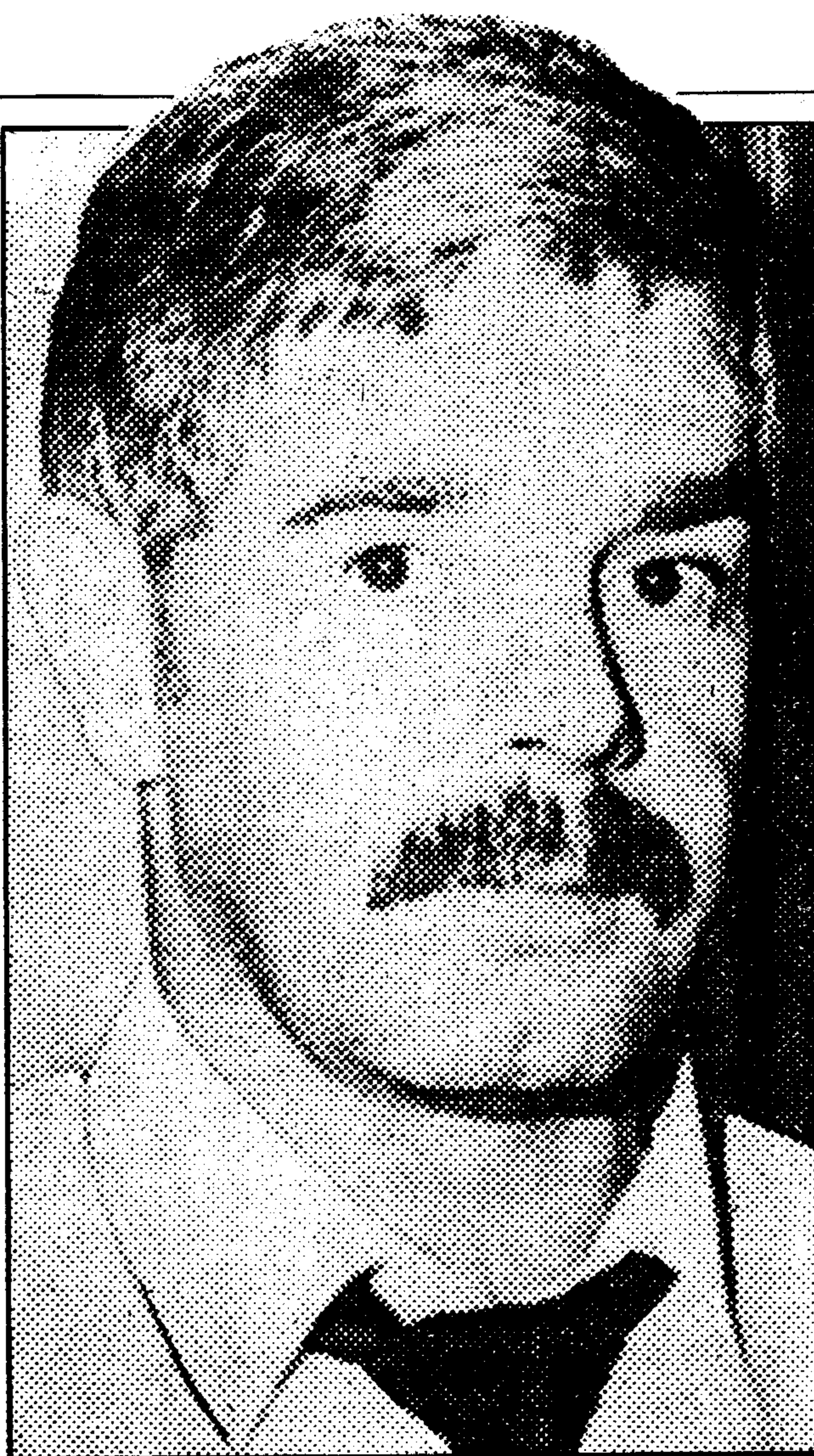
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Silver Birch Let him rot

Reports of the 'growing back-to-work movement' in the mining communities have been big news in recent weeks. After the appearance of Silver Birch, champion of the working miner, two Yorkshire NUM members went to court to force the union to hold a strike ballot, and the first miners crossed picket lines in the militant areas.

The establishment acclaimed Silver Birch and friends for defending the right to work and representing all that is best about the British working man. In fact, the strike-breakers have upheld the right to scab. They represent all that is worst about the British gutter press.

Budding Birch

The mysterious Silver Birch turned out to be boring Chris Butcher, a blacksmith from Bevercotes Colliery in Notts renowned for anti-union posturing.

Butcher claimed that, during a tour of the coalfields on his days off from crossing picket lines, he had 'got a feeling' that 80 per cent of miners supported his views. Presumably he received this telepathic message from the same source that told him he was a tree. His only real support comes from a handful of hard core scabs, corporate directors and the Mail newspaper group.

Butcher's reliance on the image created by his Fleet Street allies is such that *The Sunday Times* accused him of being the 'Zola Budd of the

pits'. He has even less chance of succeeding than that failed Olympian. Thousands of striking miners are not so easily tripped up in the back straight as was Mary Decker.

The money backing the scab groups has come from big business. Prominent bosses have been sent a circular appealing for funds for strike-breakers 'fighting for what we believe in'.

The begging letter quotes Edmund Burke's warning that 'all that is needed for evil to triumph is that good men do nothing'. Such erudition may have employers reaching for their cheque books. It will have thousands of miners reaching for the scabs' throats. Striking miners have treated the strike-breakers with the contempt they deserve.

Passivity

It is important, however, to distinguish between the empty prattle of media stooges and the real problem of disaffected strikers. The majority of striking miners have had only a passive relationship to the dispute. They are more likely to have watched the violent picket line clashes on television than to have swapped blows with the riot police.

After six months of hardship the potential for passivity to turn into disillusionment is growing. A real movement back to work could quickly develop if the strike does not make some definite progress. Rumours about secret talks and major concessions made by NUM

leaders are a much bigger threat to the success of the strike than the antics of Silver Birch.

The responsibility for this state of affairs lies with the miners' leaders. From the outset they have failed to involve their members in running the strike or to consult them about the strategy to be pursued.

Stake

The strike has been run bureaucratically from the top down. Miners have been told where and how to picket. Many have lost interest in attending the showpiece shouting matches staged by NUM officials.

This strategy has exacerbated divisions and encouraged passivity. As a result, the most active militants have been tied down, consolidating their home base rather than going out to fight for solidarity with other workers.

Miners' leaders can scoff with justification at the suggestion that one Yorkshire miner working means the strike is about to collapse. But as the numbers working inch upwards, thousands of pickets who should be away closing down power stations are forced to stay in their back yards to defend the picket lines at their own pits.

To really put the axe into Silver Birch, miners need to take control of their strike and convince the stay-at-homes that they have a stake in getting stuck into the struggle.

Mick Hume

Take the next step to a weekly paper!

In July we launched a £25 000 fund drive to go weekly and raised £2500 on the spot. Last month we netted another £3500. In September we want to double it!

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Frank Richards

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The miners' next step



IDEAS IN ACTION

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The 'most important industrial dispute in Britain since the 1926 General Strike'. That's the importance given to the miners' strike in *The miners' next step*, the Revolutionary Communist Party's pamphlet supporting the six-month struggle for jobs. Our pamphlet is fast becoming one of the most significant contributions to the debate about the strategy needed to win this crucial dispute.

The miners' next step has been sold at pits and other workplaces, in mining communities, on demonstrations and around housing estates throughout Britain. The first 5 000 copies were snapped up in little more than a week and the second edition is selling out fast. We sold around 500 on the Women Against Pit Closures march through London in August.

Supporters of the RCP have organised discussions of the problems raised in the pamphlet with miners and other workers. The national speaking tour we put on the road last month took the message of *The miners' next step* to towns and cities in England, Scotland and Wales.

We've found that many miners who were unconvinced by our alternative strike strategy now welcome the injection of some new political ideas. But the basic idea running through *The miners' next step* isn't really all that new.

The pamphlet seeks to revive the traditions of the 1912 rank and file pamphlet, the original *The miners' next step*, whose motto was that 'the old policy of identity of interest between employers and ourselves (should) be abolished and a policy of open hostility installed'.

In the current dispute, that means arguing that miners have the right to protect jobs and living standards irrespective of the financial state of the industry in which they work.

Efficient

'Open hostility' towards the Coal Board is a well established mood among striking miners. The political approach of their leaders, however, centres on the notion of an 'identity of interest' between workers and employers.

The NUM leadership projects collaborating with the Coal Board to make the mining industry more efficient as the only way to defend miners' jobs and livelihoods. The union has based its case in the strike on the 1974 *Plan for Coal*, an efficiency scheme for the coalmining industry agreed among the last Labour government, the Coal Board and the NUM.

The miners' next step argues that this collaborative approach cannot defend the miners. The British mining industry is a capitalist enterprise. It is run to make a profit for employers, not to provide jobs for miners. As

Margaret Thatcher explained to Neil Kinnock last month, making a capitalist industry efficient means cutting out unprofitable pits and slashing jobs:

'In a market economy an efficient coal industry should help to finance the social services, and not become one itself.'

The NUM's commitment to the *Plan for Coal*'s efficiency drive led to the sacrifice of more than 20 000 miners' jobs over the year leading up to the strike. To win the dispute, miners need to reject the *Plan for Coal* and adopt the strategy of aggressive class struggle promoted in the original *The miners' next step* and reasserted in our pamphlet of the same name.

Bitter

Many miners who have read *The miners' next step* have found that its arguments against tying miners' living standards to the efficiency of a state-run enterprise corres-

pond to their own bitter experience of closures, redundancies and increased exploitation.

Alan, from Yorkshire Main pit near Doncaster, agreed that the 1912 document 'correctly saw that nationalisation in a capitalist system would only serve capital and not the workers'. The task now is to get that message across to the majority of striking miners:

'We keep hearing that we are fighting to get back to the 1974 *Plan for Coal*. Most miners think that this has something to do with their job security, a four day week, early retirement, better pensions, rate protection etc. The fact is that the *Plan for Coal* was a plan to make the coal industry more efficient.

'Every time we get more efficient the only reward is the dole for many. Plans for coal mean nothing unless they include the demands I've just mentioned. The 1974 *Plan for Coal* does not include these things. It does not look after us so it is nothing to do with us. We want jobs, not efficiency for somebody else's profits.'

The miners' next step shows why miners need to reject the idea of uniting with a state corporation, and to concentrate on uniting with other workers in a struggle against the state machine. After reading our pamphlet, Steve, a Silverwood miner, told us he'd 'learnt a lot more about what solidarity means — not to trust the state'.

The struggles of the last six months have made some miners more than willing 'not to trust the state' in any circumstances. Luis, a miner from Markham Main pit, told us that his distrust of the police had been confirmed by the strike:

'From the beginning I told all the pickets to say nothing to the police, to turn our backs on them whenever they try to talk to us. The police act only for the bosses. We should be doing more to defend our brothers against them.'

Many more miners have come to see the police for what they are during the dispute. The breakdown of respect for the establishment's law and order has made miners more receptive to the anti-capitalist politics of *The miners' next step*.



We support miners' wives and miners at war

Issues

Over the past few weeks, RCP supporters selling the pamphlet and arguing for solidarity with the miners have confronted the issues thrown up by the strike. We have used the approach of *The miners' next step* to put forward our unequivocal support for the miners' fight for jobs.

● **violence:** the government, Coal Board and media have launched an hysterical campaign, accusing miners of 'violent intimidation' and denouncing the 'criminal conspiracy' they claim is behind the strike.

The establishment's howling about miners' violence is designed to divert attention from increased police terror in the coalfields.

In the last week of August the press focused attention on an 'organised mob', dressed in paramilitary uniforms and led by a sinister 'thin-faced' woman, sabotaging pits.

This device conveniently shifted the public gaze from the Yorkshire pit villages which were being sealed off by occupying armies of riot police. Police rampaged through miners' streets and homes, beating anything that moved into the ground.

The right wing of the official labour movement condemned outright miners' who fight back against state terror. Labour Party deputy leader Roy Hattersley warned miners that Labour could 'have no truck with violence in any form'.

The left, too, has bowed to pressure from the establishment's law and order lobby. The Socialist Workers' Party condemned the same miners' 'hit squads' vilified by Fleet Street.

We make no concessions to the bosses' propaganda campaign. The miners have the right to fight for their jobs by whatever means are necessary. We give our unconditional support to miners fighting the government, the police and the courts.

● **negotiations:** the recent few weeks have brought renewed behind-the-scenes efforts to set up negotiations which could end the strike. The miners' leaders have been involved in talks on two fronts.

The NUM has been discussing with TUC chiefs about how much support

other union leaders are prepared to give, and what concessions they would demand from the miners in return.

NUM officials have had negotiations with the Labour Party to try to work out a revised package of demands which could be put to the Coal Board. Last month NUM president Arthur Scargill admitted that the proposals arrived at with Labour's Stan Orme (and later rejected by the Coal Board's Ian MacGregor) involved 'significant concessions' on the union's part.

Our supporters have been arguing against a deal with the Coal Board and for all negotiations to be conducted in full view of striking miners. Nothing about the running of the strike should be concealed from miners whose livelihoods and communities are at stake.

Instead of conducting committee room discussions with TUC and Labour Party officials, miners' leaders should be organising mass meetings at which their members can decide the strike's strategy. Rank and file miners must be actively involved in dictating the terms on which any talks are held, and on which the strike is run.

● **emergency cover:** the Coal Board claims that the deteriorating state of many mines means that they will have to close permanently unless work resumes soon. It has used this argument to blame the strike for any subsequent pit closures and to put pressure on miners to return to work.

The miners' next step puts the case for workers' control of their own lives and struggles. That includes repair work to mines. Our supporters have argued that miners can allow pits to be maintained for future use as long as the emergency cover remains under their control. Miners have made clear to the Coal Board that any attempt to use scab labour in the pits will result in the withdrawal of emergency cover.

Miners can give no ground to the employers' claim that pits will collapse unless mining resumes. If the Coal Board is serious about these worries, the solution is in its hands. MacGregor can withdraw the pit closures programme, guarantee every job, and let the miners go back with a victory.

Solidarity

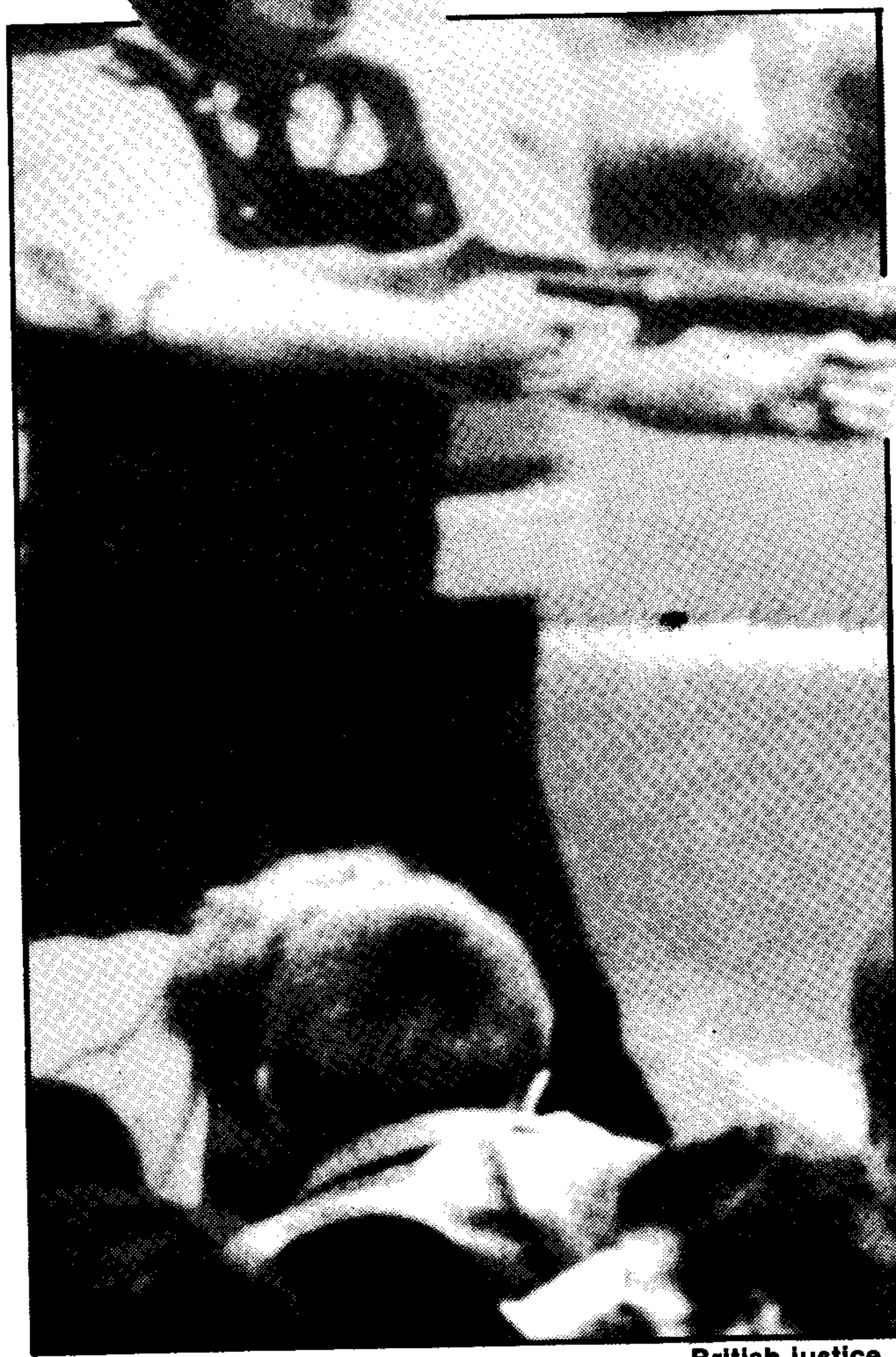
We have used *The miners' next step* both to try to push the strike ahead and to win wider solidarity with the miners. In Rotherham, our supporters in Nalco have used the pamphlet's approach to oppose all attempts by police administration employees to cut off Nalco's financial support for the NUM. We have also seized the opportunity to open a debate about how rank and file Nalco members can give the miners more active backing.

To widen the discussion around the strike we need to get *The miners' next step* into even more workplaces and estates. If you want to read and discuss the pamphlet that miners and militants are talking about, order your copy now.

In Belfast... Another Bloody Sunday

On Sunday 12 August Loyalist police used plastic bullets, riot batons and armoured landrovers to carve through 3000 unarmed nationalists at a West Belfast rally commemorating Britain's introduction of Internment without trial in 1971. The Royal Ulster Constabulary shot dead 22 year old Sean Downes and hospitalised 20 others in a failed attempt to capture banned American republican fund-raiser Martin Galvin. Here *Mick Hume* looks behind the Andersonstown carnage at the problems of British rule in Ireland

today. Opposite he reviews the failures of those who oppose it within Britain.



British justice..

Sean Downes was murdered two days before the fifteenth anniversary of Britain's invasion of Northern Ireland. The bullet that struck him in the heart also blasted tales and pictures of British brutality back into the headlines of the world media for the first time since the republican hunger-strike of 1981.

The British government took fright at the press and public outcry over the shooting. Whitehall quickly passed the buck to retiring Northern Ireland Secretary James Prior, holidaying in Hampshire. Somewhere along the way back to Westminster Prior fumbled the pass badly. His apologetic statement on the killing of Sean Downes exposed the dead-end of Britain's strategy for ending the Irish War.

Pretext

The government's ban on Irish Northern Aid spokesman Galvin entering the Six Counties gave the RUC its pretext to attack the republican rally when Galvin appeared on the

platform.

Prior embarrassed the establishment by admitting that the decision to ban Galvin looked 'a bad mistake' for which he took 'full responsibility'.

'It's also a great set-back for the Royal Ulster Constabulary, who have done so much under the leadership of Sir Jack Hermon to improve matters. Now let us accept that this has been a set-back, let us see how we can now quieten things down and then move forward again.'

Prior's faltering response underlined the limits of British control in the Six Counties. Trying to 'quieten things down' in Northern Ireland to a level where Britain can 'move forward' to stable political rule has been a constant aim of Tory

and Labour governments over the past 15 years.

But 'quietening things down' in the Six Counties means crushing nationalist resistance to British rule. From James Callaghan in 1969 to James Prior in 1984 that has proved beyond the capabilities of the British politicians who have run Northern Ireland. From Derry's Bloody Sunday in January 1972 to Belfast's bloody Sunday in August 1984 Britain has had to resort to terror to maintain even a semblance of order.

Bankrupt

Bloody Sunday in January 1972 was Britain's most desperate attempt to quieten down the Irish War. The paratroopers tried to drive nationalist protesters off the streets by shooting dead 14 unarmed Catholics at a Derry anti-Internment rally.

Last month's bloody Sunday in Belfast had the same aim. It was staged as the culmination of a 20-month shoot-to-kill campaign which has left more than 20 nationalists dead. These are the victims of the RUC's efforts to 'improve matters', which Prior praised so warmly.

The first Bloody Sunday in 1972 failed to improve matters for Britain. It sparked a crisis which led to the suspension of the local Parliament at Stormont and the imposition of Direct Rule from Westminster.

Since 1972 British governments have failed to find an alternative to Direct Rule which could disguise Britain's direct domination over Ireland.

The republican movement's continuing fight for freedom has forced Britain to keep Northern Ireland under a tight military regime. Prior's own contribution to the fruitless search for a political solution, the Ulster Assembly, is now an empty shell.

Prior's forthcoming departure from the Northern Ireland office reflects the bankruptcy of Britain's political strategy in Ireland. The killing of Sean Downes showed that guns on the streets will remain the mainstay of British policy as the Irish War rages on through the eighties.

Cynicism

After 15 years the establishment press in Britain has come to share the government's pessimistic view of the prospects for peace. Almost all of the pillars of Fleet Street criticised the RUC attack on the anti-

Internment rally.

Their greatest concern, however, was not over the death of a young Irishman. They were more worried about the consequences to Britain of its benign façade slipping to reveal the brutal face of military terror underneath.

The press objected only to the public character of the shooting and the 'propaganda coup' thus handed to the republican movement. *The Economist's* front page headline — 'killing on camera is wrong' — summed up the cynical reaction of the British ruling class.

Alongside their discomfort at the circumstances of last month's events the editorial voices of the British ruling class acknowledged that the war is set for a long run.

Resignation

The obligatory calls for a 'new political response' were tired and unconvincing. *The Economist* expressed frustration over 'another wasted year of death' without seeing any prospect of the next year being much different.

The Financial Times noted that other parts of Europe suffered 'internal strife', but 'nothing compares to Ulster' where 'politics long ago ceased to function in any normal way'.

It was left to the more leisurely observations of *The Sunday Times*, a week after the Belfast events, to draw out the logic of the establishment doom and gloom about the prospects for a political solution to the Irish War:

'When the troops went in 15 years ago, this newspaper foresaw a 20-year stay for them. In fact the term of service will almost certainly be longer than that... For the first five years after that 1969 crisis, the hunt for solutions was energetic. For another seven, it continued at a gentler pace. This newspaper joined in; and the attempt was worth making, even though every proposal aroused more opposition than support. But, by the end of a dozen years, it had become clear that there were no radical changes which would help. There was nothing to be done except the dull and obvious.'

The Sunday Times summed up the 'dull and obvious' planks of British strategy: 'you hold down violence', 'you provide jobs' to create an air of normality, 'you keep in touch with the Republic be-

cause you need its help against terrorism'. 'But all of this' it noted 'takes a long time'.

'In that line of Yeats' about how peace comes dropping slow, the operative word is the last.'

The British ruling class is set for a long, slow war of attrition in Ireland.

Repression

Despite its unyielding support for the occupation, the British media was severely criticised by Loyalists for its coverage of the August shooting.

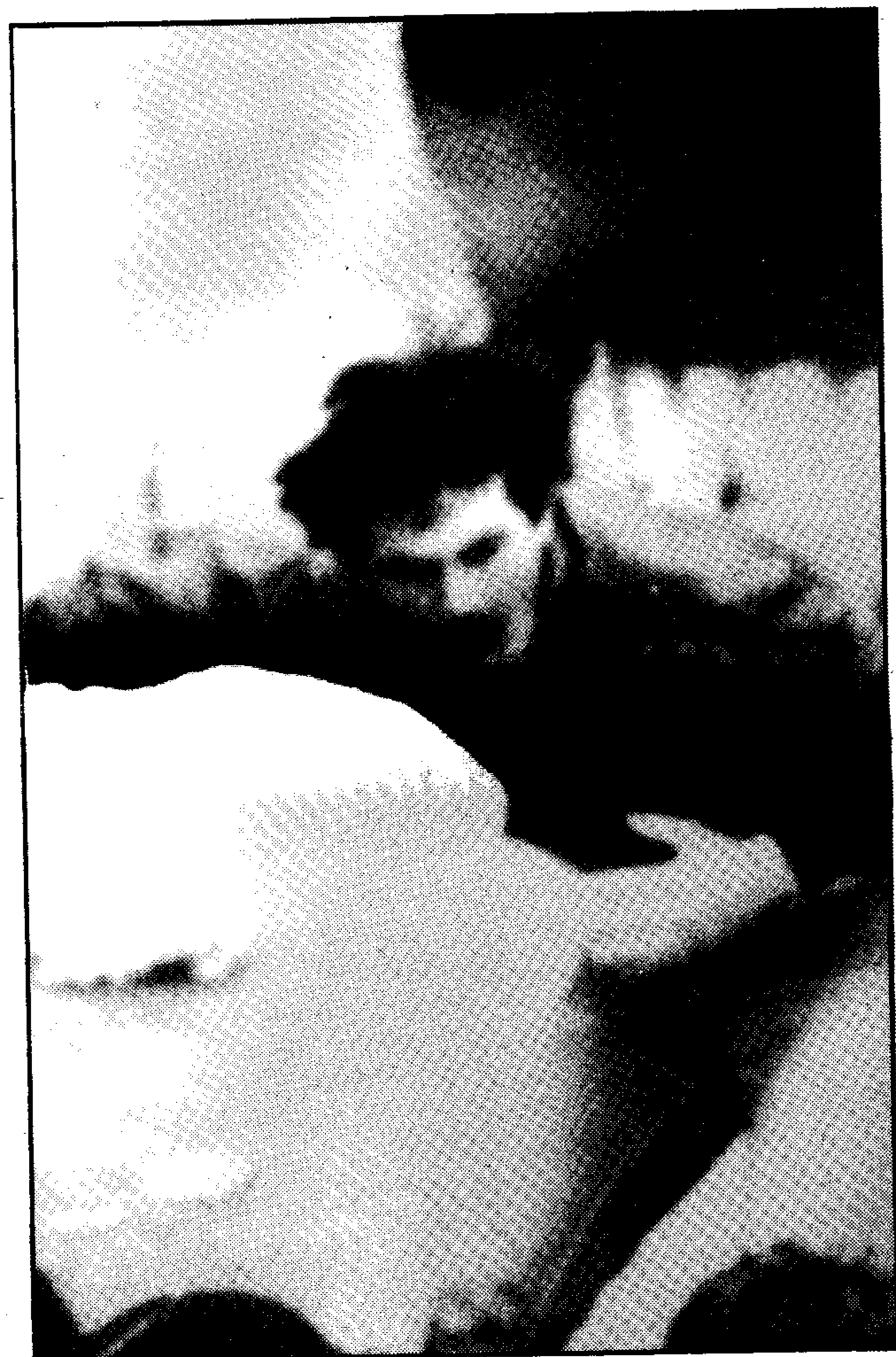
Ian Paisley organised a picket of police widows at the BBC and Loyalist youth rioted in the Shankill Road in protest at the republican propaganda victory. Meanwhile, RUC chief Sir Jack Hermon upheld the ban on Galvin while Prior backed down.

British spokesmen seized upon Loyalist criticism of Britain's apparent equivocation. They attempted to distance the imperial state from Loyalist politicians and police

On the day Sean Downes was murdered a member of the Loyalist Ulster Defence Association murder gang was buried. He had been crushed to death in a garbage truck while trying to flee the Maze prison. Democratic Unionist Party MP Reverend William McCrea conducted the funeral service. Hours later, the DUP's response to the murder of Sean Downes showed that paying homage to convicted Loyalist killers is consistent with support for British law and order in Ireland:

'We praise the strong and positive action by the security forces in West Belfast today. They ensured that those who openly boast about flouting the law were taught a salutary lesson... Hopefully this will not be the last time that republican law-breakers will be dealt with in such a positive manner.'

The Loyalists understand that 'positive action' to maintain Britain's peace can only mean more nationalist bodies in the streets of Northern Ireland.



..In Ireland

and blamed the Ulstermen for 'over-reacting' by shooting Sean Downes.

The Loyalists have no independent role in the Irish War. Their recent protests are only a call for Britain to stick to the consistent line of repression it has pursued for 15 years. They have little patience with political solutions designed for consumption in Britain and abroad while Loyalist policemen are being shot by the IRA.

Terror

The Tories have to make conciliatory gestures but Unionist politicians are free from such constraints. Government ministers try to create the impression that re-establishing law and order in Northern Ireland is for the good of all sides.

Loyalists openly admit that British law and order means the British state's right to terrorise the nationalist community.

No peace

After 15 years the nationalist community and its republican defenders have an equally clear understanding of what British law and order means. They continue to flout it in their struggle for democratic rights.

Bloody Sunday in 1972 proved to the nationalists that peaceful resistance was useless. Belfast's bloody Sunday last month will only confirm that view.

Days before the anti-Internment rally, IRA volunteers boarded the Noraid delegation's buses in Derry to announce that the armed struggle against Britain would go on until Ireland was free.

That struggle is the guarantee that Westminster can never 'quieten down' Northern Ireland, however many bloody Sundays Britain brings to the streets of the Six Counties.

... and in Britain Another bloody cop-out

'A police riot' was how Liberal leader David Steel, floating on his holiday yacht in the Aegean, described last month's Royal Ulster Constabulary attack on the Belfast anti-Internment rally.

Steel's comments got a wider hearing than anything he's ever said in Parliament. The Liberal-SDP Alliance verdict shaped every British radical's response to the killing of Sean Downes. Labour Party spokesmen followed the Liberal lead.

Social Democratic Party President Shirley Williams weighed in with the dubious claim that 'not since Peterloo in 1819' had 'British police shot dead people at a peaceful meeting'. She called for an independent inquiry into the ban on US republican fund-raiser Martin Galvin and the shooting of Sean Downes.

Liberal MP Simon Hughes led a delegation of supporters to Downing Street in protest at the use of plastic bullets. He called for the RUC and the British Army to drive nationalists off the streets with CS gas and water cannon instead.

At a London rally organised by the Labour left a week later, the Young Liberals criticised the Loyalist police for 'over-reacting' to events in Belfast and demanded a return to 'normal' policing.

'Un-British'

Liberal spokesmen all accepted the need to uphold law and order in Northern Ireland and stamp out republican resistance to British rule. Their objection was that gunning down unarmed nationalists in public was not the British way of doing things.

Liberals counselled Britain to play fair in its war against the Irish people, curb the excesses of the shoot-to-kill squads, and present an image of benign rule in Northern Ireland. Their concern to save Britain from further international embarrassment will do nothing to protect Irish nationalists from repeat performances of RUC terror.

The Liberals called for a ban on plastic bullets and an independent inquiry because they want Britain to be seen to fight according to the rules.

But whether the army and police use CS gas canisters, plastic bullets or machine guns in the Six Counties, the only rule which guides their actions is the need to crush nationalist opposition.

The last 15 years are littered with 'independent' British inquiries which have abided by that single rule and whitewashed the terror of the security forces.

The RUC has established its own inquiry into Belfast's

response was 'dangerously complacent'. It would 'look like a cover-up, giving credence to the idea that the RUC is still a purely sectarian force'.

The fact that the RUC is still a purely sectarian force for murdering nationalists matters little to Labour's leaders. They want only to ensure that Britain is seen to be behaving itself in Ireland. Their 'not in front of the children' approach to state terror mirrors that of the British ruling class — 'killing on camera is wrong', as *The Economist* put it last month.

Spellbound

Even those on the left of the Labour Party who declare their support for Irish self-determination fell under David Steel's spell after Belfast's bloody Sunday. Left-wing MP Joan Maynard could only protest that the RUC had broken the rules by ignoring its own guidelines for the use of plastic bullets.

The Labour left's solidarity movement lined up behind the protest lobby led by the Liberals, the party which partitioned Ireland.

A week after Sean Downes was murdered, the left turned the rally at the end of its London demonstration over to the Young Liberals, and borrowed the text for its own speeches from the old Liberals.

Labour's Irish solidarity activists called on Britain to comply with the European Parliament's ban on plastic bullets, and to set up an independent inquiry.

The Labour left could have used the attack on the anti-Internment rally to expose the bloody reality of British law and order. Instead it chose to tail the establishment critics of the government who sought only to restore public confidence in Britain's policing methods.

Of mice and men

The solidarity movement's attitude to the state and legality stands in stark contrast to the approach of the Irish liberation movement. Britain banned Martin Galvin from the Six Counties. The republican movement took up the state's challenge by putting

him on its platform in Belfast.

Yet when the Tories refused to lift the ban on Irish demonstrations entering London's Trafalgar Square last month, the left meekly re-routed its march to Jubilee Gardens.

Five thousand nationalists who joined a Belfast black flag march the day after Sean Downes was murdered braved the threats of armed police to arrest them for demonstrating illegally.

In contrast to this stand against the state, an organising committee for the British left's demonstration decided that, if the march was attacked by fascists, there would be 'no retaliation while there is police protection'.

In bowing to the public consensus backing British law and order, the Labour left has condemned the Irish people to more of the sort of 'police protection' the shoot-to-kill gang gave Sean Downes.

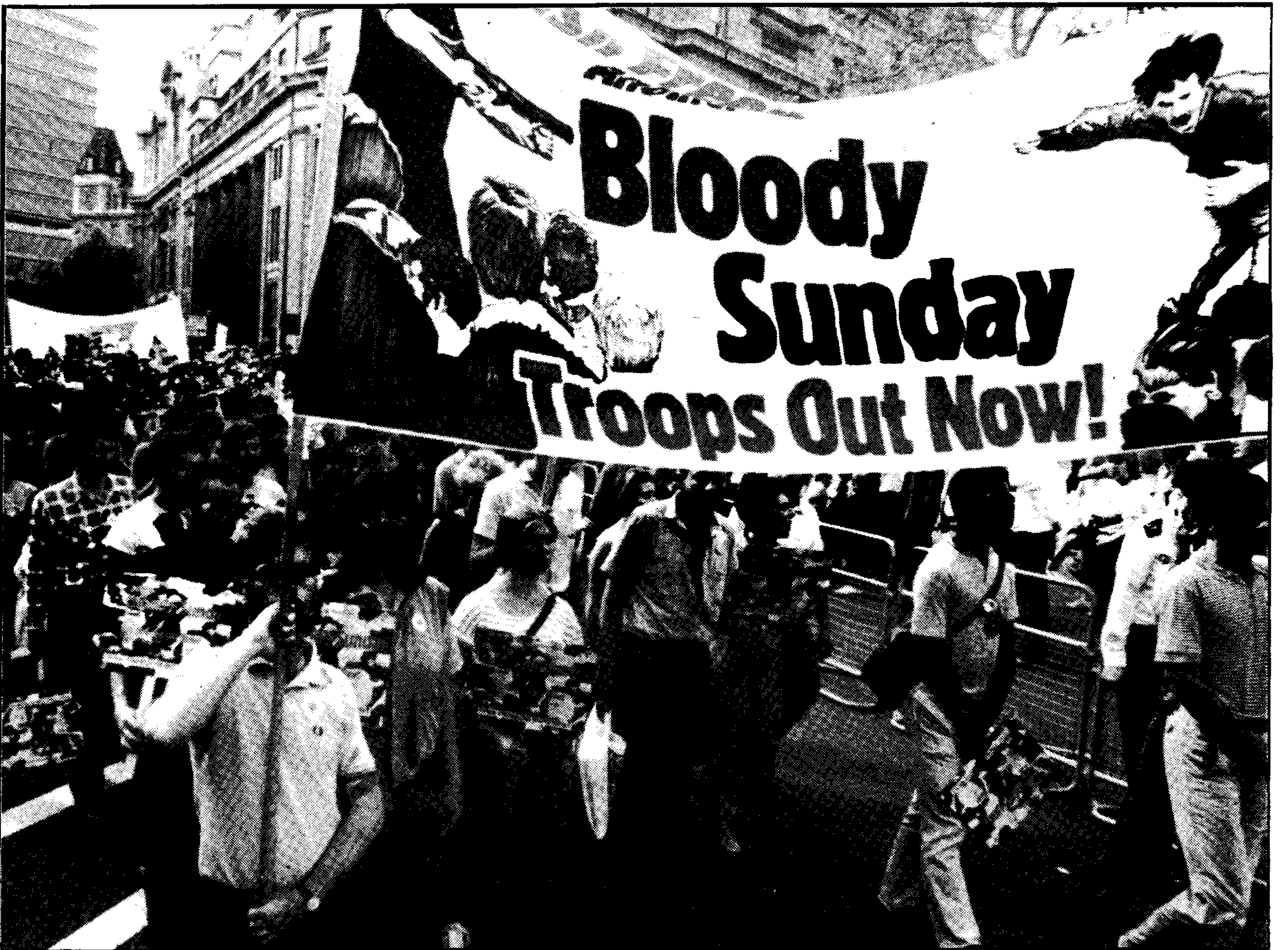
Fight British terror!

The moment the plastic bullets hit Belfast's streets, supporters of the Irish Freedom Movement were out in force on the

streets of Britain's major cities organising protests. In Islington, North London, almost 100 of our supporters brought traffic to a halt in a demonstration staged 24 hours after the RUC murdered Sean Downes. Within days, more than 200 Irish Freedom Movement supporters marched through London behind our 'Another Bloody Sunday — Troops Out Now!' banner.

Our national day of protest brought the message of Irish freedom to thousands throughout Britain. In Cardiff the Irish Freedom Movement's city-centre rally won support from the local labour movement and sparked a debate about Ireland which is still raging in the South Wales press.

Everywhere, our message was clear: British law and order in Northern Ireland means legalised murder. The nationalist community rightly refuses to recognise London's law. We are out to show British workers that they have much to learn from the Irish people's attitude to the courts, Parliament and police, and much to give the Irish people in a united struggle against legal terror.



The Irish Freedom Movement marches against British murder

Cold comfort

The Liberal's advice to the British state about polishing up its public presentation of its war in Ireland struck a chord with the Labour Party.

Labour leaders responded to the Belfast shooting by trailing behind David Steel, echoing Liberal appeals for Britain to keep to the straight and narrow in Northern Ireland.

Labour Party leader Neil Kinnock wrote to Margaret Thatcher to protest about the 'unacceptable level of violence' and to request an independent inquiry.

Labour's deputy Northern Ireland spokesman Clive Soley complained that the Tories had put the police in 'an impossible situation' by banning Martin Galvin.

Soley called for a ban on plastic bullets, claiming that 'normal riot control methods should have been sufficient' to deal with the unrest which followed Belfast's bloody Sunday:

'I can find no evidence that plastic bullets have been effective in saving the lives of police officers, who have suffered dreadful casualties in recent years.'

British bullets — lead and plastic — have proved very effective in destroying the lives of Irish people over the past 15 years. But like the Liberals', Soley's sympathies lie with those who uphold British law and order.

The concern of the Labour Party leadership was not to save nationalists from further terror, but to rescue the legitimacy of British law and order in the Six Counties. They wanted state violence toned down to an 'acceptable' level which could restore the RUC's reputation.

When Margaret Thatcher turned down Kinnock's request for an independent inquiry, Soley warned that her

No way out

Last month the Liberal and Labour parties called for a British withdrawal from Ireland. But their approach poses no threat to British rule in Belfast.

Young Liberals declared their commitment to 'eventual Irish reunification'. The pro-Labour *Daily Mirror* published a special edition on 'the way out' of Ireland. Labour left MP Tony Benn published a parliamentary Bill for withdrawal.

All three objected to the expensive and bloody consequences of the occupation for Britain. They sought to

persuade the British establishment that negotiating a withdrawal would be in its own best interests.

The *Daily Mirror* claimed that pulling out 'makes sense' for Britain economically and politically. But the British ruling class knows better.

The only consequences of the Irish War which worry the British establishment are the consequences of admitting defeat. Northern Ireland is a province of the United Kingdom. It is administered by the same state machinery which maintains capitalist stability

in London or Glasgow.

If the state's institutions of government lost their authority in the Six Counties, the acceptance of established power relations throughout the UK would be brought into question.

The legitimacy of British state power is on the line in Northern Ireland. That's why pulling out of Ireland makes no sense for the British ruling class, and why lobbying the establishment to withdraw is no way to fight for Irish freedom.

Tony Benn's Bill for with-

drawal begins by bowing to 'the Queen's most excellent majesty'. Benn wants to preserve the establishment's integrity by getting it out of a sticky situation in Ireland.

The walls of the nationalist ghettos of Belfast and Derry are covered with the slogan 'FTQ' — Fuck The Queen. The nationalists recognise that their liberation depends on defeating the British state, not on persuading it to leave. British workers who want to end the Irish War should reject Benn's approach and line up with the Irish people against Britain.

Gays and the state

Censored

In August customs and excise seized a consignment of the French weekly paper for gays *Le gai pied*, bound for bookshops in Britain. This was the latest in a series of raids which started back in April code-named 'Operation tiger'. Chief target of the raids was Gay's The Word bookshop in London's Bloomsbury.

On 10 April five officers arrived at the bookshop at lunchtime and spent the rest of the afternoon on the carpet surrounded by piles of books deciding which titles to take and which to leave in the shop. 'They had to keep ringing up to find out what they were meant to take', said shop worker Paul Hegarty. Homes of directors were also raided.

On 6 June customs announced that 22 titles, all American imports and 221 volumes in all, would be burned unless the bookshop successfully challenged the seizure order in court.

Customs officers also revealed that they had intercepted the shop's mail for 18 months. Deliveries of foreign books worth £6000 have been held back at customs points since the beginning of the year.

As the Defend Gay's The Word Campaign illustrates, the gay movement's incorporation into the Labour Party and its individualistic approach to fighting gay oppression means that it cannot challenge the state's campaign of censorship and harassment.

Prejudice

'Operation tiger' is part of a wider wave of repression aimed at homosexual people (see box). The state can rely on the inability of the official labour movement to counter hostility to homosexuality. The paralysis of the gay movement helps to ensure that there is little more than token opposition to this repression.

Scratch the surface of the new tolerance of homosexuals in the media and not much has changed for lesbian and gay workers. Regular *Daily Mirror* features about cross-dressing teen idol Boy George merely continue the anti-gay traditions of working men's club drag shows.

Tories can appeal to anti-gay prejudice to justify attacks on homosexuals and to win support for wider political objectives. A recent Conservative television broadcast justified the abolition of the Greater London Council on the grounds that its grants to gay organisations promoted 'sexual deviance on the rates'.

Home Office minister David Waddington felt no inhibitions about writing to a constituent that it would be 'crankish' to argue that it was 'wrong to discriminate against people on grounds of homosexuality'.

Strain

The Labour Party wants to support gay rights because a section of the party recognises

the issue's appeal to middle class liberals who see it as a matter of individual freedom. On the other hand, Labour daren't risk alienating wide sections of its voters who retain virulent anti-gay prejudices.

A division of labour has developed over the past 10 years, with the right wing of the party adopting an explicitly anti-gay position and the left making show-piece gestures of support for gay rights. When defence aide Keith Hampson was arrested for being groped by a policeman in a gay strip club in Soho, Labour right winger Ted Leadbitter condemned the lack of 'vigilance to scrutinise and monitor the behaviour patterns' of people in Hampson's position. The Labour left's role is to reassure the party's middle class vote that the issue of gay rights is being 'taken seriously'. It sponsors internal discussions on sexuality and token motions at the party's annual conference.

Left wingers like Ken Livingstone are prepared to appear on platforms at gay meetings and make ambiguous declarations about their sex lives. When he became leader of the Greater London Council, Livingstone did exactly this at a meeting of London group Harrow Gay Unity.

'Shock-horror' press reports that a well-known public figure with civil responsibility admits he might be a little bit 'so' are a convenient distraction from the Labour Party's failure to defend gays.

Crunch

When it comes to the crunch the Labour left cannot challenge the growing state harassment of gay people. The response of left-wing Islington MP Chris Smith to the raid on Gay's The Word was to try to avoid the issue of gay rights by questioning the right of customs officers to interfere with 'a much valued service'.

Treasury spokesman Ian Stewart ridiculed Smith's description of 'the import of obscene and indecent articles' as a 'much valued service'. He warned that 'customs and excise needs to take whatever steps are necessary to prevent that taking place'. For the government the seizure of gay books is the important thing. All the Labour Party can do is haggle over who seizes them.

Quango city

In the absence of anything other than a rhetorical commitment to gay rights the



Illicit love: for gays in Britain, the personal is criminal

Labour left has concentrated on using its control over local councils to seduce gay activists into the arms of the Labour Party.

Left-wing Labour councils such as Islington, Hackney, Haringey and Lambeth have set up gay rights committees. Prominent gay activists are invited to meet with council officials to discuss departmental policies. Lambeth's Lesbian and Gay support committee recently spent more than an hour arguing about

whether local libraries should have a gay section which some gay borrowers would be embarrassed to look through or to have specially marked index cards indicating gay books in the main collection.

The GLC has blazed a trail in buying up the gay movement. The GLC has funded projects on gays and the police, gays and employment, the problems of young gays and the problems of bereaved gays. Everything that moves in the gay movement has been

pinned down by issuing it with a GLC grant.

The trend is less well developed outside London but even Manchester city council, formerly a bastion of the Labour right, has been funding the city's gay centre for several years.

This strategy has been spectacularly successful. Many gay radicals of the seventies like lesbian separatist Linda Bellos in London and John Shiers in Manchester have stopped playing hard to get and signed up with the Labour Party.

Consent

The gay movement's resistance to the blandishments of the Labour Party was always low. Although most went into the new affair as consenting parties they have quickly discovered where power in the relationship lies.

Its dependence on the Labour Party has compromised the gay movement in the face of the renewed state offensive. This year's annual march of gay and lesbian people in London in June was the smallest ever. Fewer than 1000 people turned up.

The defence campaign for Gay's The Word illustrates the paralysis of the gay movement. A week after the raid 200 people assembled at London's County Hall to plan a defence campaign. Within an hour the meeting had split, with some women forming a separate group. A Woman's Right to Read and Write wanted to support the bookshop but wanted to voice its objections to some of the titles seized.

A Woman's Right to Read and Write reflects the weakness of the campaign as a whole. Implicitly recognising the state's right to censor, it simply disputes particular cases of censorship, arguing they are unjustified.

The Defend Gay's The Word Campaign itself is entirely

under the control of the shop's directors and their lawyers.

Retreat

They want to fight the seizure of their books as a simple civil liberties matter. They object to the fact that the use of customs law means 'there is no defence of literary or artistic method', making a legal action defending each book more difficult.

Directors of the shop already appreciate the need to make a tactical retreat. Jonathan Cutbill recognises that 'politically we ought to be fighting every case'. But he accepts the 'practical constraints and legal difficulties'. Directors have already decided to accept the seizure of one title and are prepared to 'decide about the others on the basis of legal advice'.

Marginal

Inside the Labour Party gay activists have become even more marginal to working class politics than before. All that stands in the way of the current state offensive is a rampart of moribund committees and liberal pressure groups.

The state offensive against gay people aims to tighten up on sexual expression and political discussion for everybody. While the fightback is pitched at trying to persuade the establishment that its tactics are unfair, it has no chance of defending gay rights.

Whatever the outcome of the court cases the state's right to control our reading and our sex lives has gone unchallenged. The evasion of the issue of gay rights by the Labour Party and the gay movement means that the state's ability to mobilise anti-gay sentiment to justify its political objectives will be strengthened.

John Johnson

Repression

Two months before the raid on Gay's The Word, Edinburgh's Lavender Menace bookshop received a visit from the censor police. They carried off copies of the newsletter *Minor problems* which they later returned in a plastic bag. In July Camden's Zipper bookshop in North London and the offices of *Him*, Britain's biggest gay paper, were raided by the obscene publications police.

Gay scene

In March, North London's popular alternative gay disco at the Bell pub was raided by 50 police from the Instant Response Unit. Throughout the summer gay pubs and clubs in Soho became a regular police hang-out. The Pink Panther club was raided about twice a week. Last year in Manchester police were discovered video taping the comings and goings outside the Rembrandt pub in the city centre.

Police harassment

Police trawls have netted hundreds of victims in parks, public toilets and outside gay pubs and clubs. Police indecency patrols in Liverpool produced at least half a dozen

arrests. In London's Earl's Court, Chiswick, Richmond and Waltham Forest as many as 300 gays have been arrested in the last 12 months. In Hull the police have used the murder of a nine year old boy as a pretext to investigate the gay community. Seven men have been hauled in to answer questions about their sex lives. One has been charged with gross indecency. In February diabetic Jimi Christmas was arrested after kissing his lover in the street. He was beaten up, had his earring ripped out and his trousers torn off.

Gay movement

Edinburgh's gay centre has been subject to sporadic raids for almost a year. Last December, customs officials seized copies of *Gay Scotland* and *Him Monthly*, as well as bottles of butyl nitrate, 'poppers'. In July the city's *Evening News* attacked the decision of the social services to allow a young gay man to work in a gay cafe as part of his community service order. The London offices of Gay Rights in Prison activist Chris Bankford were raided in April. Bankford is now in prison, convicted of having sex with an under age youth.

Next month's Labour Party conference will debate *Defence and security for Britain*, a document unanimously agreed by the party's National Executive Committee. James Wood examines how Labour is preparing to lead Britain into a war.

When Labour leaked *Defence and security* last month, *The Economist* greeted it as 'a step toward reality'. Coming from the journal of big business, such plaudits may have seemed surprising, for *Defence and security* was also widely hailed as a victory for the Labour left.

Defence and security commits a future Labour government to ridding British territory of all nuclear weapons — not just American Cruise missiles, but also Polaris and Trident. So why did it get such a favourable reaction?

There are two reasons. First, Labour made clear its willingness to spend more on conventional weapons. Second, while Labour called for the abandonment of nuclear weapons sited in Britain, it also expressed a firm commitment to membership of Nato — firm reliance, in other words, on the nuclear strike force of the USA.

Backing Britain

The catchphrases of *Defence and security* are 'security', 'defence' and 'deterrence'. Labour upholds the 'security' of one of the world's most powerful imperialist countries. It expresses its loyalty to the 'defence' of a nation with one of the strongest war machines in the world and with a record of aggression second to none. And it pledges its support for the 'deterrence' of enemy attacks by building up Britain's murderous military hardware even further.

By 'proper' deterrence, *Defence and security* means deterrence with conventional rather than nuclear weapons. In Nato's youth, the document notes, deterrence meant massive nuclear retaliation against attack. But this implied Mutually Assured Destruction — an all-out East-West nuclear war, with no winners.

Now, however, the greater accuracy and lethality of nukes have led to them being thought of as war-fighting weapons, rather than war-preventing ones. US defence secretary Caspar Weinberger wants to 'decapitate' top Soviet decision-making centres by Nuclear Utilisation Target Selection. This makes everybody nervous and leads to less 'security'.

Labour's alternative? Instead of inviting suicide by holding nukes, Britain should develop non-nuclear 'defensive deterrence'. Britain should play porcupine, not wolf. It must have forces 'designed, as unambiguously as possible, for defensive purposes only'.

In Labour's view today's new military technologies, especially Precision Guided Munitions (PGMs), provide 'real possibilities' for doing just this.

Labour wants to do away with Britain's nuclear sword and make do with a conventional shield. But you don't have to be a 'potential enemy' to realise that the shield could be used to knock the hell out of you. The distinction which *Defence and security* makes so much of — between 'aggression' and 'defensive deterrence' — is illusory. Every schoolchild knows that the best form of defence is attack, and when Britain goes to war the establishment can rely upon the Labour Party to come to the same conclusion.

If missiles or submarines are about to be launched at Britain, should Westminster wait till the last moment to knock them out by laser or detect them lurking in the Channel — or use PGMs to destroy them in their silos and in their docks? Labour already knows the answer.

Keep it conventional

Defence and security calls for:

- diverting the funds saved from going non-nuclear into conventional weapons
- expanding Britain's reserve forces
- aircraft 'which would be more manoeuvrable, easier to conceal and which could be produced in larger quantity'
- a strong Royal Navy and strong Merchant Navy
- 'considerable investment in radar, communications, and effective electronic equipment which makes it possible to identify aircraft as friend or foe'.

With such forthright support for conventional rearmament it is no wonder that *Defence and security* won praise from the media. As for the document's call for a reduction in defence spending from the current 5.6 per cent of Gross Domestic Product to the rest of European Nato's 3.9 per cent, this is yet

Labour's road to Armageddon

another fraud.

Defence and security says that such a reduction would not be possible within the lifetime of a single Labour government without major cuts in conventional forces — 'which we do not recommend'. Indeed, in a New Year interview with *Weekend World*, Neil Kinnock went further. He told Brian Walden that he was prepared to spend more on defence than Thatcher, if that was the price of going non-nuclear.

You keep them

Labour's approval of Nato renders its anti-nuclear stand meaningless. Labour claims to be engaged in a campaign to reform Nato from within. Hoping eventually to turn Ronald Reagan's war agency into a force for peace in Europe, Labour in the meantime calls for a 'nuclear freeze' and for 'no first use' of nuclear weapons.

In plain language, Labour is prepared to stomach the maintenance and detonation of nuclear weapons outside Britain, so long as Britain's allies only use nukes against nukes, and not against tanks. To this end, *Defence and security* proposes, as an immediate step, a 300 kilometre-wide zone in Central Europe free of battlefield nuclear weapons — the type that are used to deal with armour.

We will leave aside the hypocrisy of Labour's 'you keep them on our behalf' attitude to the siting of nuclear weapons in America and West Germany. It is enough to record that the modest suggestion for a withdrawal of battlefield nuclear weapons already looks like a non-starter.

According to both British and West German militarists, only the heaviest kind of conventional anti-tank rockets are capable of penetrating modern armour

So that's what Kinnock meant by 'appealing to the "upwardly mobile"'

(*Financial Times*, 7 August). Like it or not, battlefield nuclear weapons seem bound to remain an indispensable part of the 'defensive deterrence' Labour wants to see on Nato's eastern flank.

The first echelon

Defence and security is uncompromising on the need for Britain to continue to play its part in the Nato occupation of Germany. It calls for the reinforcement of the British army of the Rhine and for 'better organisation' in Nato. Of a two-wave Soviet tank attack, it announces:

'Trying to stop the lower grade second echelon forces at the expense of concentrating on countering the much higher grade Soviet first echelon forces does not make military sense. Stopping the first echelon is essential.'

For Labour stopping the first Soviet echelon is essential. So, then, are nuclear weapons.

Cynicism

Labour's unilateralist promises amount to nothing more than a cynical attempt to cling on to its image as a party of peace. Over the past five years this has allowed the Labour Party, both independently and through the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament, to mobilise vast demonstrations and some public support from people concerned about the danger of

nuclear war.

Despite all the talk of global 'nuclear winters' set off by trigger-happy Ronald Reagan and his Cruise, Labour is prepared to stick with America and Nato.

On television shortly after the release of *Defence and security*, Roy Hattersley admitted that there was 'a certain ambiguity' in the document. He was referring to the fact that while it wanted American nuclear forces off British shores, it intended to keep (if 'regularise') American conventional ones.

The press was not slow to point out that America would in this situation probably prefer to get shot of Britain and its European 'allies' in Nato altogether. But in fact Hattersley's and Labour's 'ambiguities' run deeper than this.

Here to stay

It is true that American militarists have turned from nuclear deterrence to nuclear war-fighting. This is the outcome, not of technological developments or White House belligerence, but of America's need to flex its military muscle to make up for its economic senility.

It is also true that the turn to war-fighting has undermined the credibility of strategic nuclear weapons. The world's enormous arsenals of nukes appear overblown and clumsy.

Finally, it is true that new-technology conventional weapons now command the

respect (Labour celebrates it!) of the aptly named Lord Carver, and of Nato chief Bernard Rogers too. But there are, as is evident in anti-tank warfare, problems with conventional weapons. There can be no doubt that nuclear weapons will be a major form of 'defensive deterrence' for some time to come.

Armageddon

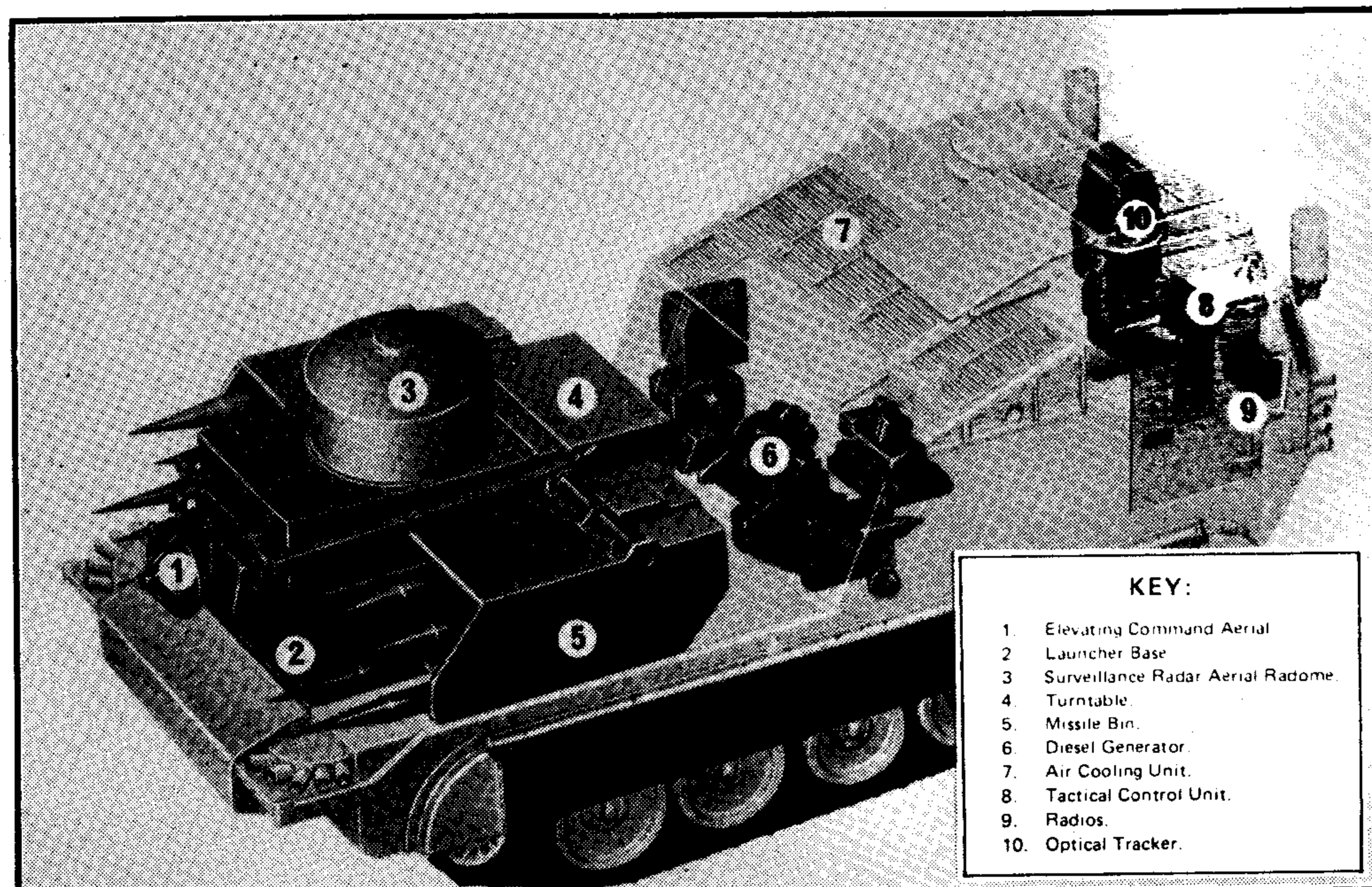
The central 'ambiguity' of Labour's new defence posture relates not to American conventional bases but to what the party would do in government if and when times get rough.

When the survival of the 'Great British Nation' is at stake, there can be no ambiguities. *Defence and security* repeats dozens of times that Labour believes in 'effective defence' for Britain. It also announces early on:

'We do not suggest that our defence policy — any more than policy in any other field — will remain immutably unchanged (sic) between now and the next General Election.'

We can be certain that when the going gets tough, 'effective defence' will mean Labour hanging on to nukes, and being prepared to use them if necessary.

It is bad enough that Labour is preparing for a conventional war. But to preserve the British way of life, the Labour Party is ready to blast us all to Armageddon.



Labour's 10-point plan for peace

From London to Lothian, RCP supporters have been playing an active part in the struggle against privatisation and cuts in the health service.

Barking not biting

'We've been on strike one week less than the miners', the Barking Hospital women tell everybody who comes down to the picket line. Since mid-March the 90 cleaners have kept up round-the-clock pickets on the hospital gates.

The strike started when Crothall's, the private firm which has run cleaning services at the hospital since 1970, put in a tender for a renewal of its contract. Crothall's made two offers. One accepted the existing Whitley Council conditions and rates of pay. The other was more than 40 per cent cheaper.

Hospital authorities grabbed the cheaper contract and Crothall's told the cleaners the new deal. To achieve a cut of 876 hours' cleaning time the women were told they would have to accept cuts in hours and wages of up to 60 per cent. One woman was offered 10 hours instead of her previous 37 which meant a wage cut of £40. On top of this, sick pay and holidays were to be slashed.

Crothall's sacked all the strikers and began to bus in scab workers. The scabs have attacked the picket line shelter built by the women. One woman was punched in the face by Crothall's manager. Once, a lorry drove right at one of the shelters knocking it over. In August scabs crept out of the hospital and smeared a shelter with dog shit.

The women have also had to put up with intimidation from the police; so far 29 women have been arrested on the picket line. And the

Spirit

In the sixth week of the strike



Not the miners' strike: but women at Barking Hospital have been out almost as long and face the same police harassment

women are still waiting for the bailiffs to come to serve an eviction order imposed by the courts on the picket shelters.

These attacks have not broken the women's spirit. They have stepped up their activities against the scabs. The scabs are so scared of the women on the picket line that their bus has all its windows boarded up.

Appalled

The strikers have been appalled at the way their unions — Nupe and the GMBATU — have behaved during the strike. Both were quick to give official backing at the start of the dispute. Nupe leaders in particular saw the strike as an opportunity to demonstrate their determination to defend their members against private contractors.

The GMBATU officials tried to stitch up a separate deal for their own members — but the women rejected it. Nupe's objective was to put pressure on the contractor to continue to recognise the union and to negotiate some concessions on the proposed cuts in hours and wages.

It soon became clear that Crothall's would not give an inch. Two alternatives faced the Nupe leaders. They could extend the dispute to other workers in the hospital and other hospitals in the London area to put more pressure on the health authorities. Or they could give in.

They gave in. 'They just hoped we'd give up or get other jobs', said one woman on the picket line, 'but they were wrong.' To prove it the Barking women lobbied Nupe's May national conference in Bournemouth and won a standing ovation. An embarrassed leadership promised nation-wide action over the Barking dispute.

Galling

Three months later the strikers are still waiting. They 'promised they'd get everyone in the area out, and that's the

last we heard of it'. The most galling thing for the strikers was the way Nupe obstructed sympathetic action by other workers.

In Barking Hospital itself kitchen staff and porters, most of whom are Nupe members, work on. At the start of the strike they were solidly behind the women. But after 10 days of half-day and one-day stoppages they refused to take any more action, 'sick of being used as strike fodder'.

Workers at several London hospitals, including the Royal Free Hospital, the London Hospital and the National Temperance Hospital, responded to Nupe's early calls for one-day stoppages in support of the Barking strikers. Workers in many London hospitals would respond to a call for all-out sympathetic action — especially in the anti-government climate created by the miners' strike. But the health unions fear losing control over the action and have kept it restricted to Barking.

Fight on

The women at Barking Hospital have decided to bypass the union leadership by forming their own strike committee. They had

discovered that 'our suggestions go to the top...once they get there that's the end of it'. So they meet regularly to 'decide on speakers to go to talk to other workers', plan regular mass pickets and organise fund-raising and other actions. Local RCP supporters have won support for the strike at other London hospitals and helped build links with workers on strike at the nearby Mattessons' processed meat factory. Our picket of strikers and supporters outside the court when Crothall's manager

appeared on assault charges attracted widespread support.

The women on strike at Barking Hospital are a tremendous example of the determination of health workers to fight attacks on their jobs and conditions. Their defiance of government-imposed cuts in the NHS puts to shame the cynical leadership of their union. Their fight shows that as long as health workers accept the advice of the officials they are fighting with one hand tied behind them.

Inez Landa

Fear in Lothian

At the end of June Scottish health minister John MacKay instructed Lothian health board to put domestic services in the board's offices and in at least two hospitals out to tender. Local RCP supporters are mobilising for a protest at the board's meeting at the end of August.

The Scottish TUC has produced hundreds of 'I love the NHS' badges. But it has so far done little to keep workers informed about negotiations with the health boards. The signs from neighbouring Fife

are ominous.

The Fife health board has already voted to introduce private contractors. Local Nupe official John Fleming told *The Scotsman* that the unions had 'been bending over backwards to make economies — on the understanding that the board would not go for privatisation'.

The RCP's message for the health union officials is that you can't fight if you're bending over backwards.

Mike Wall



Party picket line: RCP supporters support Barking strikers

Shifts in Sheffield

New Department of Health instructions to improve 'manpower efficiency' in nursing services in hospitals are meeting unexpected resistance in Sheffield. The authorities attempted last month to tighten up shift schedules and reduce staff overlap times. The proposed changes would intensify the burden on nursing staff and produce a deterioration in the service they provide.

At mass meetings at Netheredge and Royal Hallamshire Hospitals, RCP supporters won widespread backing for a rejection of management plans. Representatives of the Royal College of Nursing and Cohse argued for more consultation, a different pattern of shift changes or

queried the likely scale of savings. However, our arguments that making the health service more efficient was not our concern and that workers must stand firm in defence of existing hours and conditions carried the day.

The unions informed the bosses of the workers' view at a joint staff/management meeting last month. When they got over their shock, the administrators threatened to bring in the 'general managers', as suggested in the recent government report on efficiency in the NHS, unless the unions cooperated with the changes. However, the meeting concluded in a 'failure to agree' and the struggle now goes into the second round.

Phil Watson

Hammersmith tenders

The dispute over privatisation at London's Hammersmith Hospital brings out a conflict of interest between workers and union officials.

In June it became clear that the health authorities were about to make a final decision on competing tenders for the hospital cleaning contract. The short-list included six private contractors (including Crothall's) and two in-house tenders — one from the unions (Cohse and Nupe) and the other from management.

The authorities finally

chose the management tender which meant job losses, from 122 to 15 full-time workers, and cuts in hours and wages. Hospital workers immediately took strike action to safeguard jobs and conditions. They are still on the picket lines.

While the health service unions backed the workers' action, their approach to the privatisation threat provided scant defence of the workers' position. Cohse and Nupe continued to put forward their unsuccessful tender as a basis to 'settle the dispute'. They

openly acknowledged that this scheme accepted a 'considerable loss of jobs' (*Public Service Action*, August 1984).

Health workers' response to privatisation is to take action to save jobs. The health unions' response is to offer concessions on manning levels, hours and wages, in the hope of keeping the contractors out. But as one Hammersmith worker told *the next step*, 'what good is it keeping the contractors out if we lose our jobs anyway?'

John Johnson

Islington nursery workers

Striking reflections

The protracted strike by 150 nursery workers at Islington council in London ended in July. The strikers are now back at work with 26 extra jobs and a paltry pay increase. The nursery workers wanted a 20 per cent increase in staff, a single wage scale to cover all workers, and a substantial rise above their £83 a week basic.

From the start of the dispute in April the strikers faced determined resistance from Islington's Labour council, which boasts a radical reputation. They also had to contend with the reluctance of their union leaders in Nalgo to mobilise the all-out action needed to win a decisive victory. David Douglas talked to two workers about the strike, the council and the union.

Looking back at the strike, would you have done things differently given the chance again?

Barbara: I think we would have brought out the rest of Nalgo much quicker. At mass meetings there was a lot of messing about. We weren't sure about bringing the others out. We didn't have the confidence in the mass meetings. But we gained a lot of confidence through the strike. So if it happened again we'd probably have the strength to bring people out quicker.

You're in the Labour Party, what do you think about the way the council treated you?

Barbara: I think it's despicable. I've never known anything so bad politically in all my life. I really think if it had been a Tory council it would have been better.

People found it very difficult to understand why we were fighting against a radical Labour council. The council in turn was shocked and surprised to find its workers in revolt against it because it thinks of itself as the archetypal socialist borough.

Labour's 1982 council manifesto promised more nursery provision and better pay for nursery workers. Why

hasn't Labour kept its promises?

Barbara: Well, the reason they gave was that the cost of their decentralisation plans wasn't foreseen. But it must have been, especially because of rate-capping. Decentralisation is part of rate-capping because the council hopes through decentralisation to save money. In reality it's just going to mean more bureaucracy isn't it?

If decentralisation is just the council's excuse for not giving you your claim, what's the real reason for refusing your demands?

Barbara: I don't know the real reason. You've just got to suppose that they don't really think child care provision is as essential and fundamental as we would have liked them to.

Given the council's refusal to meet your claim and challenge the Tories over rate-capping, how can you have any faith in the Labour Party?

Barbara: Well, I must admit one really horrible thing I remember hearing during the strike. You know the socialist boroughs met up recently in a conference in Sheffield. We were told by one of the councillors that he'd mentioned the strike to other councillors from Liverpool



Barbara: 'they don't care about child care'

while the whole Liverpool thing was going on.

They told him that no way would they have given us the extra money and staff. I mean I just laughed you know. What can you say? It really knocked me, although, there again, it doesn't really surprise me.

What response did you get to the strike from people who use the nurseries?

Barbara: Initially they were horrified about us going on strike but then we did get a lot of support. There was an occupation at the Town Hall and a lot of the mothers and fathers, but mostly mothers, were involved, going on the demonstrations and lobbies.

At the council meetings for instance, mothers held up their children and said if anything happened to them it

would be the council's fault. Did you get much support from the other unions?

Barbara: I was very disheartened by some trade unionists who crossed picket lines. But a lot of unions did support us — like the transport workers, printers and post office workers who didn't cross picket lines. The electricians in the EETPU just gave us a bollocking and told us to 'fuck off'.

One of the greatest laughs of the strike was Margaret Hodge, the Labour leader, advertising in the *Lady* magazine for a nanny for £35 a week to look after her kids.

Do you think the strike was a victory?

Barbara: Yes I do. We didn't go back with our tails between our legs did we? People are quite chuffed about it.

The council's 'we can't afford it' cries and its refusal to take a stand against Tory cuts do not augur well for workers' jobs and conditions when the government implements its rate-capping measures.

Solidarity

The prevarications of the Nalgo leadership at national and local level reflect its reluctance to sever close ties with Labour councillors. The union bureaucrats are so concerned to preserve their niche in the local government negotiating machinery that they are incapable of leading effective action in defence of their members.

The lesson of the Islington dispute is that workers cannot afford to place their livelihoods in the hands of Labour councillors who cannot fight and union officials who refuse to fight.

To defend jobs and services when the Tories get tough, council workers have to start forging links now among the different council departments and unions. Only through rank and file contact and regular discussions of common problems can we build real solidarity against the Tory offensive.

Blow

The nursery workers' strike was a blow to Islington council's socialist credentials among many council workers.

whole branch had come out it would have been over much quicker.

Was that the position argued for in the meetings?

Tony: Yes, it was argued quite



Tony: 'we didn't know what was happening'

Did you agree with the way the strike was run?

Tony: No. The only way to have done better would have been to bring the whole branch out. I think if the

Militant machinations



Socialist, bureaucrat, boss: Militant's Derek Hatton

Hot on the heels of its budget climb-down in July, Militant-controlled Liverpool Labour council hit the council workforce with another cost-cutting salvo. Two workers in the housing management division were suspended without pay for refusing to do extra work for phase two of the council's Urban Regeneration Scheme.

The scheme involves a reorganisation of the housing management division. The division is already undermanned and overworked, but Labour wants to trim it even further. A mere 54 workers have to cope with Liverpool's pressing housing problems. Labour wants to make do with 29.

When the council failed to reach agreement with Nalgo on staffing and regrading it decided to impose the new scheme anyway, suspending two workers who refused to comply. On 1 August 250 Nalgo members walked out in protest.

Twisted words

Labour accused the strikers of betraying the council. This is how it justified using other workers to scab on the strike.

Unfortunately, the workers' decisive action was undermined by the collusion of the Nalgo bureaucrats with the Militant councillors.

While workers responded to the threat to their jobs by walking out, their union officials entered into a ridiculous debate with the council over what constitutes a redundancy.

Rather than take an unconditional stand in defence of jobs, the Nalgo bureaucrats engaged in semantics about whether 'redeployment', 'non-replacement of staff', 'natural wastage' etc. were the same as redundancies. This display of tongue-twisting only indicated the unions' willingness to make concessions on jobs.

The strike ended on 13 August after negotiations behind closed doors among council leaders Derek Hatton and Tony Byrne and Nalgo full-timer Peter Cresswell. The council agreed to withdraw the suspensions but failed to resolve the regrading and staffing issues.

Flunk

This attack on Liverpool workers' jobs and conditions is only the latest example of the gulf between Militant's fighting words and flunked results.

Militant is adamant that its new budget represents 'an

overwhelming victory over the Tory Government'. The Labour leaders and the union bureaucrats might be happy with their face-saving compromise, but Liverpool workers have little to smile about:

● The budget worked out between the Liverpool Labour leaders and the Tory environment secretary Patrick Jenkin was £16 million lower than Labour's proposed March budget, which was spartan enough to begin with.

● The council has consistently pledged not to impose a rate increase 'to compensate for Tory cuts'. Yet on 11 July the Labour group passed a budget increasing the rates by 17 per cent. For Militant this was 'a necessary though regrettable compromise'. For most Liverpool workers it was yet another attack on headline living standards.

● The new budget cuts the council's £2 a week 'decoration allowance' which it had paraded as a rent cut, but which gave council tenants only £36 in 14 months — £68 short of the promised reduction.

Boasts

In office, Militant has accepted the limitations of capitalist administration and set out to balance the books.

From the start, Militant's road to confrontation was littered with compromises. Militant councillors stressed that it was the government which was seeking confrontation, not the council. In the words of councillor Derek Hatton, 'no stone was left unturned' in pursuit of a legal budget and a compromise solution. An illegal budget was never set.

Indeed, Labour is proud of its achievements in streamlining council expenditure at the expense of workers' living standards. A recent issue of *Militant* boasted that the Audit Commission, which investigates local government finances, has praised Liverpool Council for its 'good housekeeping' and 'efficiency' (27 July).

Nalgo workers have threatened all-out action in response to more suspensions. They have good cause to be vigilant. A council that is so adept at twisting words — turning compromises into victories and redundancies into redeployment — cannot be trusted. The Revolutionary Communist Party in Liverpool will continue the war of words, and actions, against a council that promises the earth but delivers only defeats.

Paul Saunders

Privatisation in Wandsworth

Two ways to skin a cat

Ever since the Tories took control of Wandsworth Council in 1978 they haven't let up in their attack on council workers' jobs and conditions. The latest targets in the Tories' sights are 55 lavatory attendants threatened with redundancy. Frances Wright looks at how the Tories have been able to sweep aside union resistance to privatisation.

Some 2187 jobs have been lost in Wandsworth over the past five years. The slimming down operation began in earnest in 1982 when Pritchard's Industrial Services moved into town:

- **February 1982:** Pritchard's Industrial Services wins contract for street cleaning. Staff reduced by 50, cuts in pay and conditions.

- **October 1982:** Grand Met Waste Services wins contract for refuse collection. Cut in pay of £30 a week and loss of 80 jobs.

- **March 1983:** Pritchard's takes over contract for gardening. No holiday pay, no sick pay, no protective clothing and loss of 26 jobs.

- **December 1983:** Automagic Cleaning Services takes over cleaning public halls, community centres and swimming pools. Twenty per cent increase in work load, worse pay and conditions, loss of 30 jobs.

- **May 1984:** Highway Vehicle Maintenance takes over council vehicle maintenance. Same pay despite increase in hours from 39 to 45 a week, 24 workers lose jobs.

- **June 1984:** Laundry services stay in-house after competing with private contractors. Agreement to lose jobs through natural wastage.

- **July 1984:** Initial Services win contract for caretaking services on Roehampton

estates. Pay cut from £159 to £91 a week, 45 redundancies.

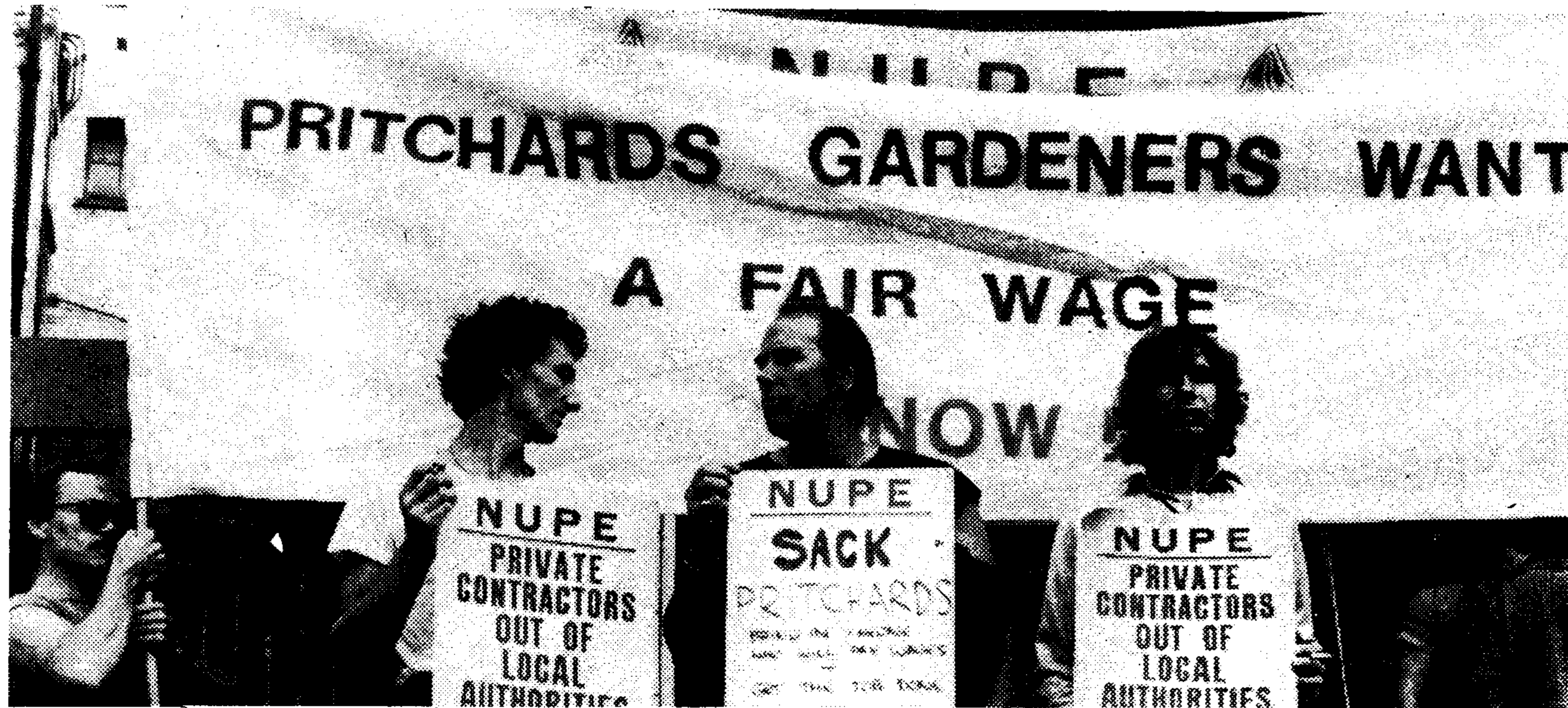
- **July 1984:** Letters sent to 55 lavatory attendants inviting them to tender for their own jobs.

In response to this all-out assault on jobs and services the unions have sought to prove that 'in economic terms it doesn't make sense to bring in contractors'. Rather than fight every attack on the council workforce, the unions have offered concession after concession on hours, wages and conditions in the hope of keeping the private contractors out and preserving their negotiating positions and membership rolls.

Threat

Council leader Paul Beresford noted how even the threat of privatisation has been enough to bring the union officials rushing to the council with suggestions about how to improve efficiency:

'You have also got to take into account the savings the council has made by the council's own workforce coming up with productivity deals keeping the private contractors out. Our mechanical workshops, social services transport and swimming pool operations have all stayed in-



Wandsworth workers have been fighting privatisation for five years

house due to productivity improvements. Taken together, these privatisation and productivity measures give a five year saving of £15 million so far.'

Whether they stay public or go private, Wandsworth workers have had to pay the price for the unions' readiness to do deals with the council.

The case of the Garrat Lane laundry in June was a striking example of how the union leaders are prepared to sacrifice jobs to maintain in-house services. When the Tories decided to 'test the service against the market' and invite private tenders, local GMBATU official Mike French pointed out that the laundry service has always been cost-effective:

'We are only asking for the same opportunities that a private laundry would get. The staff have earned their right to investment.'

French helpfully suggested that jobs could go through natural wastage - two people were coming up for early retirement anyway.

Appeal

While the Tories are clear about how to reduce expenditure and take a direct approach to cutting costs, the unions and the local Labour Party prefer to avoid the issue of jobs and appeal to the public to defend 'our services'. The recent example of the Roehampton caretakers indicates why such cries for public sympathy won't defend jobs and services.

The Roehampton caretakers were the only ones to reject the Wandsworth contract of employment when they were transferred from the Greater London Council. All the other area caretakers

accepted, and the union failed to organise a fightback.

The in-house caretakers lost 50 jobs and all overtime work, which they needed to earn a decent living. Now the Roehampton estates are to be run by Initial Services and all 45 caretakers face redundancy.

The Labour Party and the union didn't even try to lead a fight for jobs. Instead they appealed to Roehampton residents to defend public services. Wandsworth tenants who cannot see the difference between a third-rate in-house service and a third-rate privatised one were not inspired.

Only a campaign organised around the need to defend jobs and workers' livelihoods could have mobilised caretakers, other council workers and Roehampton tenants against the privateers.

Alternative

The lavatory attendants facing the axe, and other workers in Wandsworth who want to keep their jobs and maintain conditions clearly

need a different approach from the union's past efforts. The Revolutionary Communist Party in Wandsworth has a fighting alternative:

- The working class needs every job it has got, just to maintain its present meagre standard of living. 'No to all redundancies' must be our organising principle.

- Natural wastage means the slow contraction of the number of jobs available in a particular workplace. It must be resisted. Workers should insist that employers fill any vacancy within a set period and enforce their demand with appropriate industrial action if required.

- The privatisation of public service employment must be fought as part of the process of cutting jobs and enforcing harsher conditions. At the same time, all measures to rationalise employment levels and raise productivity to compete with the private contractors must be vigorously resisted. Public or private, the issue is our jobs. We cannot afford to lose them.

Beating the bailiffs

On Thursday 23 August management moved in to break the sit-in supported by 120 workers at the Cammell Laird shipyard in Birkenhead.

The bosses set a 4.30pm deadline for workers to vacate a gas rig and the warship HMS Edinburgh, which they had occupied in protest at job losses and the threatened closure of the yard. Management also threatened to withdraw the workers' redundancy money on the grounds of 'gross industrial misconduct'.

When the workers ignored the deadline management sacked six workers involved in the occupation and threatened to send the bailiffs in to smash the sit-in.

The union involved in the occupation, the general and municipal workers', called a picket of the shipyard to coincide with the eviction deadline. There was a tremendous response from miners all over Lancashire who turned up to withstand the bailiffs.

Despite this show of solidarity, the union officials turned the pickets away when

the bailiffs failed to put in an appearance at 4.30pm. GMBATU shop steward Leo Duffy blustered that 'we have really scared the management', and made no provision for the bailiffs' late arrival.

While the shipyard workers were determined to defy management's removal order, the local GMBATU executive was cringing at the prospect of legal action. It withdrew official backing for the strike.

The response of the union officials involved in the occupation was to accept defeat. Occupation committee chair Billy Albertino told a meeting of the Merseyside Trade Union Labour Movement Coordinating Committee that 'we have been sold down the river and have no further plan of action'.

In contrast, striking workers rejected the 'ridiculous' decision by the executive and said they would fight on.

Under pressure from rank and file workers, the GMBATU restored official backing the next day and called a one-day picket for the following Tuesday to resist the

bailiffs. Revolutionary Communist Party supporters argued that this strategy left the strikers wide open to eviction.

We argued for daily round-the-clock pickets and the maximum involvement of Cammell Laird workers in the occupation and picketing. Although the sit-in is supported by well over 100 workers who stand to lose their jobs, very few are actively involved in the occupation.

RCP supporters argued that it was vital to win the support of other Cammell Laird workers laid off as a result of the occupation. The workforce has been slashed from 3200 to 1700 over the last few months. Yet the union leaders have failed to mobilise the majority of workers in a fight to defend all jobs.

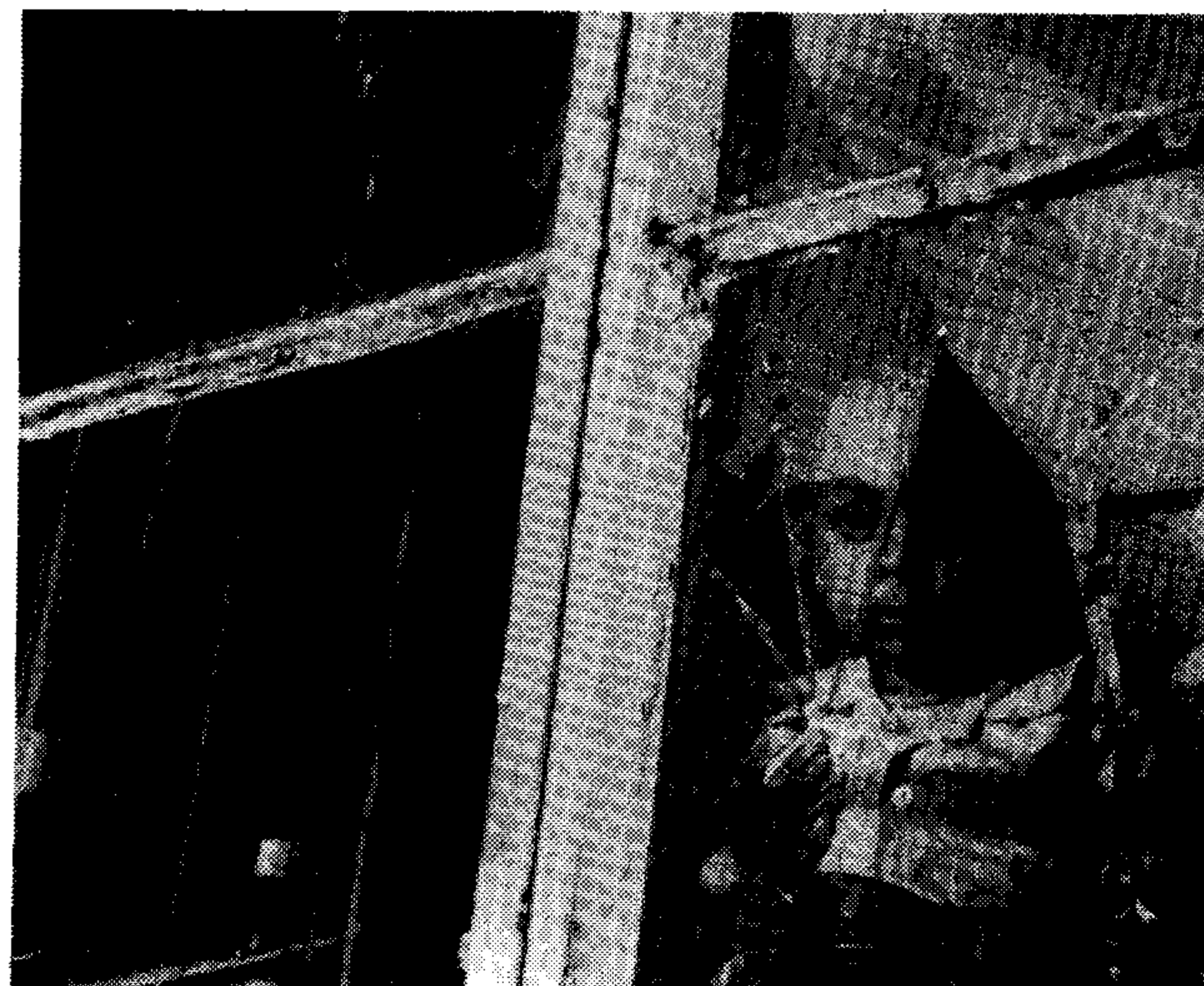
The only way to combat management's efforts to use a section of workers to lead a 'back-to-work' campaign against the strikers is to convince workers not directly involved in the occupation that they have every interest in supporting it. *Dario Davies*

East End action

The Mottlibs are a Bengali family under siege by racists. Their assailants have smashed the windows of their ground floor flat on Hadrian Estate, set fire to their washing outside and hounded their children.

The Labour council has used Hadrian Estate as a dumping ground for Bengali families it can't house in its Spitalfields ghetto. The council's indifference has made Asian families regular targets for racists.

East London Workers Against Racism supporters have been providing physical defence for the Mottlibs and building political support for our stand against the council's discriminatory housing policy. We have approached Nalگو members in the housing department to



The Mottlibs wait for the next attack

raise the issue in their union meetings and to join us.

Hadrian Estate is only the tip of the iceberg in Tower Hamlets. ELWAR needs

more people to get involved and build labour movement resistance to the racists. For more information, phone 01 274 3951.

the next step

There is a war on

On Sunday 12 August the Royal Ulster Constabulary attacked a Belfast demonstration, killing one man with a plastic bullet and injuring 20 others. The month of August passed in Britain with almost daily scenes of violent confrontation between riot police and striking miners. The coincidence of these two conflicts, both threatening a deeper destabilisation of the British state itself, caused some alarm in establishment circles last month. The responses of the government and the official labour movement throw some light on the significance of the Irish War in British politics. They also suggest some lessons the miners and other workers in Britain could learn from the Irish people.

On closer examination parallels between the events of 12 August and those on the first Bloody Sunday in 1972 seem far-fetched. Links between the conflict in Northern Ireland and that in the British coalfields also appear inappropriate. In many ways there is no comparison between the fairly subdued state of the Irish War in 1984 and its ferocity in 1972. In that peak year of bombings and shootings, 467 people died — more than 10 times the total for the first eight months of 1984. On Derry's Bloody Sunday soldiers of the parachute regiment opened fire with *lead* bullets on a massive demonstration, killing 14 people. In Belfast's recent incident police used plastic bullets to terrorise a much smaller crowd of 3000, resulting in a single fatality.

Nor is there any real comparison in terms of the scale of violence between the conduct of the Irish War and that of the miners' strike. In occupied Ireland state repression is ruthless and systematic. The RUC's use of plastic bullets is one aspect of a whole machinery of terror. The British state employs its army and the police, interrogation centres and concentration camps, and the notorious shoot-to-kill squads as well as the murderous Loyalist paramilitaries. On the other side the resistance of the nationalist people is organised along military lines through the Irish Republican Army and the Irish National Liberation Army. By contrast, state repression in industrial disputes in Britain is episodic and relatively restrained. None of the methods commonly used or recommended in Ireland — from plastic bullets to water cannon to CS gas — have yet been used in the miners' strike. The response of the miners to police intimidation has so far been random and uncoordinated.

Bloody Sunday 1984 was a fairly small-scale atrocity by the barbarous standards Britain has established in its long rule over Ireland. Yet the fact that it occurred at the same time as the miners' strike in full view of millions of British television viewers gave the incident an unprecedented impact. The Belfast incident came at the very moment that the British establishment faces the most serious challenge on the home front for many years. Raging picket

line violence, legal actions and threats of legal actions, have led to a questioning of the legitimacy of the authority of the state among striking miners and many other workers. The increased insecurity of the British establishment this August made another Bloody Sunday an even bigger embarrassment to the authorities and an even greater propaganda coup for the republican movement.

The police have imposed curfews and road blocks, sealed off mining communities and brutally assaulted thousands of miners. They have used truncheons, horses and dogs, fists and boots, to break up picket lines and demonstrations. The result is that the police are no longer seen by many workers as the impartial enforcers of a law that protects all citizens. They increasingly appear as coercive agents deployed by the bosses against the working class. The police themselves are fearful of the consequences of this loss of respect for their authority, as Warwickshire chief Peter Joslin admitted:

'We do police this country by consent, and what the miners dispute has highlighted is the difficulty for the police when a significant minority of the public withdraws that consent... What I fear is that assaults on police will become acceptable within the community and that to protect our officers we will be forced to change our traditional style of policing.' (*The Guardian*, 28 July)

When miners began barricading roads, attacking police vehicles and fire-bombing scab coaches, the authorities became apprehensive about a breakdown of law and order in the coalmining areas.

The crisis of state authority in Britain gave Belfast's bloody Sunday its explosive significance. It directed public attention on a community of half a million people in occupied Ireland. Their fight for freedom is such a threat to the British state that it has to try to suppress even peaceful commemorations of episodes in that long struggle. The scenes of police terror immediately brought to the public mind another community which has become bitterly alienated from the state. The miners have been labelled by Thatcher as 'the enemy within'. Home Secretary Leon Brittan scorns them as thugs and boot boys and his Cabinet colleague Peter Walker considers them a threat to democracy. According to sociology professor Frank Musgrove, miners in general, but striking miners in particular, are of limited intelligence (*The Sunday Times*, 12 August).

There hasn't been such an outpouring of prejudice since...the last IRA bomb in London. A sense of exclusion from British society is now common to nationalists in Northern Ireland and to many miners and workers at home. The spectre that haunts

the ruling class is that this will generate a growing disrespect for the institutions of the British state, especially on this side of the Irish Sea where it has long felt secure. The resulting destabilisation of capitalist rule would indeed force the authorities to change their 'traditional style of policing'.

Unfortunately, the British ruling class still has considerable room to manoeuvre. For the Tories the Belfast bloody Sunday fiasco was another in a long line of banana skins. But they remain confident that they can stay on their feet, contain the threat from Ireland and defeat the miners at home. One of the main reasons for their confidence is the existence of the official labour movement and its political leader Neil Kinnock.

The British establishment takes a different approach to Ireland than to the miners' strike. It appreciates that there is a war on in Ireland and that it has no alternative but to keep on dishing out terror to try to crush the resistance of the nationalist people. The priority in government policy is *keeping the lid on*. British strategy is designed to prevent the instability in the Six Counties from seeping across the Irish Sea. It is also intended to ensure that all the killing is done with the minimum fuss off camera. For as long as the republican movement continues to fight for Irish freedom, British withdrawal is not an option. A British withdrawal would unleash unprecedented social instability throughout the United Kingdom.

The government's approach to the miners' strike is *to turn this industrial dispute into a wider class war*. Thus the Tories and the Coal Board bosses have sought to politicise every aspect of the strike. They have presented the miners' fight for jobs as a menace to the whole British people. They have particularly emphasised the issues of violence and law and order to maximise public hostility against the miners and press them to return to work.

The success of the Tory strategy depends on the spinelessness of the Labour leadership. When it comes to the security of the British state, Thatcher knows she can rely on Kinnock to back the establishment. Over the recent events in Belfast, as over most things, Kinnock's comments were rambling and equivocal. Yet when he is invited to condemn the violence of the IRA, Kinnock is direct and unequivocal: he always upholds the forces of the British state against the Irish people. Throughout the miners' strike Kinnock has sat on the fence, sometimes feebly criticising Thatcher and MacGregor, sometimes offering to press Scargill into settlement talks. Yet when he is invited to condemn the violence of picketing miners, Kinnock speaks out clearly and forcefully. Whenever the oppressed fight back the leader of the Labour Party can be found

condemning and denouncing them from every media platform eagerly provided by the ruling class oppressors.

The Kinnock approach is no personal idiosyncrasy. It is shared by every Labour leader and every trade union bureaucrat. The official labour movement's deference to the British state makes it possible for the government to keep the lid on in Ireland while it takes on the miners at home. It helps to prevent the miners from developing a broader political response when the Tories politicise the dispute. The loudest voices denying that the miners' strike is 'political' are those of the Labour leaders. Kinnock recognises the risk involved when Thatcher raises the stakes:

'Only two small groups in Britain believe the fight is political. The first group is not in the leadership of any union or democratic political party — the outer left. The other is the Prime Minister and her colleagues.'

Kinnock must have been reading *The miners' next step*.

The Labour Party recoils in fear at the thought of workers adopting the strategy advocated by the Revolutionary Communist Party — an anti-state response to a state offensive against the working class. It fears this because its whole style of operation is overshadowed by its loyalty to the state. The Labour Party was founded to help restrict the working class to the straight and narrow of British trade unionism and keep it out of politics.

The RCP has no allegiance to the British state. We are committed to building a party that can lead the working class beyond trade union disputes. Our aim is to get rid of the British state and the system of exploitation and oppression which it defends at home and abroad. In preparing to take power, the miners and other workers in Britain can learn much from the Irish people.

The Irish people have just come through 15 years in the latest round of their struggle against British domination. Their long and bitter experience contains many valuable lessons for British workers. The Irish people once put their trust in courts of inquiry and government reforms. They learned that these produce only lies and empty promises and that the only way to get their rights was by fighting for them. The Irish people tried peaceful protests — and they were clubbed off the streets. They learned that violence was the only way to defend their communities against military terror.

It is time British workers recognised their common cause with the Irish people against the British state. This recognition could pave the way for an unbeatable alliance against the state in Ireland and in Britain. The events of August gave Thatcher and Kinnock and the rest a glimpse of this nightmare. The RCP is working to turn their worst fears into reality.

Helping the miners means breaking the law

The legality barrier

Over the summer months the Tories have stepped up their propaganda campaign against the miners. The government and its backers have portrayed the miners as 'the enemy within' and the strike as a threat to democracy and law and order. They have also resorted to court actions and intensified police repression. Their aim has been to isolate the miners from the rest of society and build up pressure for a return to work.

The Tory offensive has put the leadership of the labour movement on the defensive. The leaders of the Labour Party and the TUC have become more and more embarrassed by the strike. They are afraid of the consequences for themselves of a defeat for the miners. But they fear even more the violence and instability that results from the miners' determination to keep on fighting against the bosses and their state machine. The bureaucrats are desperate for a settlement on any terms and have worked non-stop to get one.

The left wing of the official labour movement is in an even more embarrassing position. Left trade union officials would like to do more to help the miners, but they know they cannot deliver the support of their members. The gulf between their declarations of solidarity and the reality of the miners' lone fight has become increasingly difficult to conceal as the strike has dragged on over the last six months. The threatened 'big bang' of industrial action to follow the TUC Congress has been hyped up by the media to call the left's bluff and to expose its weakness.

On these pages Joan Phillips examines the response of the labour movement, particularly its left wing, to the state's combined political and legal assault on the miners and other sections of the trade union movement. On the following pages Mike Freeman looks at the role of the union Broad Lefts in the miners' strike in the light of their call at the TUC for a 24-hour general strike.



Law and Order, courtesy of Horse and Hound: miners get dragged through fields while the left worries about

against this alien menace.

While police repression of striking miners intensified, the Tories homed in to take propaganda advantage of the miners' determination to fight for their right to work against police and scabs. Home Secretary Leon Brittan condemned 'picket line thugs and bully boys' and insisted that the rule of law must be maintained. Employment secretary Tom King claimed that 'some scenes in recent months have nothing to do with the traditions of trade unionism as people understand it in this country'. He tried to turn decent law-abiding British trade unionists against violent striking miners.

As well as stepping up their harassment of striking miners and their communities, the police have moved into the front line of the political battle. Warwickshire police chief Peter Jospin echoed government ministers' attacks on striking miners and upheld the bosses' cherished right to scab:

'What we are seeing in this dispute, without doubt is a deliberate challenge to law and order in this country. The mass picketing and the intimidation of working miners are an attempt by the bully boys in society to impose their will on those wishing to exercise that most democratic right — the right to work.'

The Police Federation urged the TUC and the Labour Party to disown the miners. It is unprecedented for Britain's supposedly impartial police to play such an overtly political role. It indicates the establishment's determination to make every aspect of the dispute into a wider political confrontation between the miners and the state.

Labour's retreat

In response to the Tories' law and order offensive against the miners, the Labour leaders have gone into retreat. While the Tories have been fighting a class war, they have been trying to pretend that they are involved in an ordinary industrial dispute. The TUC and Labour Party leaders reeled before Thatcher's outbursts against 'the enemy within'. Neil Kinnock accused Thatcher of being 'insulting and offensive':

'She seems to have forgotten that it was the sons of these very miners and the brothers of these miners who were prepared to defend their country's interests in the conflict of which she speaks.'

Rather than go on the offensive against the Tories by welcoming the link between workers in struggle against the state and an attack on the British state by a Third World country, the Labour leaders put on a display of wounded patriotic pride. Every time the Tories raised the

stakes the Labour leaders took one step backwards. Kinnock's answer to the question — 'who rules?' — was to deny that the miners' strike was a struggle about class power.

The leadership of the NUM also backed down in face of the Tories' broad political attack. Scargill insisted that the strike was a simple trade union dispute centred around the Coal Board's failure to respect the 1974 *Plan for Coal*:

'Are we really talking about defeating a trade union leader and the NUM or are we talking about solving a damaging and difficult dispute, caused by the NCB violating a signed agreement?'

While the government was prepared to throw the rulebook out the window, Scargill pleaded that agreements and proper procedure should be upheld.

The issue of violence was an even more powerful weapon against the official labour movement. Kinnock responded immediately to the Police Federation's challenge to condemn the 'tyranny' of miners' pickets:

'I have repeatedly condemned violence. Violence has no part in industrial disputes in Britain. It is utterly alien to the way we conduct affairs in this country.'

While miners faced brutal assaults on pickets, demonstrations and even in their own communities, Kinnock condemned any response from the miners as 'un-British'. Local NUM officials also ruled out aggressive tactics and tried to curb miners' resistance against the police.

In a *Newsnight* interview a Yorkshire NUM executive member found himself agreeing on violence with the media created back-to-work leader 'Silver Birch'. He blamed 'a very small minority of miners' and 'fringe elements' for picket line violence. After clashes on the Bilston Glen picket line in Scotland in July, NUM officials reached an agreement with the police to limit the confrontation to pushing between the picket line and the police cordon. Labour councillor Tom Darby and union officials spent hours persuading the pickets to stop throwing stones. The following morning the police responded to the ritual pushing and shoving with violence and mass arrests. Local NUM branch secretary Jackie Aitchison was outraged that the police had broken their agreement:

'The police agreed they would accept a push but they reacted with mass arrests. I consider these methods were violent. Even reporters and TV cameramen were protesting. It was disgusting to say the least.'

Union officials are so accustomed to playing by

'SCARGILL OR democracy — that is the choice' was the headline over energy minister Peter Walker's *Sunday Express* onslaught on the miners' union at the height of the Tory summer offensive. Walker condemned Scargill for 'directing violence, intimidation and mob rule' and for his affinities with the Soviet Union. In a cartoon on the same page Scargill appeared as a winged monster with sharpened teeth and claws, bearing a submachine gun and a hammer and sickle emblem. The Tory press was ready to go to any lengths to vilify the miners and discredit the strike.

The twin themes in the Tories' propaganda war were to present the miners' strike as a threat to British democracy and to show up the striking miners as a violent challenge to law and order in Britain. The ideological campaign has

been given a cutting edge by legal actions against the miners' union. The Tory assault on the miners brought together the main features of the government's mounting offensive against the unions over the last couple of years.

All Argies now

Thatcher herself launched the most explosive charge against the miners back in July. She drew a parallel between the NUM and the Argentinian junta that challenged British imperialism over the Malvinas in 1982. Other ministers followed the Thatcher line. 'This is not a mining dispute' agreed Peter Walker, 'it is a challenge to British democracy, and hence to the British people'. The Tories used the full resources of their press to try to unite the British people



Limits of the peaceful road: Welsh NUM leaders put up token barricades but flinched from defying the law

ier



being dragged through the courts

the rules that they can only hold up their hands in horror at the refusal of the police to play along with them.

Scargill's refusal to condemn violence and intimidation on picket lines is the least that striking miners could expect from their union leader. It is a considerable improvement on Kinnock's cringing before the Tories, the Police Federation and the media. But miners have a right to ask much more from their union leaders when they are engaged in a battle for their very livelihoods. The police are effective because they are disciplined, trained and coordinated; they are dressed and equipped for battle. The miners cannot expect to win unless they meet organised force with organised resistance. It is up to Scargill and the other officials paid by the miners to organise the defence of miners' rights on the

picket line. The NUM has so far failed to organise effective action. Indeed it has generally curbed militant mass picketing and discouraged the intimidation of scabs.

Left-wing groups active in the miners' strike have also capitulated to the bosses' ideological onslaught. The Communist Party, which retains some members within the NUM bureaucracy, endorsed the Labour leadership's attempts to confine the strike to trade union issues. In his report to the party executive back in May, industrial organiser Pete Carter insisted that 'any projection of the strike as a political strike aimed at bringing the government down will be of no help to the miners'. But the miners never set out to overthrow the government. They were forced to take strike action in defence of their jobs. The government then made it clear that the miners could only save their jobs by taking on the state itself. The response of the rank and file miners was clear — we fight on regardless. The advice of the Communist Party amounted to a counsel of despair.

The left also made concessions to the bosses on the issue of violence. The Socialist Workers' Party criticised rank and file miners for organising 'hit and run' raids such as the destruction of scab lorries and coaches (*Socialist Worker*, 11 August). It has also condemned the intimidation of individual scabs away from the picket lines. Such tactics have a long and honourable tradition in British working class struggles. They are often essential to ensure the effectiveness of strike action. The SWP counterposes mass picketing to 'individual' terror organised secretly, but both are necessary in any major strike. Condemning such actions in the current miners' dispute amounts to a capitulation to the establishment's 'law and order' hysteria.

Using the courts

The government has used the issue of law and order to great advantage in the miners' strike. Yet it has been reluctant to drag the miners' union through the courts. Its strategy has been to avoid provoking any wider conflict or sympathy action from other unions through precipitate legal action against the NUM. In the early days of the dispute the Coal Board was granted an injunction under the civil law — the 1980 Employment Act — to prevent 'secondary picketing'. But it decided against using the High Court to enforce this order. Instead of using the civil law, the police have used the criminal law to control picketing. More than 5000 miners have been arrested, convicted and fined — several have already been imprisoned. But the government has bided its time before moving in with wide legal actions against the NUM, working to criminalise and isolate the miners.

Last month's legal action against the South

Wales NUM was a test case for the Coal Board and the government. Two Gloucestershire haulage companies went to the High Court to enforce an injunction to stop miners' pickets interfering with their trucks moving coal and other materials at the Port Talbot steel works. Under pressure from rank and file miners, the South Wales NUM boycotted the court proceedings as a show of defiance. But while the union leaders indulged in public bravado, behind the scenes union solicitors were hard at work trying to fix a deal with the lorry companies.

The area union claimed that the companies' legal action was misconceived. Officials said they were following NUM picketing guidelines, and that the terms of the injunction had been communicated to picketing miners. In a conciliatory letter, solicitors for the South Wales NUM argued that the haulage companies 'simply do not appreciate that, as their vehicles travel with a large number of other vehicles in a single convoy, it is extremely difficult to observe the terms of the order'. The union helpfully suggested that the lorries travel in a group at the front or rear of convoys so they would be clearly recognisable to pickets.

Despite its willingness to abandon effective picketing, the South Wales NUM was nevertheless ordered to pay a £50 000 fine for breaching the injunction. After vigorous protests from rank and file miners the union refused to pay, and the sequestrators moved into action to seize the unions assets for contempt of court. Rather than mobilise masses of angry workers at Port Talbot in defiance of the law, the union leaders sounded the retreat. They scaled down picketing at Port Talbot and the union leaders stood by while militant miners erected barricades and occupied the NUM's Pontypridd headquarters.

The militancy of the rank and file miners and their determination to defend the union were wasted in a useless gesture. The London firm of chartered accountants had no need to send the bailiffs to the union office. The seizure of the union assets was done smoothly via telephone calls to the banks and building societies. The class struggle was reduced to shifting union funds from one bank to another in a futile attempt to evade sequestration.

Left and the law

While the South Wales NUM continued its showpiece defiance left-wing union leaders called on the TUC to back the NUM's illegal action. Broad Left union leaders have demanded that the TUC abide by the decision of its 1982 Wembley conference to support unions which challenge the Tories' anti-union laws. Yet the best way for the left to have supported the miners against the legislature would have been by example. Unfortunately, their recent records provide only negative examples.

● Post office engineers and Mercury

In October 1983 the High Court rejected Mercury Communications' application for an injunction against the Post Office Engineering Union's campaign of industrial action. 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 not illegal, but a genuine industrial dispute over job losses. The POEU claimed the court ruling as a victory for the labour movement. In reality, 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. Broad Left bluster about taking on the courts proved to be empty rhetoric.

● NGA printworkers, Warrington

During the dispute over the closed shop at Eddie Shah's *Stockport Messenger* last year the NGA was fined £675 000 for defying orders to stop 'illegal' picketing. In July the union was ordered to pay a further £125 000 damages. Mr Justice Caulfield accused the union of 'mobocracy and intimidation at its worst' and condemned its flouting of the law. Unfortunately, the NGA never intended to defy the courts or the government to defend trade union rights.

The union's final declaration of a 24-hour national print strike in support of the 'Stockport Six' victimised by Shah for trying to enforce a closed shop was only a gesture to placate its members. Nobody was more relieved than NGA leader Joe Wade when TUC leader Len Murray called off the strike only hours before it was due to start. The left was up in arms about the 'betrayal'. But the left-wing union leaders, like the NGA bureaucrats, only wanted to show their members that they were prepared to defend trade union rights. They were not ready to turn their words into action.

Transport workers' leader Moss Evans made it clear that what he had in mind was a *gesture* of support for the NGA. Others mouthed platitudes about solidarity or, like Arthur Scargill, simply waited until it was all over before demanding action. The NGA now leads left-wing critics of the TUC's refusal to back defiance of the law in the miners' strike. But none of the left-wing leaders seriously considered leading industrial action in support of the printworkers.

● Civil servants, GCHQ, Cheltenham

On 25 January, Foreign Secretary Sir Geoffrey Howe announced that civil servants at the Government Communications Headquarters had a month to sign away their right to belong to a trade union. The government claimed that unions at Cheltenham were a threat to national security and had to be disbanded to protect the interests of the state.

More than 20 000 angry civil servants took spontaneous strike action in response to the union ban, closing down social security offices and hitting several government departments. While their members took the sort of action needed to force the government to give in, the union leaders were preoccupied with defending their patriotic credentials. The Council of Civil Service Unions proclaimed that the GCHQ workers 'would never do anything to jeopardise national security, and they feel insulted by the suggestion that their loyalty could ever have been compromised by membership of a trade union'.

The union bureaucrats were so busy denying that they were a threat to national security that the real threat to their members' jobs and trade union rights never became an issue. On 1 February, the Council of Civil Service Unions offered a 'no-disruption' agreement at GCHQ. A week later, the civil service union leaders explained that they were 'very sensitive to the danger that their offer of a "no-disruption" agreement with the government might seem to be signing away vital trade union rights'. For the union bureaucrats, desperate to save their own skins, the right to strike was no longer a 'vital trade union right'. For trade union leaders prepared to give up the right to strike to retain token union membership it was inappropriate to take strike action to force the government to back down on its GCHQ ban. The union leaders ruled out industrial action from the beginning because the Tories would play the state security card:

'Geoffrey Howe will only jump up and say that we're threatening national security. Anyway, it's not an issue for industrial action.'

Rather than fight the Tories' attack on union rights the union leaders took them to court. When the High Court overruled the government's union ban on the grounds that it had failed to consult GCHQ workers, CCSU secretary Peter Jones claimed that the ruling was 'an historic judgement for the labour movement'. Within weeks, the Appeal Court overruled the High Court decision. The three Appeal Court judges ruled that the courts had no power to interfere with government decisions taken in the interests of national security. Given the union leaders' acceptance that national security is a legitimate cause for trade unionists to champion, they had no case to argue against the courts.

Left-wing union leaders' record of bowing down before the Tories' legal assault means that they have nothing to offer the miners except a legacy of capitulation and defeat.

Defy the law!

Respect for the law unites union bureaucrats and Labour leaders, left and right in subservience to the establishment. Their law and order, not workers' needs, defines the limits of the class struggle.

The law exists to protect the interests represented by the state, and the state is nothing more than the concentrated power of the capitalist class. The state and its institutions — the police and the judiciary — are accountable only to the ruling class. They cannot be answerable to the labour movement. In accepting the establishment's law and order, the labour movement accepts the legitimacy of ruling class power. The leaders of the labour movement cannot fight the law because their future depends on preserving the existing system. The working class, on the other hand, has every interest in challenging the law and the class it serves because our future depends on getting rid of the present system.

The plaintiff left

The left wing of the British labour movement retains a strong faith in British justice. Left-wing union leaders have failed to challenge the Tories' anti-union laws and their attacks on particular sections of the trade union movement. At the same time, they have tried to use the courts to defend trade union rights.

● The miners and the productivity scheme

In 1977 the NUM executive overturned a national ballot against the introduction of divisive area incentive schemes. Left-wing area leaders sought a court injunction against the executive for sanctioning unconstitutional conduct. When a High Court judge ruled against them the resistance of the militant areas crumbled. They introduced the productivity scheme. Putting their trust in the courts rather than the class struggle led to a serious setback for the miners, deepening the divisions that have dogged the 1984 strike.

● Nupe's case against privatisation

Over the past year the left-led public service union Nupe has turned to the courts to protect its members. It has launched cases against local authorities to save the jobs of school meals staff and against health authorities over the contracting out of catering, cleaning and other ancillary services. In March, Nupe and other unions

applied for a judicial review to stop Hertfordshire council giving its 4100 staff new contracts involving a 17 per cent pay cut. In April the High Court ruled that the council had every right to reduce wages to make economies. The same thing happened in every other court case. Nupe's strategy of fighting its battles against the employers through the courts was doomed to failure from the start. The bosses' judges were not likely to deliver verdicts favourable to the union when it was not prepared to put up a fight.

● Counsel for the left

Left-wing organisations and politicians are no strangers to the courts. In 1982 the Militant group threatened to use the law to prevent its leaders' expulsion from the Labour Party. When the 1983 General Election was announced, GLC leader Ken Livingstone threatened to support an injunction against his party's national executive, to thwart manoeuvres designed to prevent his selection as a parliamentary candidate. Every time a fascist group threatens to march the Labour left turns to the courts rather than the working class to keep them off the streets.

The labour movement's subservience to the courts is a reflection of its loyalty to the British state and its naive belief that it can be used to promote workers' interests.

The Broad Left and the miners' strike

Big blather

'The men in my garage just laugh at the idea of a 24-hour general strike. I can't argue it with them - it doesn't make sense. If you really want to do something to support the miners then why not go the whole hog? You see nobody wants to lose a day's pay when they know they won't achieve anything. I'm sure there are better things we could do that would be effective, and I'm convinced the men would support it if somebody took the trouble to persuade them.'

(Pete, London Transport worker)



Windy Jimmy Knapp



Ray Buckton's high profile

The Broad Left Organising Committee has organised a mass lobby of the TUC in September, calling for a 24-hour general strike in support of the miners. BLOC is a Militant-backed umbrella group of left-wing factions in the unions. The lobby of the TUC is also supported by the Communist Party and the Socialist Workers' Party. Inside Congress Broad Left delegates will be pressing for firmer TUC backing for the miners.

Broad Left suggestions about general strikes and other militant gestures raise the question — what have the Broad Left unions been doing for the miners over the past six months? Here we look at the record and outline some practical measures the unions could take instead of talking empty about the big bang.

THE TRANSPORT SECTOR is one of the strongholds of the Broad Left. Both the big rail unions are dominated by left-wing factions. Engine drivers' leader Ray Buckton and NUR chief Jimmy Knapp are two of the Broad Left's most prominent personalities. The Transport and General Workers' Union which organises dockers and lorry drivers has long been a bastion of the left in the TUC and in the Labour Party. The TGWU's retiring general secretary Moss Evans will soon be succeeded by Ron Todd, the left's victorious candidate in the union's recent elections.

The transport unions have a radical reputation. They are relatively strongly organised and they are in a powerful position to help the miners. Their leaders have proclaimed their sympathy for the miners' cause since the strike began in early March. But how have the unions used their strength to give practical support to the miners in their fight for jobs?

Steel blockade

The most publicised action of the rail unions has been to stop transporting coal and coke into the steel plants at Ravenscraig, Llanwern, Port Talbot, Scunthorpe and Redcar. It is significant that systematic action was not taken until June, the fourth month of the dispute. Sympathetic action

followed pressure from the miners in each area on local railway workers. In the end, it was local contacts, not national directives, that prompted effective solidarity.

It is significant too that rank and file initiative in taking sympathetic industrial action has been constantly thwarted by deals between officials of the NUM and the steelworkers aimed at maintaining steel production. The on/off character of the blacking of coal supplies to the Ravenscraig plant in Scotland is only the most extreme example. In the event, the railworkers' action has been rendered ineffective by hundreds of strike-breaking lorry drivers, many of them TGWU members.

The Shirebrook connection

The delivery of supplies of coal by rail to the steel plants is not, however, the crucial issue in the miners' strike. In terms of whether or not the strike bites, the transport of coal from the Nottinghamshire coalfield, where a majority of miners have worked through the dispute, is far more important. Around 400 000 tonnes of coal a week flow out of the working pits. Most of this coal goes by train to the power stations of the Central Electricity Generating Board. Recognising the importance of this traffic, miners appealed to railway workers at the key Shirebrook depot in Nottinghamshire to

black coal movements.

Early in June Aslef and NUR officials instructed members to stop moving coal and local branch meetings voted narrowly in favour of this policy. But the union leaders did not campaign actively to convince workers of the legitimacy of this tactic. Many failed to attend the crucial branch meetings and most crossed picket lines to go into work. British Rail bosses suspended the handful of workers who refused to man the coal trains. The unions' response was not to widen the scope of industrial action but to make up the wages of the suspended men. The movement of coal to the power stations was scarcely affected.

The result was that one of the weakest links in the bosses' energy supply chain remained unbroken. The Broad Left union leaders were content merely to make a gesture of support for the miners by calling for action and paying the suspended men. They were in a position to strike a decisive blow at the supply of energy to industry and give the miners some real leverage against the government. But they made no serious attempt to do this.

The TGWU's shame

The support of the transport workers' leaders for the miners has proved even more hollow than that of the rail union leaders. When railway workers have refused to transport coal or iron ore into the steel plants the bosses have found little difficulty in finding contractors prepared to shift raw materials by road. Many lorry drivers in the scab convoys have openly displayed TGWU membership cards.

The TGWU instructed its oil tanker driver members to block the use of oil as a substitute for coal in power stations. Yet the Central Electricity Generating Board has increased the proportion of power produced from oil from four per cent to 40 per cent of the total without any threat of disruption.

The dockers are another group of workers who are strategically placed to help paralyse energy supplies to industry. Like many trade unionists, rank and file dockers have made considerable contributions to help the miners. Many have been prepared to take sympathetic action to prevent imports of coal and other raw materials from reducing the effectiveness of the miners' strike. But TGWU leaders have taken a much narrower view of the scope of industrial action.

Defending the dockers

In July dockers at Immingham came out on strike when the British Steel Corporation used non-registered dock labour to unload iron ore destined for blacked steel plants. Dockers throughout the country immediately came out in solidarity. The TGWU leaders had a tremendous opportunity to link up with the miners and deliver a 'big bang' against the bosses and the government. But they chose to use the government's embarrassment at facing two big unions at once in the narrow interests of the TGWU dockers' section. When the employers agreed to uphold the terms of the National Dock Labour Scheme which protects dockers' jobs, the TGWU recommended a return to work. The miners — whose jobs were as vulnerable as ever — were left to fight on alone.

In August, *Socialist Worker* revealed that the TGWU had made local deals with the Steel Corporation at Port Talbot and Hunterston. TGWU leaders allowed coal and iron ore to pass through these registered ports using registered TGWU dockers (11 August). At Hunterston the TGWU let non-registered members of the steelworkers' union unload ships. The Hunterston dockers finally agreed to support the miners' blockade of Ravenscraig in mid-August. When the bosses continued unloading coal using non-dock labour, dockers' leaders called another national dock strike. But the goal of the union leaders is to safeguard their own position rather than help the miners win. The dock strike shares many of the problems that have dogged the miners' dispute — delays in making the action bite and divisions among dockers in different ports over supporting the strike. Many dockers remain unconvinced of the legitimacy of strike action.



Tough-talking Ron Todd

Why the left fails

Why has the Broad Left in the transport unions failed to provide more than rhetorical support for the miners? There are two major reasons. First, because when these unions are described as 'left-wing', the label really means 'strong sectional militancy', not a commitment to defend the wider interests of the working class. The TGWU's oil tanker drivers, for example, have a tradition of using aggressive trade union tactics to advance their own claims. Their relative success rests partly on their combativity and partly on the relative prosperity of the oil industry. This narrow militancy cannot be directly tapped to win sympathetic action for another group of workers such as the miners.

The second reason is the bureaucratic style of leadership that the Broad Left shares with the traditional right. Knapp and Buckton, Evans and Todd have conducted their unions' intervention in the miners' strike from the Olympian height of their union head office without consultation or discussion with rank and file workers. They have no confidence in their ability to influence their members' actions. This is not surprising because they always try to justify their members' industrial action on the grounds that it is in the best interests of their industries. They find it so difficult to justify sympathetic action that can only damage British industry that they do not even try. Instead, they issue unconvincing moral exhortations not to cross picket lines. They try to deliver solidarity by edict from above. Instead of campaigning to win support and involvement in sympathetic action, Broad Left union leaders issue declarations and instructions. This approach allows the passive workers to gain influence and leaves militants to struggle on in isolation.

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Potential targets

Other unions with a strong Broad Left influence are also well placed to take sympathetic action. Members of the civil service union, the CPSA, are responsible for administering — and restricting — social security benefits for striking miners. At an early stage in the dispute the DHSS issued guide-lines concerning benefits for striking miners. The government regulations dictate that £15 a week should be deducted from benefit assuming that the miners get strike pay (which they do not). The CPSA could have organised non-cooperation with these punitive rules and insisted on paying out full benefit and the maximum of discretionary allowances to all miners on strike.

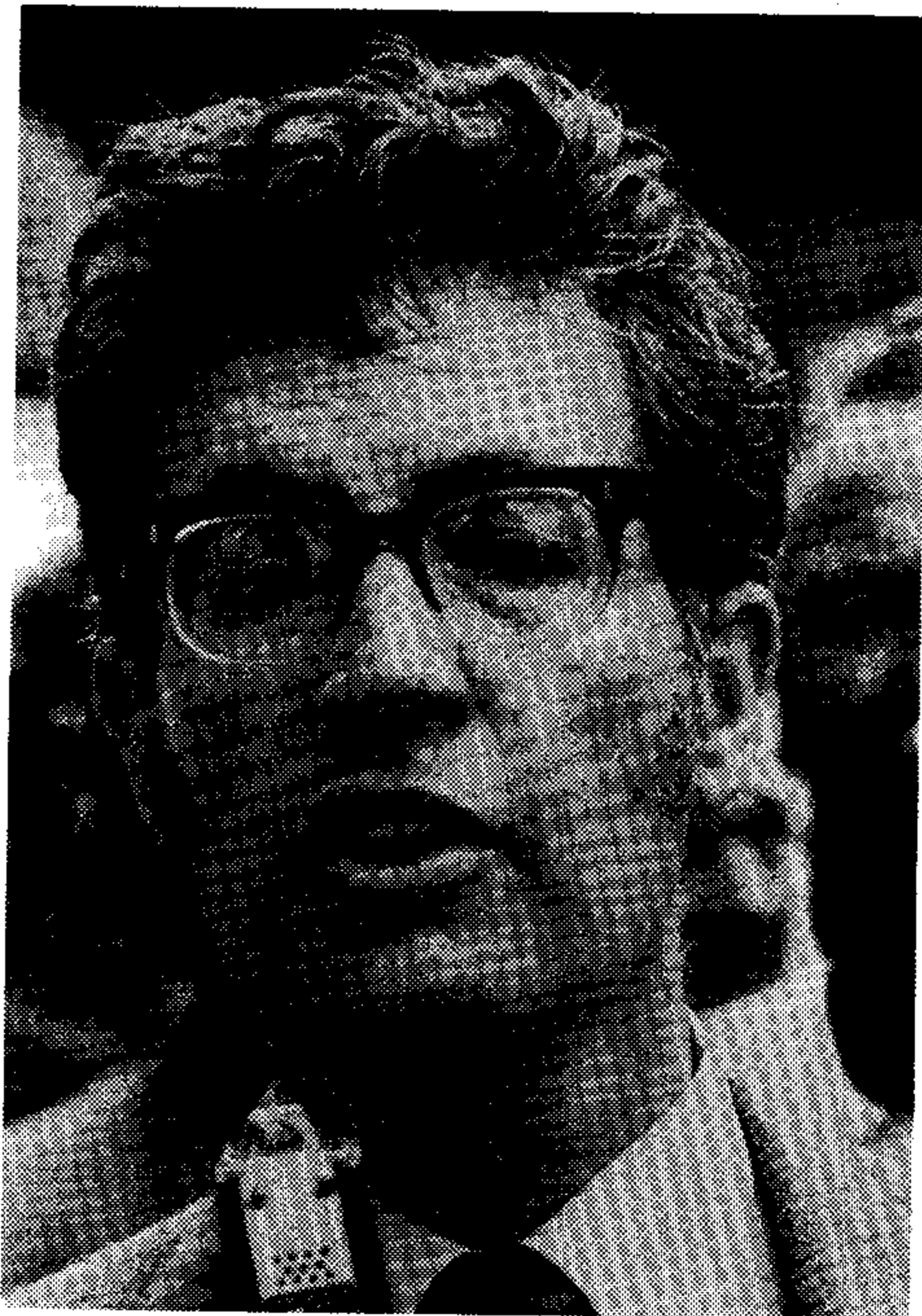
The post office engineers could greatly assist the miners by disrupting telecommunications services to the Coal Board. This could render the continuation of coal mining in the working areas very difficult. The post office workers' union took similar action against the Grunwick film processing factory in the famous 1976-7 strike in North London.

It is not surprising that the influential Broad Left caucuses in these two unions have not even proposed, let alone enacted, such measures. As we have seen (pages 12 and 13), both unions refused to challenge the law in their own recent disputes. Any solidarity action with the miners along the lines suggested would clearly be illegal. The Broad Left's acceptance of the limits of bourgeois legality is another constraint on its capacity to deliver effective solidarity for the miners.

Leading by example

Other left-wing unions or unions with strong left-wing factions are less well placed to give direct assistance to the miners. The best contribution that public service unions such as Nupe could make to the miners' cause would be to take on their employers with the same spirit of determination that rank and file miners have displayed over the last six months. But a union leader like Nupe's Rodney Bickerstaffe is much more at home sounding off at miners' rallies, than he is in leading industrial action against attacks on his members in the health service (see page 8). The miners' cause would be better served by one hard-hitting strike in the public service than by a hundred fiery platform speeches by public sector union leaders. Yet teachers and civil servants, railway workers and dockers, have all announced and called off industrial action while the miners have been on strike.

The failure of the union Broad Lefts to defend their own members' jobs and living standards in recent months and years is another part of the explanation for their failure to deliver solidarity for the miners.



Rodney Bickerstaffe mouths off

- The railway unions have virtually abandoned resistance to flexible rostering, one person operated trains and other measures that mean fewer jobs, higher productivity and worse conditions for railworkers.
- The dockers accepted management's call for 1100 voluntary redundancies by 1985 immediately after the July strike.
- The civil servants have acquiesced to tens of thousands of job losses since 1979, as well as the removal of union rights at GCHQ.
- The post office engineers have abandoned resistance to privatisation and now face drastic job cuts as British Telecom is sold off.
- Nupe has sacrificed the jobs, wages and conditions of health service ancillary workers and local government manual workers in its pragmatic competitive tendering with private contractors.
- The bakers' and the furniture workers' unions have presided over redundancies, the removal of the closed shop and the expansion of sweatshop conditions in their respective sectors.

Workers' experience of their Broad Left unions has often made them cynical about both unions and what they take to be left-wing politics. Workers become reluctant to respond to calls to action from leaders in whom they have lost all confidence.

Why the Broad Left is a loser

Broad Left prattle about a general strike merely exposes its past failures and present feebleness. The left troops wearily to Brighton in the grim certainty that at the end of the day the right will prevail and put it out

of its misery. The left can then take its traditional consolation in moaning about the betrayal of its principled stand by the treacherous right. Writing about the left wing of the TUC almost 60 years ago, Trotsky noted that the left always loses because it lacks the political coherence of the right and its 'generalised system of politics':

'The left wingers have no such system: their very nature prevents this. The right wingers have a system: behind them tradition, experience, routine; and most important of all, bourgeois society as a whole is thinking for them and thrusts ready-made decisions under their noses... The weakness of the left wingers arises from their lack of cohesion and this arises from their ideological shapelessness.'

The Broad Left is destined for defeat in its attempt to push the TUC into wider action in defence of workers' rights because it lacks a coherent strategy for the miners or for the wider labour movement.

To win real solidarity for the miners or for any other group of workers in struggle we need a different sort of Broad Left. We will have to base this left on a commitment to defend the jobs and rights of all workers irrespective of the state of the industry or service in which they work and regardless of legal restrictions. It will have to be built through active campaigning and open discussion to win workers' support and involvement — not through backroom cliques and conference manoeuvres. The Broad Left we need will not blather about general strikes but will talk softly and carry a big stick.

Second to none?

Arthur Scargill's claim that the miners have 'a record second to none' in providing



Arthur Scargill talks a good strike

solidarity to other workers on strike is only half true. It is true that rank and file miners have responded positively on many occasions to appeals for support. But it is also true that the NUM leadership has a record as bad as most Broad Left unions when it comes to delivering effective sympathy action.

In 1977 hundreds of miners, especially from Yorkshire, turned out to support the struggle of Asian women workers for union recognition at Grunwick. Scargill led the Yorkshire miners' delegation on to the picket lines and he was arrested in a scuffle. He also led a mass picket away from the factory gates at a crucial stage in the dispute and later acquiesced to the TUC's betrayal of the strike.

In the 1980 steel strike miners in South Wales, Yorkshire, Scotland and other areas actively supported the steelworkers. Most NUM areas made substantial donations to the steelworkers' funds. Yet the NUM never organised the systematic blacking of the use of steel in the pits which continued throughout the dispute.

In November 1981 workers at the Laurence Scott engineering factory in Manchester had already been on the picket lines for nine months fighting against the closure of the plant. After their eviction by boss Arthur Snipe they turned their attention to his parent company — Mining Supplies of Doncaster. They appealed to the NUM to black this firm's products. Scargill's response was to insist that only those lorries that had actually been seen crossing a picket line should be blacked, and that all other Mining Supplies' products should be used. 'In other words, he restricted the blacking to a small proportion of Snipe's products in a way which rendered it ineffectual and impossible to operate' (*the next step*, January 1982).

In 1982 thousands of miners in different areas took strike action in solidarity with the health workers in the course of their dispute. Unfortunately the cautious approach of the Nupe and Cohse leaders prevented this wider sympathetic action from hitting home. The NUM leadership stood by TUC etiquette and left it to the health union leaders to sell out the strike.

In the big challenges to the labour movement over the past 12 months — NGA Warrington, GCHQ Cheltenham (see page 13) — the NUM has joined the rest of the Broad Left in capitulating to the defeatist response of the TUC leadership. The last six months have shown rank and file miners are second to none in the British working class movement when it comes to defending working class interests. They have also confirmed that although Scargill is a good talker there is not much to choose between the NUM leadership and the rest of the Broad Left when it comes to delivering solidarity.

What can be done

Instead of producing hot air about general strikes the Broad Left unions could take a number of practical measures in their own industries.

● **TRANSPORT:** the rail unions could pull out all the stops to prevent the movement of coal from the Notts pits, by threatening and even carrying out, if necessary, a national rail strike. The TGWU dockers and lorry drivers could help ensure that no coal reached the power stations from other sources.

● **SUPPLIES:** the working pits cannot function without water supplies which workers in Nupe and the TGWU could easily disrupt.

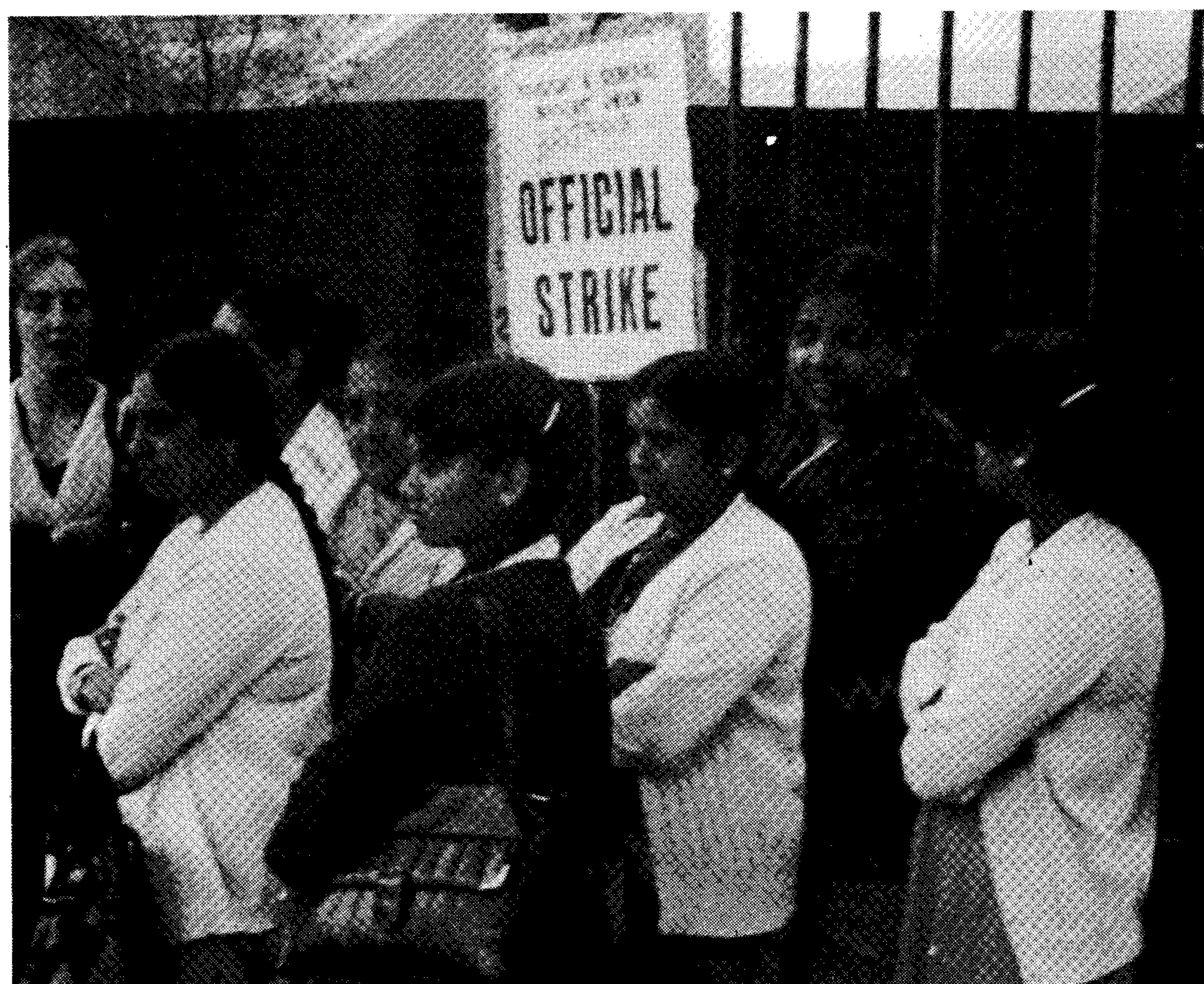
● **TELECOMMUNICATIONS:** the POEU could paralyse the Coal Board with the sort of selective action its members used in their own dispute against privatisation last year.

● **CIVIL SERVANTS:** the CPSA could make sure that miners and their families got at least the social security minimum by defying the DHSS regulations cutting benefits.

● **LOCAL GOVERNMENT WORKERS:** the Nalگو Broad Left could block all demands for rent and rates to miners for the duration of the dispute — as well as campaigning against right-wing attempts to prevent funds being collected for the miners. They could also press councils to provide free school meals, transport and other facilities for the miners.

These are merely some of the most obvious steps that the Broad Left unions could take. Together they would force the government to settle on the miners' terms within days, if not hours.





Work in the rag trade

Sweating it out

‘I start work at 8am and finish at 6pm, sometimes later. I usually work 50 hours a week for 87.5 pence an hour. On Saturdays we work until 1pm. We get 30 minutes for lunch and two cups of tea which we drink while we carry on sewing at the bench. I’ve worked here for two years. It’s not very nice, too noisy and dusty. I get skin rashes from the cloth, sore eyes from the dust, headaches from the noise and backache from bending over my machine all day. When I get home I’m too tired to play with my four children. All the women here are Asian. We put up with it only because there’s nowhere else to go and we need the money. We haven’t got a union.’

(Surinder Kaur, Birmingham)

Britain is still the sweatshop of the world. In thousands of small factories, garages and derelict warehouses in inner-city back streets, women like Surinder Kaur ‘put up with it’. The abominable conditions and disgusting wages of the Victorian sweated trades live on in 1984. Tony Powell looks at life in the rag trade.

BRITAIN BUILT ITS EMPIRE on the sweat and blood of millions of textile workers. Today, the textile and clothing industry is in terminal decline, but the sweatshop is still in business. Recession and cut-throat competition in the clothing industry have forced employers struggling to survive to return to the barbaric and backward methods of the Victorian sweated trades. The sweatshop and the associated homework and outwork sectors are making a major contribution to the growing pool of second rate jobs in Britain in the eighties.

The mushrooming sweatshop sector is a warning to organised workers in the larger clothing firms that unless they take concerted action, and fast, they will soon end up doing the same degrading work. And it is a warning to workers in other industries that a fightback against the creation of a secondary labour market for insecure, second rate jobs is long overdue. The growth of the sweatshop is only one example of the ominous trends emerging in the recession. But the same trends are evident in every industry and service sector. The growth of a dual labour market must be fought as part of the broader attack on jobs and living standards and because it threatens to deepen existing divisions in the working class, between skilled and unskilled, men and women, white workers and black workers.

Rock bottom

The recession has devastated the clothing industry. Between 1971 and 1978, 116 000 jobs disappeared in clothing and footwear, nearly 25 per cent of the total. Employers implemented ruthless rationalisation measures in an effort to reduce costs and restore competitiveness with their European

and Third World rivals. There was a slight recovery in 1978-79, but then the crisis became a collapse. Redundancies and closures accelerated to bring employment in the industry to an all-time low. The shakeout of jobs in clothing has been faster and more severe than for the manufacturing industry as a whole. Nevertheless, the industry is still a major employer, equivalent to coal mining or vehicle manufacture, and twice as large as shipbuilding or steel.

Even by the low standards of British manufacturing industry, the clothing sector is rock bottom. The first industry to be transformed by the industrial revolution today operates with long obsolete machinery and methods. Modern technology has passed it by. Mechanisation and automation are confined to high volume producers. These turn out standardised items such as men’s outwear, trousers, jeans or shirts. Large parts of the industry are still organised in small units, producing short runs of varied products by craft techniques that have changed little in a century. Low profits have discouraged capital investment and inhibited investment in new technology and the restructuring of production methods.

Clothing is an intensely competitive industry, with a large number of domestic producers and international competitors. Countries in the Far East and Southern Europe have taken advantage of their extremely low labour costs to gain a significant share of the clothing market of the West. In 1981 wage costs were estimated at 50 per cent of United Kingdom levels in Hong Kong, 25 per cent in Peru, 10 per cent in Sri Lanka and the Philippines. Over the past couple of years, however, a number of factors have put the British clothing industry back in the running:

- The tightening of import controls under the 1982 Multi-Fibre Arrangement — the international agreement regulating world trade in textiles — established stringent quotas for imports from low wage companies.
- The price gap between imported garments and UK produced garments has narrowed. This has resulted partly from rising labour costs overseas. But the more important contributory factors are increased productivity and falling real wages in Britain.
- The drive to restore competitiveness has encouraged a low price, low wage, labour intensive industry based primarily on the sweatshop at the expense of larger clothing manufacturers.

The clothing industry of the eighties can be divided roughly into three sectors:

- A small number of large firms produce their own designs at high volume by increasingly mechanised methods for a small group of major customers and for export.
- A much larger and expanding group of small and medium sized firms are run as sweatshops, using the traditional labour intensive methods of production. They cater for the low quality, low price end of the market, concentrating on women’s and girls’ outwear. Unlike the larger firms, they are non-unionised and pay wages well below the legal minimum rates. These small firms often act as subcontractors to the larger manufacturers, providing specialist clothing of a much lower quality.
- The third sector — homeworking and outworking — is very much an appendage of the sweatshop sector. It has grown massively in recent years.

Marginalised

The sweatshop exists on the fringes of the capitalist economy, and so do its workers.

Only workers who are excluded or marginalised from the organised labour market — women, immigrants and the disabled — would opt for the most desperate and degrading form of exploitation. Women have always been a majority in the clothing industry and the sweated trades. Today, they make up 76 per cent of clothing workers; this includes a very high percentage of black women. Successive waves of immigrant workers have also been channelled into the clothing industry. Their often precarious legal status and the decline of traditional manufacturing industry have left them with little place else to turn for employment but the sweatshop. The disabled are another marginal group, shunned by society at large and forced to eke out a meagre existence in the backwaters of the economy.

The clothing industry is easy to enter. It requires only a modest initial capital investment, and there is considerable scope for numerous small entrepreneurs to set up shop. To survive the intense competition, however, they must drive their workers into the ground. Only through super-exploitation and resolute slave-driving can the sweater make his money.

At the beginning of the century there were hard-fought campaigns against the appalling conditions in clothing sweatshops. The 1906 Sweaty Trades Exhibition exposed the industry’s horrors to the public for the first time. One result of this pressure was the establishment of Trades Boards (the forerunners of today’s Wages Councils) in 1909 to protect workers in clothing and other industries. They set legal minimum rates of pay and initially at least had some success in raising workers’ living standards. Over the years, however, this minimum wage machinery has made little impression on clothing industry sweatshops. The same pitiful wages persist and the same atrocious hours and conditions continue to plague workers’ health and safety.

Wages

Real earnings in the clothing industry have fallen in recent years. A variety of sources suggest that a typical sweatshop wage in 1983 was around £40 for a 40-hour week. But earnings can be even lower. Handsworth Law Centre has evidence of firms paying as little as £35 a week. A report commissioned for the West Midlands County Council cites the case of a cutter earning under £40 for a 50-hour week in Birmingham in 1983. And a recent report by the Birmingham Low Pay Unit argues that firms paying women wages of 65 pence an hour or £40 for a 50-hour week are legion.

Rag trade workers experience great fluctuations in earnings from week to week depending on the volume of work available. Payment schemes often ignore ‘waiting time’ and depend upon arbitrary definitions of workers and jobs as skilled or unskilled, experienced or trainee. The payment of workers ‘off the books’ provides no basis for

continuity of employment or guaranteed minimum earnings and denies workers sickness benefits and holiday pay.

● Hours and conditions

The general pattern in small firms is a 50-hour week, with the day shift starting at either 8am or 9am and usually finishing at 6pm. Long hours of work in busy periods and Saturday morning work are not rewarded at overtime rates. Family and community pressures ensure that this is institutionalised as normal work practice. There are some part-time workers in these firms but usually employers require a full working week.

Ten days' holiday is generous by the standards of the rag trade. It is not uncommon to work Bank Holidays. A 39 year old Asian mother of four told a recent Industrial Tribunal hearing in Birmingham how she earned £20.25 for a 42.5-hour week and got only one day's holiday a year — Christmas Day. One employer was recently discovered deducting £1.50 from his workers' weekly wages to pay for holidays.

Sweatshop conditions are atrocious. Hidden from view in back alleys, basements and tenement slums, they are overcrowded, cramped, noisy and a health hazard. In many factories the women have to buy paraffin heaters in the cold winter months and pay for the daily running cost. Most premises have inadequate fire exits for the numbers employed or exits are blocked by boxes and stocks of cloth. Windows are covered by shutters or corrugated iron. The majority of factories have no running hot water, shared toilets for men and women

Hackney. One worker, whose sweatshop was raided in March, has had to report to the local police station daily and expects a deportation order any day. He is convinced that it was the union that brought the police and the inland revenue on to his back.

Most immigrant workers find work in the rag trade by word of mouth or through family contacts. Working for the family business or friends can be of dubious advantage. Whilst a degree of protection and trust can be useful, family loyalties and pressures often result in unpaid overtime, overwork and bitter resentment. As one Bengali homeworker put it, 'the better they know you, the more they exploit you'.

● Homeworkers

Homeworkers are the lowest of the low in the rag trade in terms of pay, conditions and employment protection. Performed in isolation, often off the books without employee status, homeworking is virtually an underground occupation. Wages for homeworkers are pitifully low. One Hackney homeworker described how she was employed to stitch bags, receiving between 30 and 50 pence for every one completed.

For a 40-hour week she earned anything from £15 to £20. The terms set down by her employer stipulated a minimum number of bags to be completed. She often had to work weekends and well into the early hours to finish her quota. Earnings are reduced still further by the hidden costs incurred. It is common practice for homeworkers to hire their own machines. Add to this the cost of running the machine, maintenance costs,

Cool collaboration

'We had formed a union, the Transport and General Workers' Union, last September to improve our conditions of work. Management never liked the idea of us joining. Our conditions are very bad. We get between £60 and £80 for a 42.5-hour week. It was even worse before we joined the union as the regular pay was £30 for a 55-hour week. Two women were taken on in March and were working well for seven weeks, no complaints. But when management found out they had joined our union he sacked them. He also sacked a stud machinist, saying there was no longer any work for him which was just plain untrue. So we took it that management was really trying to intimidate us and break the union. We refused to let these fellow workers be sacked and refused to work normally until the redundancies were withdrawn. Management called the police to evict us and 18 of us came out on strike — that was 16 May. They have taken on new workers to try and maintain production.'

(Striker, Kewal Brothers, West Bromwich) Sweatshop workers at the Kewal Brothers factory in West Bromwich have been out on strike since 16 May. The workers, all Asian and mainly women, are demanding trade union recognition and the reinstatement of the three workers sacked by management. The strike is in a long tradition of determined struggle by sweatshop workers to fight for their right to join a union and for better pay and conditions:

● PS Raindi and Supreme Quilting, 1983

In 1982 PS Raindi Textiles in the West Midlands suffered its first bout of industrial unrest. More than 300 women machinists went on strike in protest at the sacking of two men at its sister company Supreme Quilting. The men had been recruiting for the TGWU. After a prolonged dispute during which the women maintained a 24-hour picket of the Raindi factory, they went back to work after promises of union recognition. The two men from Supreme Quilting remained sacked.

● Rulecan, 1982

In February 1982, 60 women workers at the Rulecan clothing factory in Runcorn came out on strike for trade union recognition and a guaranteed basic wage. They faced a management determined to smash them. Every move they made brought them into conflict with the law. When the women won promises of blacking from Usdaw and TGWU members at Kay's and Grattan's catalogues, firms supplied by Rulecan, management threatened legal action. The national leadership of their union, the National Union of Tailor and Garment Workers, suspended the blacking.

Next, the Rulecan bosses issued injunctions against supporters of the *next step* and the Women's Right To Work Campaign who helped organise nationwide pickets at C & A and Mothercare stores selling Rulecan products. The injunctions were issued under the 1980 Employment Act and claimed damages. The pickets continued.

Under great pressure, Rulecan agreed to re-engage the strikers at a different site, and the union agreed to suspend the shop pickets. Within weeks, the employers reneged on their agreement and decided to close down the Rulecan factory altogether. The women's vigorous struggle had been undermined by the NUTGW's readiness to suspend blacking and picketing action and its reliance on an industrial tribunal rather than the class struggle to defend its members' jobs.

● Queensland Pleaters, 1983

In October 1983 workers at a pleating factory in Hackney, East London, went on strike after three years of cuts in pay. It was the first strike in the industry in East London in five years. The small number of strikers got support from local building workers and other trade unionists. But their union, the NUTGW, failed to take the action necessary to

make the strike bite. The strike was called off after three weeks.

The problem facing militants in the clothing industry has not been getting workers to fight, but getting the union to fight with them. The main clothing union, the NUTGW, has long felt that sweatshop workers aren't worth organising. Less than 40 per cent of clothing workers belong to a union. Union members are concentrated in the larger factories in the East Midlands, Yorkshire, the North East, Northern Ireland and Scotland where traditions of workplace organisation are strong.

The union has always regarded London, and now the West Midlands, as a wasteland in terms of recruitment. Hackney, with 12 000 clothing workers, has only 250 to 300 workers on the union books. The NUTGW provides only one full-time organiser to cover the whole of the East End and Sussex. Only eight per cent of clothing workers in the West Midlands are in a union.

British chauvinism

The NUTGW's failure to defend the mass of clothing workers stems not so much from the undoubted difficulties of organising in the sweatshops, but from its strategy of fighting to make the British clothing industry great again.

The NUTGW wants the British clothing industry to be 'viable, profitable and internationally competitive' (*Employment in clothing - a strategy for survival*). It blames foreign imports, not the bosses' ruthless rationalisation and productivity measures, for job losses and closures. The union has been even more vociferous than the employers in its demands for import controls and 'Buy British' campaigns. For the last few years, the NUTGW has been crusading against slave-labour conditions in the clothing industry in Korea and Thailand, while doing nothing to fight exactly the same conditions in British sweatshops. The union leaders care little about what happens to workers exploited by imperialism in the Third World. Their real gripe is that sweatshop conditions abroad are stopping Britain from getting a piece of the action.

Making the industry 'viable and secure' has meant sitting on the Economic Development Committee for the Clothing Industry and presiding over job losses and deteriorating conditions. For the NUTGW, jobs lost through productivity increases are jobs well lost:

'Without the improvements in productivity that have taken place in the clothing industry since 1970, many more jobs would have been lost because of the reduced ability of the United Kingdom industry to compete with clothing firms from other countries.'

To achieve its dream of a born-again clothing industry, the NUTGW has accepted the only things that could make this possible — the expansion of sweatshop conditions throughout the industry, major rationalisations and gruelling productivity drives.

A union that is so vehemently chauvinistic in its calls for import controls and its denunciations of cheap foreign labour cannot defend the interests of cheap immigrant labour in Britain. The NUTGW has never tried to resist the systematic harassment of immigrant sweatshop workers by the immigration authorities. Indeed it has often colluded in it. The union bureaucrats are content to run the union for the benefit of a minority of white skilled male workers and ignore the special needs of its black and women members and the thousands of unorganised sweatshop workers. And to secure their own future in a restructured clothing industry, the union leaders are ready to consign more and more workers to the ravages of the sweatshop.



All the comforts of homeworking

which often do not flush, and workers have to supply their own toilet paper. Canteen facilities are usually not provided.

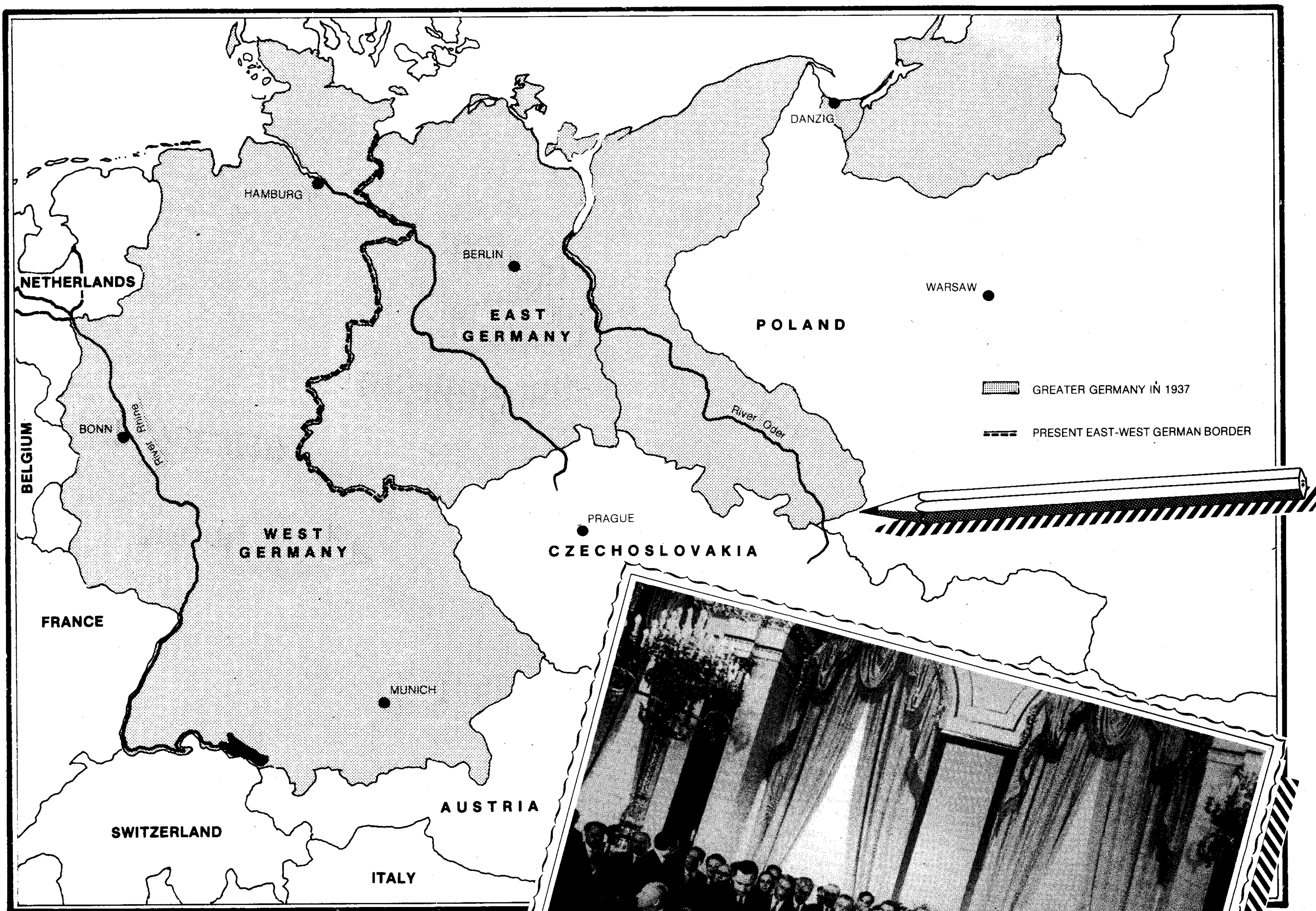
Although clothing is not considered a high risk industry, it does have its associated health problems. Trips and falls over piles of clothing cause a large number of injuries. Employers' concern to cut costs means that fire regulations are ignored, often with tragic results. In October 1983 five Asian women were killed in a fire that swept through a dilapidated sweatshop in the East End. Skin complaints continue to rate highly as prescribed industrial diseases in the clothing industry. Many sweatshop workers suffer from tension, muscular pain, headaches, backache and eye soreness.

Thousands of immigrant workers accept the harsh conditions, illegal terms of employment and lack of legal protection because of their vulnerable citizenship status under the immigration and nationality laws. Fishing raids to net 'illegal immigrants' have been a constant feature of the clothing industry. More than 100 Turkish Cypriot workers have been arrested in raids on workplaces in North-East London since Christmas. At least 40 have been deported and another 30 left 'voluntarily'. Most of the raids involved a combination of immigration officers, inland revenue inspectors and the police pouncing on small sweatshops in

lighting costs and the delivery and collection charges which often have to come out of the homeworkers' pocket and there is little left out of a miserly wage packet.

Most homeworkers lack employment protection and do not qualify for sick or maternity pay; if they get the sack, few can claim unfair dismissal or redundancy pay. Most do not earn enough to pay national insurance contributions, but even if they do, their class two contributions means that they are not eligible for means-tested unemployment benefit.

Sweatshop workers are one of the most exploited and marginalised sections of the labour force. Their isolation from other workers means that they are wide open to the employers' offensive and soft targets for state attacks. It is up to organised workers in other parts of the clothing industry to fight for the rights of sweatshop workers, and to begin the task of unionising what has been seen as a no-go area for the unions. Above all, the fight for decent jobs and conditions for clothing workers means stopping the expansion of the sweatshop sector into other parts of the industry. This requires vigorous opposition to the approach of the union leaders which has contributed directly to the growth of the sweatshop and the immiseration of rag trade workers (see box).



Not worth the paper: Bonn and Moscow agree 'not to dictate' to each other

Germany - a Reich once again?

'For us the situation in Germany will only be normal when the right of self-determination and the general rights and freedoms apply for all Germans. The present situation is not immutable. Realism: yes. Resignation: no.'

(West German Chancellor Helmut Kohl, April 1984)

LAST MONTH the 'special relationship' between West Germany and East Germany became the subject of a major row among the Warsaw Pact allies. A leader article in the official Soviet paper *Pravda* lashed the East German government for trying to undermine the sovereignty of East Germany. The Soviet leadership issued an unusually direct warning to East German Premier Erich Honecker. It stated that East Germany's closer economic and political ties with the West were a threat to the Soviet Union and, by implication, to the Eastern bloc as a whole.

It is the first time that Soviet leaders have so openly expressed their concern over the ties between the two Germanies. In June, East and West Germany concluded yet another round of negotiations. Bonn extended a loan of £250 million to East Germany in exchange for concessions on East-West travel. Honecker promised to cut the compulsory fee for West German visitors and to extend the maximum period visitors are allowed to stay. This type of political barter has been going on for years. Until recently Moscow never objected. Indeed, back in the late sixties, in the era of detente, it was the Soviet Union which encouraged East Germany to develop closer relations with the West. Now, however, a number of factors have combined to arouse alarm in Moscow.

Bureaucrats' panic

Honecker's forthcoming visit to West Germany in September challenges the Soviet leadership's more anti-West posture following the deployment of American nuclear missiles in Europe. It is the first ever visit of an East German head of state and promises to be a major display of German nationhood. Honecker has already expressed his delight at the prospect of revisiting his native Saarland. He proudly remembers that as a young communist in 1923 he was an active participant in the popular resistance to the French occupation of the Ruhr and Saar. The East German bureaucracy has long developed a distinctive blend of German nationalism and Stalinism.

In 1983 the Honecker regime celebrated the 500th anniversary of the birth of Martin Luther, the founder of Protestantism. It proclaimed him 'one of the greatest sons of the German people'. This year leading East German ideologue Konrad Hager re-discovered Germany's late nineteenth

century Chancellor Bismarck. This reactionary monarchist and founder of German imperialism was presented as a 'statesman of great stature'. His foundation of the Reich was a 'historically progressive' act and his alliance with the Tsar of Russia an 'act of great farsightedness'.

For the Soviet leadership these manifestations of German nationalism are worrying signs of a weakening of influence over its most important Warsaw Pact ally. *Pravda's* outburst was an unsuccessful attempt to disrupt the East-West German summit. The summit will serve to underline the growing ideological as well as economic and political ties between the two Germanies.

The unorthodox drift of East German ideology is only a minor irritant for the Soviet leaders. The real problem is the increasing economic dependence of all its Warsaw Pact allies on Western imports and finance. Today the Soviet Union faces the threat of increasing isolation within the Eastern bloc. Under the impact of economic crisis, each country relies more and more heavily on economic cooperation with the West. The Comecon summit in June showed how serious the problems have become. It ended in disarray as Romania, Poland, Hungary and East Germany united to demand the right to develop closer economic ties with the West. Soviet leader Chernenko's appeal for a hard anti-Western line in response to America's escalation of the arms race carried little weight. The conflict centred on the scale of Warsaw Pact imports required by the Soviet Union. Chernenko demanded



The exonerated founder of the Reich

more supplies of industrial goods. But his allies argued that they had to earn the foreign currency needed to pay off the billions they owed to Western banks. They insisted that they would have to increase exports to the West.

The division which surfaced at the summit was confirmed in the aftermath of the *Pravda* declaration. Within days, Hungarian and Romanian leaders published statements supporting the right of East Germany to its independent relationship with West Germany. Never before has the Soviet leadership found itself so isolated among its allies. Over the years it has learned to cope with some recalcitrant partners. Both Yugoslavia and Romania sent teams to the Los Angeles Olympics, despite Moscow's boycott call. But an East German rebellion is a far more serious matter.

Until now East Germany has been one of Moscow's most loyal allies. It has consistently backed the Kremlin line against the more unstable bloc members. It provided military and political back-up for the Soviet intervention in Czechoslovakia in 1968. It backed Jaruzelski's imposition of martial law in Poland in 1981. Its Prussian style army is the best equipped and most disciplined in Eastern Europe. East Germany's industry is a vital source of machines and consumer goods for the Soviet economy. East Germany straddles the East-West divide. It has capitalist Europe to the West and troublesome Poland to the East. Its role as a robust and loyal partner of the Soviet Union

has been indispensable for the stability of the Eastern bloc throughout the post-war period.

The estrangement between East Germany and the Soviet Union is symptomatic of the fragmentation of Eastern Europe. Yet East Germany is a special case. It is developing an increasingly close political as well as economic association with one particular imperialist power — West Germany. The shared national and historical traditions of the two Germanies give this relationship its peculiar dynamic, its special intensity and its legitimacy in the eyes of Germans on both sides of the border.

The special relationship

In 1972 East and West Germany signed the 'Basic Treaty' which opened up trade and political relations between the two countries. In purely quantitative terms, trade with East Germany is only of minor significance for West German imperialism. Its total value in 1983 was estimated at DM16 billion. This is small beer when compared to total West German exports of DM400 billion.

However the quality of the exchange is more important than its quantity. West Germany is using trade, credit and investment relations with the East as a lever to acquire political as well as economic influence. Through a gradual penetration of East German society the West is achieving a sort of 'creeping reunification'. This is a long

way from the German right's old dream of the violent overthrow of the Eastern regime. Yet East Germany is effectively being drawn under the control of the West.

The *Times* recently noted that 'Bonn knows that East Germany is now so dependent economically on West Germany that it cannot afford to antagonise its neighbour'. This is an accurate assessment. East Germany relies on exports to the West for the currency it needs to pay interest on loans from Western bankers. These payments now consume 80 per cent of its foreign exchange earnings. It suffers from a chronic shortage of raw materials. Barter with West Germany has become an essential means of acquiring these without further expenditure of foreign exchange. Bonn has responded to its neighbour's currency shortage by agreeing to extensive credit arrangements which allow East Germany to defer payments on West German goods.

The West has also turned to its own advantage East Germany's difficulties in purchasing expensive Western technology. Over the past two years major deals for joint projects have been concluded between big West German companies and the East German government. Already East German factories produce under licence for the big chemical giants BASF and Hoechst. Now the steel magnate Krupp and Volkswagen are due to set up production sites in the East. Leading German industrialists pay regular visits to the East German government at Pankow. The annual East German trade fair

is very much a national all-German affair.

A large proportion of East-West trade is conducted through barter. This is one reason why its total volume is difficult to assess. Another is that this trade does not figure in West German foreign trade statistics. It is classed as 'intra-German', a concept which underlines the peculiar political relationship behind it. The intra-German relationship opens up major opportunities for East Germany. It has allowed East Germany to become an unofficial member of the EEC. Many West German imports from the East are re-exported to the other EEC countries. West Germany is increasing its exploitation of the East's disciplined and skilled workforce, tightly controlled by state-run unions.

East-West contacts go way beyond trade. Economic interpenetration is giving German imperialism growing control over the East. There are solid foundations for Chernenko's anxiety over the threat to East German sovereignty.

Ostpolitik

How has West Germany achieved this remarkable influence over the East? Successive Western governments have built up this position through skilful manipulation of the issue of German unity (see box). The 'peace policy' of the sixties was the West's device for opening up the frontiers for West German capitalism. Since the seventies 'Ostpolitik' (Eastern policy) has been the label under which the West has advanced into the East. This strategy was backed by Social Democratic governments until 1982 when the policy was taken over wholesale by Helmut Kohl's Christian Democratic administration.

Ostpolitik is a devious scheme for coaxing the East into the arms of the West. An essential feature of the policy is to convey the impression that East Germany is the beneficiary. This has become one of the most important myths of West German politics since the 'Basic Treaty' was signed in 1972. The 'Basic Treaty' was presented as a fair deal — if not an outright concession by West Germany. In reality, East Germany gained virtually nothing, German imperialism, virtually everything.

East Germany wanted full recognition of its sovereignty in accordance with the principles of international law. It was eventually compelled to sign a treaty which explicitly denies its sovereignty. The 'Basic Treaty' defines intra-German relations as 'special' and outside the ambit of normal international relations. At the same time, it obliges the East to carry out a whole range of measures to facilitate access for West German capital.

The treaty compels the East German bureaucracy to take measures in relation to the 'human rights' of its citizens. The most important human right of Eastern citizens as far as the West is concerned is their right to leave the East. Under the 1983 East-West agreement 25 000 East German citizens were granted exit visas. Bonn paid out DM 7500 per head in oil and other raw materials in return. These transactions are used to drive home the message that the East German regime is unpopular with its own people and, by implication, illegitimate.

The Eastern regime accepts this degree of intervention in its internal affairs largely because it can do little to prevent it. Its regime is unpopular. West German television transmits images of higher Western living standards into most Eastern homes. However, the bureaucracy has generally been prepared to accede to West German demands. The East German rulers reckon that economic development and 'human rights' gestures may pre-empt opposition at home and improve its chances of survival. When they signed visas for the 25 000 emigrants last year the authorities put known dissidents at the top of the list.

There are no limits to the opportunism of the bureaucracy. The corrupt Stalinist dictatorships of Eastern Europe cannot be expected to put up serious resistance to imperialist interference. The only force that can resist German imperialism is the working class in both parts of the country. It is time the German working class linked up to take on German imperialism and its supporters West and East and set about reuniting Germany under the control of the working class.

Sabena Norton

Deutschlandpolitik



SPD chief Kurt Schumacher

Germany it was illegal to print the name of the German Democratic Republic, except in parentheses or with the prefix 'so-called'. The West German government denied recognition to any foreign government that entertained diplomatic relations with East Germany.

In the fifties and sixties there was no prospect of realising German unity. Adenauer supervised the rehabilitation of defeated Germany under the tutelage of the USA. West Germany became the European pillar of the Atlantic Alliance. The West German ruling class took advantage of the 'Iron Curtain' running through the country to gain economic and political support from the USA. President Kennedy's visit to the Berlin Wall in 1962 was a key moment in the emergence of the West German state. It was a demonstration of US support for West Germany's territorial aspirations and a gesture of recognition for the growing prestige of West Germany. Deutschlandpolitik, with its vicious anti-communism and staunch German chauvinism, played a crucial role in the reconstruction of a strong and stable West German state.

The myth of 'Friedenspolitik'

One of the merits of Adenauer's approach was its straightforward character. Its open expansionism and anti-working class orientation meant that it was rejected by the majority of workers and left wingers.

Under Kurt Schumacher the Social Democratic Party attempted to put forward an alternative policy. Schumacher called for the reunification of Germany as an alternative to integration into the Western alliance. But Schumacher's attempt to project the Social Democrats as more patriotic than the right was a failure. It was rejected by the ruling class because it did not correspond to the realities of post-war German imperialism. It was unpopular among the party's radical rank and file because of its crude chauvinist content. By the early sixties it was thrown out.

Only hard-line reactionaries retained any enthusiasm for the Adenauer line. West German businessmen feared losing out to France or the USA in the scramble for business with the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe. Throughout the sixties the Soviet Union was seeking to liberalise East-West trade relations. It hoped to gain access to Western technology and to

overcome its isolation in the international political arena. West Germany's antiquated Deutschlandpolitik was becoming a liability. To benefit from the windfalls of detente German imperialism needed a new strategy.

The Christian Democratic parties had become too closely tied to Deutschlandpolitik to make the necessary break. The opportunity fell to the Social Democratic Party after 15 years in opposition. Between 1969 and 1982 Social Democratic governments turned West German politics decisively towards the East.

Willy Brandt went down in history as the 'peace chancellor' for his promotion of East-West links. His Friedenspolitik ('peace policy') was a great success. It had the full backing of German capital. At the same time, it was popular among all sections of German society because it appeared to bring an end to the harsh rhetoric of the Cold War era. Brandt's visit to Warsaw in 1970 was the most stirring spectacle in post-war German history. When he knelt down and wept at the tomb which holds the remains of the Poles slaughtered by the Nazis in the Warsaw ghetto he touched the hearts of millions of Germans. He united those who felt genuine remorse at the horrors of Nazism with those proud to see Germany become a nation once again. The Christian Democrats' accusation that Brandt was selling out the national interest to communism found little resonance.

Brandt's Friedenspolitik formed the basis of the second phase of the reconstitution of German imperialism. Brandt achieved through the policy of reconciliation what Adenauer never could. By breaking through the Cold War frontier he became the first truly national chancellor in post-war Germany. Adenauer arrogantly claimed to speak for all Germans, but Brandt actually appeared to do so.

Brandt's policy gave nationalism a respectability it had previously lacked. It was freed from the taint of reaction. Even the left in West Germany failed to see through the emotional drama of the peace policy. Nobody exposed the pragmatic capitalist calculation it served or the reactionary nationalist revival it unleashed. Hence the Social Democrats were able to unite all sections of West German society behind the state and to impart an aura of progressiveness to their imperialist advances towards the East.

The division of Germany dates from its defeat in the Second World War. After the war Hitler's 'Third Reich' was divided into the West — the Federal Republic of Germany — and the East — the German Democratic Republic. The West was occupied by American and British forces and it has remained under Nato domination ever since. The East fell under Soviet control.

The West has laid claim to the territory of East Germany ever since 1949. Non-recognition of East Germany and the commitment to reunify Germany have been fundamental principles for all post-war West German governments. The West German ruling class has always assumed the right of the West German state to speak on behalf of all Germans. These principles were enshrined in the constitution of the Federal Republic. The German bourgeoisie claimed jurisdiction over the entire territory of the former Reich, as of 1937. It refused to accept that its word was only law within half of that area.

The notion that reunification was the right of all Germans was the central theme of the Deutschlandpolitik of post-war Chancellor Konrad Adenauer. Eleven million East German refugees were given financial inducements to stay in the West. They provided much of the labour-power for the subsequent German economic miracle. In Adenauer's

Reclaiming William Morris



AL Morton ed, *The political writings of William Morris*, Lawrence & Wishart 1984, pp 259, hbk £7.50, pbk £2.95

THE MARXIST TRADITION in Britain is so weak that William Morris, the artist, writer and leader of the Socialist League, despite his self-confessed weaknesses, remains outstanding. But the real irony is that only in Britain could those weaknesses be held up as a virtue:

'It may seem an odd way of introducing a volume of theoretical writings to say that their author was little of a political theorist, yet this was the truth about William Morris. As he put it himself, his mind was constructive rather than analytical. And we can say, to round off the paradox, that this was his greatest strength.'

In his introduction, AL Morton explains that in selecting Morris' writings he has given the widest possible interpretation to the word 'political'. He has selected almost exclusively Morris' useful and erudite essays on culture, technology and the relationship between the individual and society under communism. He has done this because almost everything else in Morris' political writings is a rebuttal of the vapid sentimentality which passes for historical analysis among the academics of the Communist Party and its fellow-travellers of which Morton is one.

Missing are Morris' writings on British imperialism in Ireland, his support for the Afghans and the Sudanese, and his arguments about why British workers should work for the defeat of their own ruling class. Missing are his scathing indictments of British bourgeois political parties and his prediction 30 years before it happened of the decline of the Liberal Party. Neither class conflict nor anti-imperialism feature in the politics of the modern day inheritors of the Fabian tradition which Morris so vigorously opposed.

Morris has always been a subject of incomprehension and ridicule. His first major biography was virtually dictated by his family. It eradicated the last 20 years of his life spent as a revolutionary, years which Morris himself regarded as compensation for the wasted years of his early maturity. Next, Morris suffered vitriolic abuse from the most unreliable and dishonest Marxist of his time, Edward Aveling. Finally, Morris fell foul of his one-time political pupil, John Bruce Glasier. On his pilgrimage from the Socialist League through the Independent Labour Party to theosophy and political reaction, Glasier lied through his teeth to justify the backwardness of his own political practice by claiming that Morris gloried in never having read Marx.

To be of any use, a selection of Morris' writings must correct these fallacies and challenge the myth of Morris, the dilettante, the eccentric, the medievalist, the hippy. In his flight from the class struggle, Morton cannot do this. Morris himself can do a better job. He said of his own reading of *Capital*:

'I put some conscience into trying to learn the economic side of socialism, and even tackled Marx, though I must confess that, whereas I thoroughly enjoyed the historical part of *Capital*, I suffered agonies of the brain over reading the pure economies of that great work.'

This is an honest appraisal of an important intellectual struggle. Morris read *Capital* in French as soon as he discovered socialism and was said to be 'bubbling over with Karl Marx'. He read the work again as soon as it appeared in English in 1887. He was familiar with the *Communist Manifesto* and *Socialism: utopian and scientific* — the only works available in English.

The fruits of this labour and Morris' conviction that Marxist political economy was an essential tool of the class struggle were brought to the pages of the Socialist League's paper *Commonweal*. The Socialist League was unique in attempting to challenge the intellectual hegemony of the Fabians on the terrain of political economy.

reviews

From 1885 to 1891 Morris had a speaking engagement at least once every three days and he visited nearly every major town in Britain. He spoke to socialist societies, Socialist League branches and working class unions and clubs. Morris took advantage of his tours to strengthen the political resolve of the branches and iron out political disagreements. But despite his enthusiasm and undoubted charisma, Morris could not escape the past. Morris had suffered 20 years of despair, living through the heyday of British capitalism. The experience left him without any sense of the actuality of the revolution:

'Now as we understand the policy of the Socialist League, it aims at education and organisation towards action when the fitting moment arrives.' (*Commonweal*, Mayday 1886)

Morris' political experience led him to postpone intervening in the class struggle until the 'fitting moment'. He substituted a vision of the future coloured by the pursuits and loves of his youth for the immediate struggle for power. But he never rejected the necessity for the dictatorship of the proletariat:

'Revolutions are terrible affairs, but they are as necessary as amputations when mortification sets in.' (Heinrich Heine, quoted in *Commonweal*, October 1885)

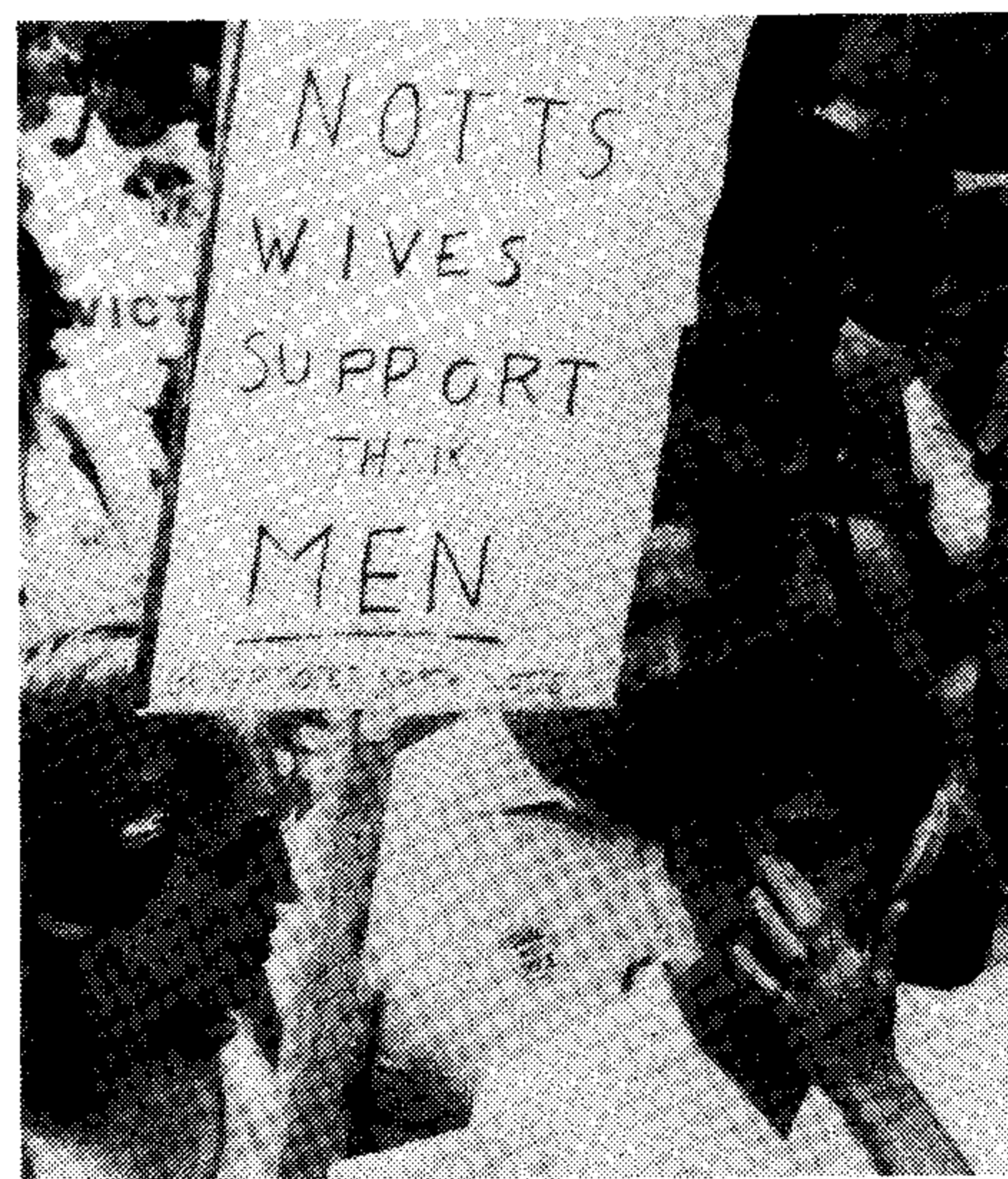
The final slur on Morris' reputation is that he ended his life by embracing Fabianism. Leading Fabian George Bernard Shaw, who should have known, disagreed:

'Everything would have driven him mad: from the bourgeois atmosphere to the furniture...he would have walked out in a towering rage damning us all for a parcel of half-baked shortsighted suburban snobs, as ugly in our ideas as in our lives.'

Morris was not a Marx or a Lenin; but nor was he a Hermann Hesse or an AL Morton. Everything in this selection is worth reading. But if you want to know what Morris' real range and limitations were, then read Paul Meier's outstanding two volume study *William Morris: Marxist dreamer* and have a look at *Commonweal*. You can then say with William Morris, although hopefully not on your deathbed as he was, 'I want to get mumbo-jumbo out of the world'.

Alan Harding

The making of the Notts miners



RJ Waller, *The Dukeries transformed: the social and political development of a twentieth century coalfield*, Clarendon Press/Oxford University Press 1983, pp 319, hbk £22.50

THIS IS A FIRST CLASS social history of the coal mines that were sunk in the Dukeries district of Nottinghamshire in the inter-war period. It is well written and well researched and goes beyond the pioneering work of the Griffins on the Nottinghamshire mining community. Waller provides many important insights into the conservatism and moderate tradition of the Notts miners.

The most striking feature of the Dukeries coalfield was the enormous social power of the colliery owners. The newly constructed pit villages were owned lock, stock and barrel by the coal

barons. And the miners were completely at their mercy. Since there were no alternative sources of employment, housing or social amenities, the threat of dismissal had a disciplining and coercive influence over the miners. The mine owners took full advantage of their social domination. They were ruthless in weeding out suspected trouble-makers, and the pits had a very high turnover of labour. Harworth colliery had an annual turnover of more than 50 per cent in the twenties. The continuous influx of migrants from areas of high unemployment provided a ready pool of new workers. Not surprisingly, the mine owners encouraged regional differences among their employees to prevent the establishment of a homogenous community. Waller quotes from an article in the *New Statesman* which summed up the effects of these divisions:

'Local isolation dies hard. The men bring with them their old customs and their old local outlook. To the Durham man and the South Wales man the Dukeries is still a passing haven. The melting pot is working slowly; no unity of feeling has yet been created. There is a Dukeries coalfield; there is as yet no Dukeries miner.'

Life in a conservative climate

The new communities such as Ollerton, Bilsthorpe and Harworth were company villages in every sense. The coal companies owned the housing, the shops and even the local pubs. As one miner from Bilsthorpe recalled:

'So what happened, you were working for the company the whole 24 hours. You worked at the pit: if you were sleeping you paid company rent, if you went out for a drink it were their money, if you bought your groceries it were their money.'

Through their total control over company villages the mine owners were able to impose their reactionary social norms on the miners. They built churches and strongly encouraged their workers to attend services. In contrast, education was neglected. As Waller notes, virtually none of the children living in the new coalfield received more than a minimum elementary education in the twenties. The owners established local sports teams and caddy bands as a means of strengthening loyalty to the area. At the same time, they had strict regulations about other forms of leisure. Pets, especially dogs, were banned from company houses. Gardening was not an option — all tenants were forced to do it. Miners and their families were not allowed to walk on their own lawns. Ollerton miners were fined two shillings if they were found walking on their lawns. Illicit sex and 'living in sin' were frowned upon.

To enhance their power, the coal owners introduced a modified form of the butty system. The butty system was based on a subcontractor, the butty, who controlled and paid a group of miners. The employers favoured this arrangement because it tended to have a corrosive effect on workers' unity and militated against effective trade unionism. The coal owners did not simply rely on the butties. They helped to foster a scab company union under the leadership of George Spencer and systematically victimised militants. As a result, working class organisation was so weak that even the Labour Party failed to establish strong roots until the end of the Second World War.

The belated development of working class organisation is symptomatic of the conservative climate that prevailed, and still prevails in the Dukeries. Waller's account shows that this tradition did not develop spontaneously among the Notts miners, but was imposed on them by the coal owners. One crucial point is left out of Waller's analysis. Rather than challenge this tradition, the miners' union adapted to it in the post-war period. Scabs like Spencer were invited to join the NUM and the tradition he represented was integrated into the area union. The failure of the present strike in Nottinghamshire is as much the legacy of the coal owners' influence as the NUM's adaptation to that tradition.

Frank Richards

Adventurers and romantics

John Cole, *Prince of spies: Henri Le Caron*, Faber & Faber 1984, pp221, hbk £8.95

Hugh Brogan, *The life of Arthur Ransome*, Jonathan Cape 1984, pp456, hbk £10.95

SPIES COME IN all shapes and sizes. These books look at two types: Henri Le Caron, the adventurer

and Arthur Ransome, the naive romantic. War and revolution projected both these men into positions which attracted the attention of the British intelligence services. Although they were driven by radically different motives, both nevertheless performed sterling service for British imperialism.

Le Caron was the adopted French name of an English adventurer, Thomas Beach. After spending two years in Paris, Le Caron left to fight on the North's side in the American Civil War of 1860-65. During the war he was befriended by John O'Neill, soon to become leader of the Fenians. The Fenians were an Irish American organisation committed to the struggle for Irish freedom. Thousands of Irish immigrants fought in the Civil War. When it ended they were eager to put their skills to use kicking Britain out of Ireland.

Le Caron's father put the Home Office adviser on political crimes, Robert Anderson, in touch with Le Caron and he was instructed to infiltrate the Fenians. Le Caron agreed and embarked on a career in espionage that was to last a quarter of a century. He used his friendship with O'Neill to rise in the Fenians' ranks to become 'Major and Military Organiser in the Service of the Irish Republic'. He was responsible for logistics during the 1870 invasion of Canada. The Fenians hoped to occupy part of the British colony to barter it in exchange for Ireland's freedom. Le Caron kept the Canadian authorities fully informed of all developments. Regular British troops easily beat off the Irish attack with Le Caron's help, and he received a £2000 reward for his trouble.

From his American base, Le Caron later helped Anderson track down the instigators of the 1880s' dynamite campaign in England. He eventually broke his cover in 1889 to appear in the Parnell Commission in London — the abortive attempt by the British to link the leader of the Irish Parliamentary Party at Westminster with the Fenians.

John Cole, the BBC's political commentator and a Northern Ireland Protestant, gleefully recounts this cautionary tale of betrayal in great detail.

High brow stool-pigeon

Arthur Ransome was a completely different character. A critic, the author of several children's books, and later a journalist with the *Manchester Guardian*, Ransome was an intellectual and an idealist. Yet his eccentric manners concealed a fervent patriotism.

Ransome was in Tsarist Russia at the outbreak of the First World War. In an effort to 'do his bit' he approached a relation at the Foreign Office. He was commissioned to write a history of Russia as a cover for political reports on the state of the Eastern Front.

Initially, the British really believed that the October 1917 revolution was a German plot to take Russia out of the war. Consequently, British interest in the Bolsheviks centred around their negotiations with the Germans at Brest-Litovsk. If the Germans were able to conclude a separate peace with the Bolsheviks, their troops deployed on the Eastern Front could be transferred to Flanders. The Bolsheviks, for their part, were engaged in a delicate balancing act designed to play one imperialist power off against the other.

Ransome naively believed that since the Bolsheviks were 'the best anti-German force in Russia', they should be supported by Britain. He obtained a letter of introduction to secure an audience with the People's Commissar for Foreign Affairs, Leon Trotsky, in December 1917. Later, he met and fell in love with Trotsky's secretary, Evgenia Shlepinina, and made great friends with another leading Bolshevik, Karl Radek.

Ransome was entranced by the revolution, yet he was always careful not to forget his duty to British imperialism. In an effort to achieve 'the alteration of policy by means of information' he agreed to report any intelligence he acquired to his masters, and thus promote his views among them.

Ransome was tragically wrong about British intentions. The British were to invade Russia in August 1918, not to prevent the redeployment of the almost beaten German troops, but to exploit the country for themselves. To this end, Ransome's information was useful for them. The unofficial British representative to the Bolsheviks — and paymaster for Sidney 'Ace of Spies' Reilly — RH Bruce Lockhart, paid tribute to Ransome:

'Ransome was...a visionary, whose imagination had been fired by the revolution. He was on excellent terms with the Bolsheviks and frequently provided us with information of the greatest value.'

After the invasion Ransome moved to Stockholm where his secret service contact was Clifford Sharp, the editor of the *New Statesman*. Ransome and Sharp have not been the only British intellectuals recruited by the espionage agencies. Somerset Maugham, Graeme Green and Malcolm Muggeridge all complemented their literary careers with spells 'On Her Majesty's Secret Service'.

Brogan's book is predominantly concerned with Ransome's literary career. But his revelations of Ransome's covert activities illustrate that imperialism is perfectly capable of twisting the best of intentions to fit its own designs.

Andy Clarkson

Impasse in Afghanistan



John Fullerton, *The Soviet occupation of Afghanistan*, Methuen 1984, pp205, pbk £4.50

JOHN FULLERTON wrote this book after spending more than two years with the Afghan *mujahadeen* guerrillas fighting the Soviet army. The experience was not wasted. Explicitly pro-imperialist, Fullerton would like to see the USA step up its intervention in Afghanistan and defeat the Soviets. Despite his political prejudices, however, Fullerton has marshalled from his experiences a remarkably honest appraisal of the conditions in that troubled region.

Afghanistan is a mountainous country on the USSR's southern border. Squeezed between its giant northern neighbour and India, Pakistan and Iran to the south, Afghanistan has been under the influence of the Soviet Union since the days of King Amanullah Khan in the twenties (except for the thirties).

Fullerton makes two perceptive observations on the character of Soviet rule in Afghanistan. First, the Soviet Union invaded the country in December 1979 to discipline an insubordinate regime, not to confront the insurgent *mujahadeen*. Second, the Soviet occupation has yet to resolve the deep antagonisms inside the regime's ruling People's Democratic Party of Afghanistan (PDPA).

The Soviet invasion force comprised crack airborne divisions which seized Bagram airbase and other vital installations; tank regiments to enter the capital city Kabul and other major towns; and 16 000 Muslim reservists from the Central Asian Soviet Republics to pre-empt any opposition to the occupation from the Afghan army. There was little attempt to move out of the urban areas throughout 1980. Not until 1981 was there any attempt to challenge the *mujahadeen*'s rule in the countryside.

Faction fight

The Soviet invasion was intended to crush Afghanistan's attempt to move out of the USSR's sphere of influence. Those moves came from within the PDPA, not from the *mujahadeen*. The PDPA is divided into two separate wings — the Khalq (masses) wing and the Parcham (flag) wing. Khalq represents rural petit-bourgeois elements and is the majority in the party. Its main base is in the Afghan army. The minority Parcham wing represents the weaker urban intelligentsia. It backed the 'socialist' monarch 'Red' Daoud until he incurred Moscow's wrath by making advances to Bhutto's Pakistan and the Shah of Iran. The army-backed Khalq threw him out in April 1978, and its leader Nur Mohammed Taraki tried to undermine the monarchy's feudal supporters by confiscating their land.

The resulting backlash was so strong that Taraki was forced to compromise. It was agreed with Moscow that Hafizullah Amin, Taraki's right-hand man, would be made a scapegoat for the bankrupt policy. Amin wouldn't play ball. In September 1979, Taraki was arrested and killed by Amin's supporters. Amin renewed Daoud's attempt at an independent foreign policy. Within three months Amin was dead, shot by a KGB hit squad and lambasted as a CIA agent. An independent Afghanistan was not an option that the Soviet bureaucracy could countenance, especially as the new Iranian Islamic regime on its borders was setting a dangerous precedent for its own Muslim millions.

Moscow installed Babrak Karmal's Parcham wing of the PDPA in power as a replacement for the Khalq regime. Karmal was sufficiently obsequious to suit the Kremlin's taste, but not strong enough to remove the Khalq from its positions of power in the army. While the USSR has struggled to reconcile the Parchamites with loyal Khalqis the friction between the two factions has only increased.

The Western media recently reported an incident where the defence minister and leading Parchamite Abdul Qader pulled his pistol and wounded the minister of communications and leading Khalqi, Brigadier Aslam Watanjar. Fullerton claims that on occasions 'the Khalq-

dominated military units (of the Afghan army) have passively or actively collaborated with the guerrillas'. Whether this is true or not, it is clear that the division in the PDPA is preventing the Soviets from forming a stable Afghan elite which could rule the country for Moscow.

Fullerton's book would make a useful political report for an imperialist General Staff planning to intervene in Afghanistan. It contains pages and pages on weaponry, logistical problems and other military data. The sections on the *mujahadeen* also make fascinating reading. Ronald Reagan uses Afghanistan more than any other issue to condemn communism. All the signs are, however, that not even he would consider intervention. His material support for the guerrillas does enough to keep the Soviet Union under pressure, nothing more. Reagan isn't interested in destroying the Soviet bureaucracy. It is far too useful to imperialism to do that.

Jackie Reynolds

The long arm of imperialism

Fatima Babiker Mahmoud, *The Sudanese bourgeoisie: vanguard of development?*, Zed Press 1984, pp 170, pbk £4.50, hbk £16.95

THE RAPID DISINTEGRATION of the Sudan makes Mahmoud's work all the more timely. Her study of the development and historical role of the Sudanese capitalist class provides a valuable background to the accelerating crisis in Sudan.

President Nimeiri recently imposed martial law. Troops have stormed picket lines and demonstrations, batoning striking doctors, teachers and state employees back to work. Soldiers and police patrol Khartoum university and the streets of Khartoum, Omdurman and other cities, hunting down Muslim fundamentalist leaders, the main focus of opposition in the North. In Southern Sudan the successes of the 6000 guerrillas of Anyanya II against government troops, have forced oil giant Chevron and other foreign companies to wind up their operations in the region.

The Sudanese jigsaw is falling apart. The response of its ruling class is to turn to the forces which brought it into being at the end of the last century — the imperialist powers. Nimeiri has issued increasingly frantic appeals for more American aid. He has justified increased US military support for his regime by blaming Libya's Colonel Gaddafi and the Soviet-backed regime in Ethiopia for the strife within Sudan. So far Nimeiri's strategy has paid off. The USA has promised almost \$300 million in new military and economic aid for Sudan in 1985, higher than for any other African state apart from Egypt. Reagan has also issued 'hands off Sudan' warnings to Libya.

Mahmoud shows how the contribution of the Sudanese ruling class to the creation and development of the Sudan was minimal. The most it could do was to provide small amounts of capital to add to projects set up by British and other foreign capitalists. The union of the Southern region with Northern Sudan was dictated by Britain not by the local capitalist class. Even independence was foisted on to a faction of the local bourgeoisie by the British who were alarmed at the strength of popular resistance to their rule.

Mahmoud rightly condemns the Sudanese Communist Party's search for a progressive faction within the local ruling class. But her understanding that the Sudanese ruling class cannot lead the struggle against imperialism leads only to pessimism. Her pessimism blinds her to the one force that could lead such a struggle — the still tiny but important Sudanese working class.

John Johnson

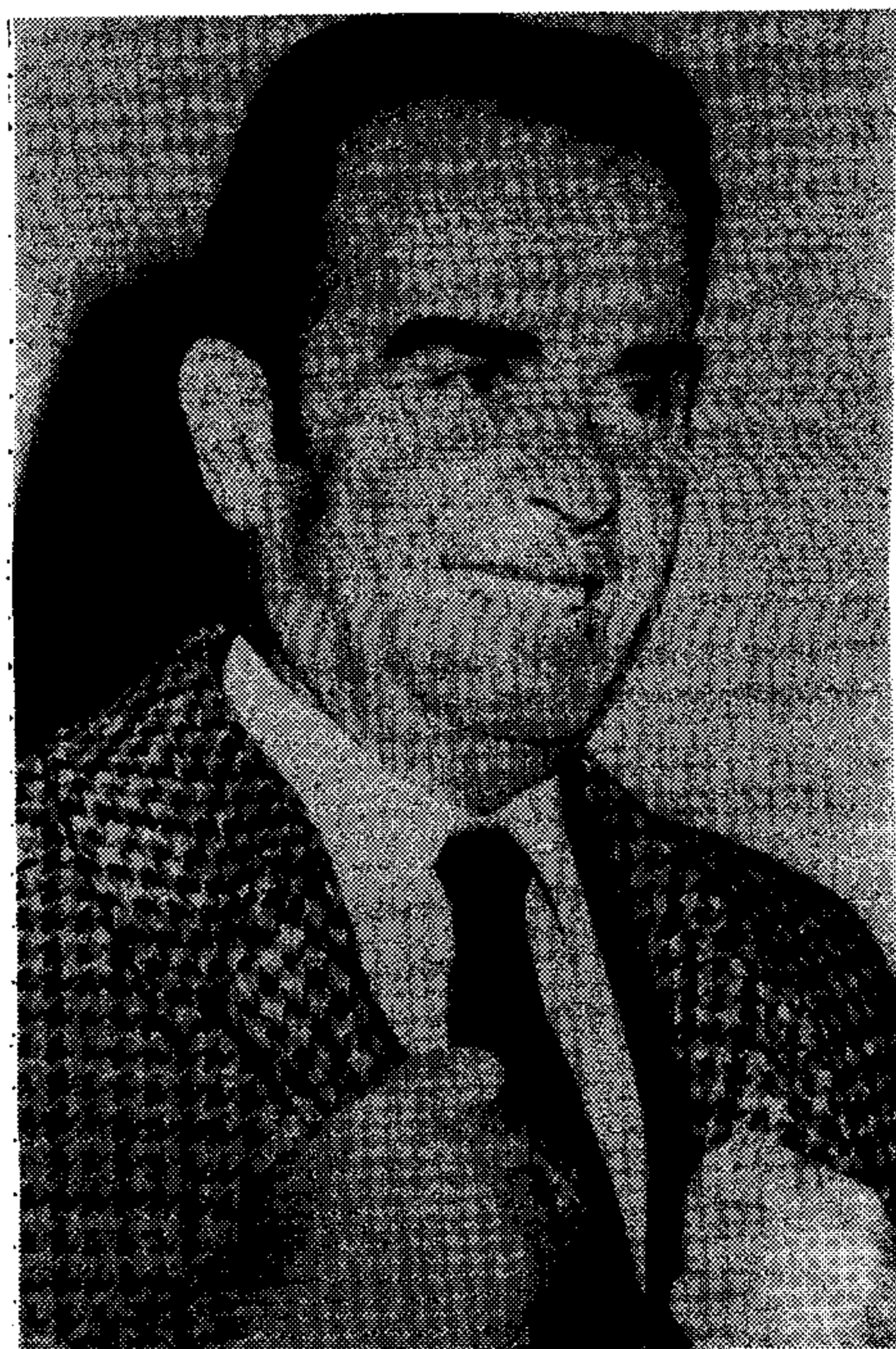
Communist collapse

Edward Mortimer, *The rise of the French Communist Party 1920-1947*, Faber & Faber 1984, pp 431, hbk £30

Irvin M Wall, *French communism in the era of Stalin: the quest for unity and integration, 1945-1962*, Greenwood Press 1983, pp 268, hbk £26.50

THE COLLAPSE OF the communist vote in the June Euro-elections and the PCF's subsequent departure from the Mitterrand government indicate the increasing fragmentation of French Stalinism. Today's crisis in the PCF opens up tremendous opportunities for the French working class. But to appreciate just how great those opportunities are, it is essential to have an all-sided perspective on the damage the PCF has done. The French proletariat will never put 60 years of Stalinism behind it unless it deals with the history of the PCF.

During and after the Cold War, historians of the PCF saw it as little more than an instrument of Soviet foreign policy. Once 1968 highlighted the PCF's conservatism, however, people began to analyse the party in terms of its roots in French



Now CP boss Marchais tries to keep a grip

tradition rather than in the committee rooms of the Kremlin. Thus Mortimer says that the PCF became a 'national party' at the turning point of July 1934. This marked the end of the class-against-class tactics of the Third Period; thereafter, the PCF proceeded, through a unity pact with the socialists, towards the Popular Front (1936). And Wall? He says that the PCF has yearned for a return to being an 'integral part of the French political mainstream' ever since a rather different turning point: its exit from the Cabinet in May 1947. In fact, an obsession with turning points prevents both authors from seeing the Frenchness of the PCF in its totality, from its formation in 1920 to the present day.

Mortimer's 'imported solution'

For Mortimer the PCF was formed as a solution to betrayals. In the First World War the anti-working class role of socialist parliamentarians and CGT trade union bureaucrats was clear enough. The solution that the PCF represented was thus 'imported' from Moscow and involved 'subjecting the French labour movement to the tightest international discipline'. Even then, Mortimer suggests, French left wingers interpreted October 1917 as a triumph for revolutionary syndicalism, not Leninism.

When most of the socialist party went communist it was new recruits and peasants who led the way. They were in little mood to accept the Comintern's stringent Twenty-One Conditions of membership, nor to apply its united front tactic to what remained of the socialists.

The PCF's rapid capture of the revolutionary wing of the unions did little to protect it from the collapse of the Russian Revolution in 1924. Instead, Stalin's French allies used left-sounding tactics to outflank their Trotskyist rivals. At Moscow's request, PCF leader Albert Treint adopted factory cells and the 'united front from below'; in addition, he personally coined the phrase 'Bolshevisation' — international witch-hunts of the Left Opposition presented as a strengthening of resolve. While the cells did little more than insulate party leaders from the rank and file, Kremlin funds trained a layer of pliant PCF full-timers, able to flaunt loyalty to Moscow as proof of their revolutionary credentials.

By the turn of the decade the PCF was in total crisis. Treint himself was now vilified as a Trotskyist and Maurice Thorez took control. The PCF's class-against-class policy brought it electoral disaster and severe repression from the state. Stalin had only to grasp that the rise of Hitler could be repeated in France for him to tell the PCF to unite with the bourgeoisie against fascism and parade the *tricolore* for all to see.

As a result of this, the latest in a long line of zigzags, the PCF won a popularity it had never enjoyed before. For the first time it was truly chauvinist in politics and truly nationwide in impact: 'national' in both senses of the word. Today, however, Mortimer argues, the PCF's national image has come to conflict with its Soviet origins more deeply than ever before.

Allons enfants

There is much to recommend in Mortimer's account. But Bolshevik politics were not simply grafted onto the French working class from outside; and nor did the French left simply regard the Russian Revolution as syndicalist. Rather, the PCF celebrated October 1917 as a replay of 1789.

The domination of the French labour movement by skilled workers in semi-artisanal forms of production ensured that nationalism was always a key dynamic of the PCF. Just as Frossard described the Bolsheviks as 'the heirs of our revolutionary tradition' (*L'Humanite*, 12 August 1920), so communism and the Soviet Union became confused with the republican legacy of the French Revolution.

Wall's view of the relationship between Moscow and the PCF is much more accurate than Mortimer's: the PCF, he writes, 'has always managed to defend the politics of friendship and

solidarity with the USSR in terms of the national interest'.

Mortimer is also wrong on colonial affairs. These always throw the policies of a country's labour movement into sharp relief; in France, one of the world's most rapacious imperialist powers, the policies of the Communist Party have been particularly critical. It is true that one of the main reasons for the repression suffered by the PCF was its campaign against colonial wars. But this said more about the instability of French imperialism than it did about PCF principle.

While French soldiers mutinied against the Moroccan war (1921-26), the PCF left protest against it to its youth organisation. Its main protest was a 24-hour general strike (1925), called at three months' notice and given no follow-up. After that, beginning with Ho Chi Minh, communists from the colonies attacked the PCF for inactivity on the issue.

Many black and Asian communists resigned from the PCF in protest, but to no avail. The party went on to criticise its slogans on Morocco as 'ultra-left'. Just as it had opposed the self-determination of Alsace-Lorraine in 1925, so the PCF of the Popular Front opposed it in the colonies. Mortimer notes all this, but only in passing.

It is the same tale with the Third Period and the PCF's line in the unions. Though the PCF did become more militant in the Third Period, Mortimer takes its rhetoric at face value. It took the PCF seven months to adopt the Kremlin's class-against-class direction. While its gibes against the socialists cost it unity with them in the elections of 1928, its proposed 'minimum programme' was, as Mortimer notes, moderate. Its union demands revolved around the eight-hour day and opposition to wage cuts. In terms of votes, the PCF's constituency consisted of republican peasants. Not for nothing did it become the first section of the Comintern to coin the phrase 'Popular Front'.

Mortimer outlines the official class-against-class policies of the PCF's union, the CGTU. But he fails to check whether these were applied on the ground. In practice, the CGTU's main difference with the socialist CGT was over defence of the USSR — something which rank and file socialist workers could agree with. Mortimer also makes no mention of how PCF union officials were drawn into collaboration with bosses and state through the collective bargaining rights conferred on them by the Matignon Agreements of the Popular Front. Once again, Wall is nearer the mark about the general relations between the PCF and the working class: 'Stalinism, as adapted to French national traditions, was a mechanism of bureaucratic control by means of which an elite drawn from working-class backgrounds tried to maintain itself in control of the labour movement'.

More please, Mr Wall!

Wall's book contains real insights. He notes the compatibility of French chauvinism with pro-Sovietism. He stresses Thorez's unwittingly correct observation that the Third Period was a logical preparation for the Popular Front. He exposes how the PCF of the Cold War, everybody's bogey, was weak and right-wing, in particular on anti-semitism, women and gays, and above all on German rearmament and the wars in Vietnam and Algeria. And he shows how Thorez's desire for an independent French politics, and his deputy Jacques Duclos' preference for pursuit of the foreign policy interests of the USSR, were only 'the two poles of the PCF's collaborationist modes'.

Wall also gives proper consideration to the PCF's 1945-47 spell in power. But, like Mortimer, he tends to look at PCF trade union strategy from the lofty standpoint of a Thorez. His handling of the four million-strong stoppage of 1953, 'the largest strike of its kind in French history', amounts to only two paragraphs.

With his treatment of Stalinism liberal errors creep in. For Wall, the PCF's 'more Stalinist than Stalin' characteristics are confined to 'slavish devotion to the USSR, the personality cult, purge trials, an absurd quest for socialist realism in art, secrecy and mass hysteria'. Yet French Stalinism displayed two other traits of greater significance. Politically, it excelled at saying one thing and doing another, at packaging reactionary politics in Marxist language and so disorienting the working class. Theoretically, it was one of the chief exponents of State Monopoly Capitalism: in revising Marx's theory of crisis, the PCF confirmed its Stalinist nature in a way Wall entirely ignores.

Seize the future

The peculiar features of the PCF reflect the historic weight of the republican petit-bourgeoisie in France and the special respect French workers paid the USSR. Today, the working class in France is much bigger than the petit-bourgeoisie and, after Afghanistan and Poland, respect for Moscow is in decline. While unemployment has shrunk the working class, and mass distrust of Stalinism has been put to anti-communist ends, proletarianisation and realism about the USSR are basic trends and ones which are favourable for revolutionaries.

In recommending these two books for close study, we are confident that French workers will shortly put the past behind them and seize the future with both hands.

James Wood

Write to . . .

the next step

BM RCP London WC1N 3XX

Letters

A sheep in wolf's clothing

I am writing to you on the subject of Tony Benn. From what I have seen, he seems to be one of the influential members of what the present government might call the 'far left'. I would very much appreciate it if you could explain the difference between Benn's policies and your party's. I would also like to hear your views on the Institute of Workers' Control of which he is, or used to be, a member.

Tony Benn could make the nation listen and would be a powerful voice for the party. My problem is that I am not well enough informed of the similarity or divergence between your objectives and Benn's. I would be grateful if you could help me to iron out this problem and thus increase my political awareness.

MD Gatley

Knutsford

Cheshire

the next step replies:

The Labour Party has historically operated a division of labour between its right and left wings. Whilst right wingers like Denis Healey concentrate on making the party more appealing to the establishment, left wingers like Tony Benn attempt to attract working class support for the party.

Though he claims to have received inspiration from Marx, Benn's policies are firmly based on reconciling the working class with capitalism. The Revolutionary Communist Party argues that it is only possible to achieve this alliance at the expense of the working class.

Benn's association with the Institute of Workers' Control was strongest during the early years of the 1974-79 Labour government. As industry minister, Benn promoted cooperatives as the solution to closures and redundancies — the most notorious being the Meriden Motorcycle Cooperative. Encouraging workers to be their own bosses proved disastrous. All these ventures collapsed and the workers went down the road. The Meriden experience confirmed that if workers take on the employers' role within the present system, they are forced to behave like any other capitalist employer. The only way any company can survive cut-throat competition in the recession is by implementing ruthless rationalisation measures and productivity drives to raise output and productivity. If they cannot compete they go to the wall.

Benn's role in the miners' strike is instructive. As energy minister under the last Labour government, Benn played a major role in getting the miners' union to accept Labour's divisive area incentive scheme. This served to deepen the divisions that have plagued the 1984 strike. He also helped win the NUM's agreement to the 1974 *Plan for Coal*, which led to thousands of job losses and many pit closures in the years up to 1979.

Today, Benn condemns the Coal Board and the government for throwing the *Plan for Coal* out the window. In a parliamentary debate with Margaret Thatcher, Benn accepted that uneconomic pits must be closed, objecting only to the Coal Board's refusal to consult with the miners' union. Benn's acceptance of the need for an efficient and profitable coal industry means that the defence of miners' jobs and livelihoods is

reduced to a debate about how 'proper procedures have not been followed'.

Unfortunately, it is not possible here to give an adequate reply to the broader question you raise on the role of reformism today. Our journal, *Prolonging the death agony*, provides a much fuller account of our critique of reformism from the origins of the Labour Party to the eighties. It is available for £1 from BCM JPLTD, London WC1N 3XX.

Lukacs and literature

I should like to make a few remarks on the subject of Lukacs' aesthetic studies in the light of Budavari's review of his *Record of a life* and Wadlow's letter in the next step last month.

Lukacs made an enormous contribution to Marxist theory. But despite his rigour Lukacs' logic got trapped in a formal method. The problem with Lukacs was not the modernist-realist counterposition in his work, but his failure to pursue a consistent critique of twentieth century literature. The closer he got to the present, the more Lukacs became bogged down in fixed categories. This was the inevitable outcome of Lukacs' resignation from politics and his self-imposed isolation from the movement of history.

Wadlow falls into the same trap as Lukacs. He also isolates the analysis of literature from changing class relations. What society does with literature is irrelevant. Wadlow is worried that political art could be coopted and defused. But so can Marxism or any other intellectual work for that matter. The answer does not lie with a specific piece of art but with existing class relations. What is really rooted in the experience of class struggle cannot be coopted — at least not until after the struggle has lost its momentum.

Finally, Lukacs' exploration of realism is stimulating and on the right track. It is true that bourgeois thought has descended to the level of vulgar philistinism. This philistinism is evident in all the recognised disciplines — economics, politics, sociology, etc. Literature and other forms of art have followed a similar trend. But literature is not inherently reactionary. It can, and indeed must, acquire a revolutionary renewal through the totalising outlook bred by the class struggle.

Frank Richards

London

Locked out

Rolls Royce at Ansty, near Coventry, recently hit the headlines when it was discovered that a number of its managers were being charged with fraud for making under the counter sales of turbines to foreign countries.

Now the same prestigious company is locking out 530 Apex members at the same site. Apex is a white-collar union with a moderate reputation, but that hasn't saved it from being on the receiving end of brutal management practices.

Last month, the union responded to management's offer of a two per cent wage rise plus 'flexibility' in working conditions with a proposal for a 4.5 per cent rise and talks about the conditions. Both these options

were put to a mass meeting of Apex members and 80 per cent of them rejected the management's offer and agreed upon selective strike action to pursue their claim.

Rolls Royce wasn't satisfied with this decision and locked out the entire Apex workforce on 6 August.

Apex has been a moderating influence at Rolls Royce for some time, accepting 178 redundancies in its ranks over the last three years. Apex initiated the current police inquiry by asking Rolls Royce to begin investigations into allegations of fraud and theft at the plant.

Even their industrial action in the current dispute amounted to little more than the selective withdrawal of members from key positions plus a bit of desultory picketing. Apex convenor Mike Bannister clearly had the interests of his company at heart when he informed his members: 'Any decision to escalate this dispute further clearly rests with the management and they must carry the responsibility in the end analysis for any damage done to (Rolls Royce) Ansty's future business prospects'.

All this moderation and concern with the viability of the company hasn't helped to defend the union members from the management assault. The company counted on the union's moderation to ensure that a lock-out backed up by a court injunction would be sufficient to destroy the fight in their clerical workers. Rank and file workers have proved them wrong so far. To win, Apex will have to jettison its past approach and forget about looking out for the company.

RCP supporter

Coventry

For or against part-time work?

I found the article on women workers in the August issue of the next step very useful. I am a part-time cashier at a store in Glasgow and a single parent. I would work full-time, but I don't have anyone who can look after my daughter when school finishes.

The part-timers at our place — all women by the way — work much harder and for less wages than the full-timers (mainly men). We never get to go on training courses and never get promotion.

Women do need all-day nurseries, and after-school schemes for older kids as well, but the problem is that there aren't any at the moment. So I don't agree with you that we should be demanding an end to part-time work. As the article pointed out, over 40 per cent of women workers work part-time. There is no way that women with kids like me can work full-time at present.

Shouldn't we be asking for good wages and conditions for part-time workers instead? And shouldn't the unions fight for our jobs and wages like they fight for full-time workers? I recently found out (through the next step) that my union Usdaw doesn't give us the same benefits that full-timers get.

Jean McIlroy

Glasgow

the next step replies:

The fact that opportunities for part-time work have expanded now is

because it suits the bosses, not women workers. Encouraging part-time work allows the bosses to divide workers up into full-timers and part-timers and promote squabbles between them. At the same time, the part-timers suffer super-exploitation.

Communists are prepared to defend every job, including part-time jobs, under attack. Nevertheless, we must struggle to secure the full participation of women in society. That means we cannot be satisfied with a form of work which depends entirely on the whims of the bosses. Part-time work confirms the marginal, inferior position of women in our society.

To oppose the bosses' plans to divide us, we must fight for the same conditions of employment for all workers. All workers must get a living wage, but women workers need additional services to make equality a reality. A campaign for free all-day nurseries for women workers will obstruct the capitalist offensive against us all. Free all-day nurseries are necessary to relieve women of the burdens of child care and free them to go out to work.

Preparing for power

I found the RCP programme *Preparing for Power* interesting. I would agree with your analysis of the capitalist-controlled world. However, I am not too sure whether your strategy is all that practical. Are you really suggesting that we are all doomed to 'carry the burden of a degenerate system' forever, unless the working class takes power before the next General Election, and that the only way to do this is to ditch the Labour Party and revolutionise the trade unions — and do all this within the space of a few years?

Obviously as time goes on the threat of a nuclear/chemical war will result in the extermination of humanity. Surely this is the only way, in capitalist societies, that the class struggle will be ended. Wherever and whenever there is exploitation there will always be class struggle.

Your criticisms of trade unions are justified. You argue for activity within unions to democratise and make them fight for workers' interests only and not get involved in collaborating with employers. So why not do the same with the Labour Party — get involved and work to make the party a workers' party? Didn't Lenin say that we must get involved in even the most reactionary of working class organisations? We must work with human material as it is, not with abstract human material.

Does the RCP see itself as a party which will eclipse all other working class parties? And, if so, could this remarkable growth be achieved in the space of a few years?

Philip Thompson

Angus, Scotland

the next step replies:

Philip Thompson is right to point out that the barbarism of world war is capitalism's final solution for the working class. Yet this fate can be avoided by the seizure of power by the working class. This is why there is a tone of urgency in our programme. The timing of the next General Election is irrelevant to our job of preparing for power now. We know there is no time to lose in preparing to take power.

Trade unions are basic defence organisations of the working class.

At the end of the day, the union leaders have to take some notice of their members. The Labour Party, however, lacks even this modicum of accountability to the working class. It is a creation of the trade union bureaucrats and is accountable only to them.

For some 80 years the British left in this country has been trying to point the Labour Party in a socialist direction and free it from the grasp of the bureaucracy. It has been notably unsuccessful. Given the experience of Labour in government and the party leaders' current role in trying to force the miners back to work, most workers are cynical about the Labour Party. Why waste time trying to rejuvenate it when conditions are so ripe for building an independent workers' party?

The RCP is out to eclipse all the other parties that falsely claim to advance working class interests. Our growth will depend on our success in replacing the tradition of Labourism with the Marxist approach. That is the purpose of our programme *Preparing for Power*.

Union blues

I have recently read *Taking Control* and find myself in total agreement. I am 62 and have now been made redundant, but in the early sixties I worked for Burroughs Adding Machines.

Whenever we were in dispute with management either over wages or conditions and we tried to contact the district organiser of the AEU in Merton, we could phone every day for weeks and still be told that he was busy.

Becoming frustrated, the men would walk out and lo and behold he would turn up in half an hour. Now, we hadn't phoned him — the management had. He would go in to see the management and come out and tell us we had to go back to work to allow negotiations to begin.

On the occasions when we did go back, we always ended up with an unsatisfactory settlement. On other occasions, we refused to go back. Then he would turn up a week later telling us that he had been sent by the AEU national executive to instruct us to go back. We would then point out to him that we, not the NEC, were the union. Both it and him were there to do our bidding — not the other way around.

Instead of hearing whether we had a legitimate grievance or not, we received the usual treatment: threats of withdrawing our membership cards and a smear campaign about 'communist agitators'. It has always amazed me how anyone could fall for this claptrap. Hundreds and thousands of men don't go on strike because a few communists tell them to. Men only go on strike when they have a legitimate grievance. However, I would agree that workers (even Tory ones) at least know that communists are the sort of men who will give them leadership and fight their case to a satisfactory conclusion.

I also agree with you that the Labour Party and trade union bureaucracy have done immense harm and damage to the working class by their allegiance to and collusion with the establishment. It has led to disillusionment and apathy in a great many people of my generation.

R Murray

Glasgow

One man strike

For the last 10 weeks the lone figure of Charles Mistry, a senior laboratory technician, has waged a one man strike against his victimisation on racial grounds by Labour Party councillors.

In 1983, two local schools were amalgamated into the new Dukinfield High School. The non-teaching staff were relieved to find that all of them were required in the new school. All of them, that is, except for Asian Charles Mistry.

When he was summoned to appear before the governors at the new school, Charles came face to face with Tameside Labour councillor Ivy Robinson. She, and the four other Labour councillors on the board, subjected Charles to what he later likened to a star chamber hearing. Robinson's relentless cross-examination focused on the fact that Charles suffered from an allergy to animal fur.

At his last post, Charles had come to an arrangement with the headmaster that he would supervise an assistant technician in the handling of laboratory animals rather than handle them himself. The fact that this system had proved satisfactory for seven and a half years was brushed aside by Robinson. Mistry was refused the job and finished up with a temporary post at a lower grade. The real objection to his skin was not that it was sensitive to animal fur but that it was black. Ten months later, the post in question is still waiting to be filled. Charles successfully appealed to the Tameside council appeal tribunal. It recommended his appointment to the vacant post. Robinson ignored this decision to the embarrassment of many of her fellow Labour Party colleagues.

Next, Charles was approached by members of Tameside Labour Party and asked to ignore the racist views of the Labour councillors. Local Labour Party members were worried the incident might damage the party's election chances, especially after Labour's protests over the recent deportation to India of clerical worker Vinod Chauhan.

After working for six months in his temporary job, Charles withdrew his labour and went on a one man strike with the support of his local Nalگو official. The local authority's answer was to offer him a series of unsuitable jobs such as that of computer technician. They knew full well that Charles is not qualified for this work, but they were keen to prove that he had been offered jobs but kept refusing them.

Local supporters of Workers Against Racism in Ashton have mounted an aggressive campaign to force the council to give Charles his job back. Labour councillors had better watch out. Their rank and file members in Tameside's housing estates and shopping centres have been flooded with leaflets about Charles. At a large street meeting we organised on the steps of the Town Hall crowds of people listened to members of Tameside Trades Council, Nalگو activists and Asian youth condemn local councillors for their racism. We also picketed the council's education services committee on 28 August. We will not rest until Charles Mistry has been reinstated.

Euan Carter

Ashton WAR

Meetings



Activities

RCP SUPPORTERS

The RCP has set up supporters' groups in the following towns. They are specifically for *RCP supporters*, but if you haven't joined yet and would like to know more please come along. You can get a card and get involved at the meeting. We will try to help out with transport and baby-sitting.

Sheffield	every Thursday
Rotherham	every Wednesday
Doncaster	every other Friday
Liverpool	every Tuesday
London	every Friday
Birmingham	every Wednesday
Nottingham	every Wednesday (from 5 September)
Coventry	every Tuesday
Cardiff	every Thursday
Manchester	every Monday
Oldham	every Wednesday
Ashton	every Tuesday
Wythenshawe	every Thursday
Glasgow	every Tuesday
Edinburgh	every Monday
Bradford	every Tuesday
Leeds	every Thursday

NEW SUPPORTERS' GROUPS ARE BEING FORMED IN THE FOLLOWING PLACES:

Brighton, Portsmouth, Newcastle, Wakefield, Camden, Islington, Hackney, Wandsworth, Lambeth, Southwark, Lewisham. See sellers of *the next step* for details or phone 01-274 3951

BECOME AN RCP SUPPORTER NOW!



TAKING CONTROL

A series of eight evening classes for trade unionists. To be held in London from October. The course will be run by Mike Freeman - author of *Taking Control*. It will look at the problems faced by trade unionists today and how to fight back effectively. The classes are open to everybody who wants to start rebuilding in the unions.

Starting Monday 1 October, 7.30pm, for 8 weeks at John Barnes Library, 275 Camden Road, N7.

If you would like to attend contact Kirk Williams on 01 274 3951 for details.

WOMEN AND THE UNIONS

London Conference

3-4 November

Sessions on: Unions, NHS, Local Authorities, The law, Sexual harassment, Nurseries, Sweated trades, Nupe, TGWU, Cohse, Astms, NUT, NUTGW, GMBATU, UCW, CPSA.

Contact Kate Marshall on 01 274 3951 for details.

TROOPS OUT NOW! GLASGOW

National Demonstration

Saturday 8 September Transport from Liverpool, Bradford, Manchester, Leeds, Sheffield, Edinburgh.

Assemble at 11am.

Forge Street

Garngad

GLASGOW

Called by the Joint March Coordinating Committee.

10 YEARS of BRITISH TERROR

National Conference called by the IRISH FREEDOM MOVEMENT on the 10th anniversary of the introduction of the Prevention of Terrorism Act. Digbeth Civic Hall BIRMINGHAM

Saturday 24 November 1984
TRANSPORT FROM ALL OVER THE COUNTRY

RCP STUDENT SUPPORTERS' GROUPS

Starting in September the RCP will be making sure that the class struggle makes an impact on universities and colleges around the country. If you are starting or returning to college this autumn then get in touch with your RCP supporters' group. RCP supporters' groups will be operating in the following colleges:

Polytechnic of Central London
City of London Polytechnic
North East London Polytechnic
Middlesex Polytechnic
Thames Polytechnic
London School of Economics
Queen Mary College
Goldsmiths College
South Bank Polytechnic
North London Polytechnic
London FE colleges
Warwick University
Lancaster Polytechnic
Portsmouth Polytechnic
Portsmouth College of Art
Birmingham University
Aston University
Birmingham Polytechnic
Matthew Boulton FE College
Bourneville FE College
Liverpool University
Liverpool Polytechnic
Manchester Polytechnic
Manchester University
UMIST
Bradford College
Bradford University
Leeds Polytechnic
Leeds University
Sheffield Polytechnic
Sheffield University
Nottingham University
Newcastle University
Newcastle Polytechnic
Sussex University
Brighton Polytechnic
University of Kent - Canterbury
Essex University
Edinburgh University
Glasgow University
Glasgow Polytechnic
Cardiff University
Oxford University
Cambridge University

If you are going to a college on this list then contact Keith Tompson on 01 274 3951 for details of RCP activity. If not, you should still contact us for details of activities in your area.

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Join the RCP

If you would like to become a supporter of the Revolutionary Communist Party or would like to find out more about us, please write to:

The General Secretary
BM RCP
London WC1N 3XX
or phone
01-274 3951

Kate Marshall will answer all enquiries by return of post



**the
next step**
review of the Revolutionary Communist Party

Irish Freedom
Movement
Conference against
British legal terror
24 November
Birmingham
Phone 01- 274 3951 for
details

Another

Bloody Sunday



Troops Out Now!

On Sunday 12 August the Royal Ulster Constabulary, backed by British troops, murdered 22 year old Sean Downes and maimed a score more Irish nationalists in a brutal assault on a 3000-strong Belfast rally.

The carnage was one more police and army atrocity to add to a catalogue of British terror in Northern Ireland stretching back over the past 15 years.

Sean Downes was murdered two days before the fifteenth anniversary of the British Army invasion. He was shot at a rally commemorating the thirteenth anniversary of Internment without trial, when hundreds of nationalists were herded into British concentration camps.

Sean Downes' death brought back memories of Bloody Sunday, when British paratroopers gunned down

14 Irish demonstrators 12 years ago. He was the latest of more than 20 nationalists executed by army/SAS/RUC shoot-to-kill squads in the last 20 months.

For 15 years the Irish people have carried on a heroic resistance against the barbarous might of the British war machine. Their suffering and their struggle will continue until the British occupation is ended.

The Irish Freedom Movement gives unconditional support to the struggle against British terror in Ireland. We are campaigning to build a movement which will line up with the Irish people, against the British agents of death who brought another bloody Sunday to Belfast's streets last month.