

No 52 October 1984 20p

the next step

review of the Revolutionary Communist Party

Break
with the
Labour Party
p. 14-17

No

- No redundancies
- No pit closures
- No victimisations
- No sell out

surrender



the next step

monthly review of the Revolutionary Communist Party
No 52 October

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Fighting fund

We are fighting to build a movement that can take on the bosses and win. We need a weekly paper to get our message across to more and more people and the resources to extend our activities in every area. If you can afford to make an investment in the future of the working class then make a donation to our fighting fund.

By 16 September we had raised £8175 towards our £25 000 target. We need to raise more than £5000 a month to reach our target by January. The regional breakdown below shows how we got £2395 in the three weeks up to 16 September. Next month we want to double it.

Rush donations to BM RCP, London WC1N 3XX
Cheques payable to RCP Association

Glasgow		£219.13
Leeds		£109.31
Sheffield		£174.87
Bradford		£166.86
Manchester		£134.07
Liverpool		£163.22
Birmingham		£301.47
London		£926.75
Coventry		£59.88
Others		£90.73
Total		£2395

Fighting to win

In the seventh month of the miners' strike, as in the first, supporters of the Revolutionary Communist Party have been out campaigning for a successful outcome to the strike.

Hattersley harassed

Labour Party deputy leader Roy Hattersley has been outspoken in his condem-

nation of miners' resistance to police attacks. He has also urged the miners to keep their

strike 'non-political'. Last month he found his regular constituency surgery in Birmingham besieged by protesters in a mass picket organised by the local RCP branch. 'Hattersley get off your knees — support the miners' fight for jobs!' was the message that rang out loud and clear. 'Go away' said Hattersley, but we will only stop criticising the Labour Party when its leaders stop condemning the miners.



Holed up in Sparkbrook: RCP supporters besiege Hattersley's surgery

Campaigning in Nalگو

The right wing in the council workers' union Nalگو has called a special conference for 10 October to prevent the union from supporting the miners' strike. Last month RCP supporters in Tameside won majority support at their Nalگو branch meeting for the following resolution to go to the emergency conference:

This conference resolves to: '1) Make a further donation to the NUM hardship fund equivalent to the cost of convening this special conference (approximately £250 000).

2) Instructs the NEC to institute a national levy of all Nalگو members, equivalent to the scale of subscriptions, to go to the NUM hardship fund.

3) Instructs the NEC to instruct its members not to process rent, rates, electricity and gas demands and arrears on striking miners.'

The second and third parts of the resolution challenge Nalگو's traditional abstention on 'political' issues and the union's traditional deference to the law. The miners' strike has plunged Nalگو into controversy, especially in the North of England and Scotland. RCP supporters have been

lobbying delegates to regional meetings of activists in Liverpool, Bradford, Leeds and Edinburgh. The debate, which raises vital issues for Nalگو members as well as miners, now goes to the special conference in London. Delegates to the conference who support our motion should get in touch with us beforehand to agree a plan of action.

Civil solidarity

The civil servant's union CPSA is in a key position to help the miners. If its members defied DHSS regulations and paid out maximum social security benefits to miners' families this would relieve hardship and strengthen their resolve for the struggle. This is exactly what RCP supporters in the CPSA in the Manchester and Sheffield areas have been proposing to their workmates.

In Manchester our proposals for giving real solidarity to the miners have generated fierce debate around the issue of legality. Resistance has come, not from the traditional right, but from the Militant-dominated Broad Left. Our motion to the November Broad Left conference has been referred back to the DHSS branch by Militant supporters to decide 'an appropriate formulation of

words'.

In Sheffield resistance comes from right wingers and moderate Labour Party supporters. But the campaign is gathering momentum. It will continue at the Broad Left conference next month and at next year's national conference.

Collecting on the streets

People collecting money and food for the miners have been harassed by the police in virtually every town and city in the country. But nowhere has it been worse than in Bradford. The Tory council has banned all street collections and the police have enforced the ban by moving on and arresting collectors.

But the forces of law and order were overwhelmed last month by the local RCP's mass collection. This gesture of collective solidarity with the miners and organised defiance of the state was supported by so many people that the police were powerless to intervene. Members of Selby miners' support group from Leeds helped to swell the numbers. RCP supporters also took the Selby support group to a Bradford Natfhe meeting where £80 was collected for the strike on top of the money raised on the street collection.

Stop the sell-out

After nearly seven months on strike, rank and file miners are as determined as ever to win. Striking miners are ready to fight to the finish against pit closures. But what about the leaders of the labour movement?

Kiss of death

The TUC's promise of 'total support' has proved worse than useless. The resolution it agreed in Brighton does not instruct affiliated unions to support the miners — it just asks them nicely if they will meet to consider the possibility.

Since the TUC conference:

- the rail unions have called off their promised strike
- the dockers have ended their dispute and resumed coal supplies to Ravenscraig and other steelworks
- power union leaders have made it clear they will ignore requests for support.

Instead of the 'big bang' promised by the unions, the TUC has given miners the kiss of death.

Endless talks

The miners have been asked to pay a high price for TUC 'support'. Along with Labour's Stan Orme, the *Mirror's* Robert Maxwell, Archbishop Runcie and all the other self-appointed middlemen, TUC General Secretary Norman Willis is insisting the miners 'get together' with the coal board and settle their differences. Now the government's arbitration service Acas is getting in on the act too. This is always a sure sign that a sell-out is in the air:

- the coal board and the government want talks to settle the strike before it hits big business
- the TUC bureaucrats want talks to settle a dispute that has been interrupting their daily round of luncheons with the bosses.

But for rank and file miners there is nothing to talk about. The only issue is pit closures, and on that the coal board has not budged an inch.

Doubletalk

Scargill should not be wasting union time locked in secret talks in hotel rooms, debating which word to use instead of 'uneconomic'. This strike is not about words. Nor is it about whether the 1974 or 1977 version of the *Plan for Coal* is more honest about pit closures. This is all doubletalk. *The only thing that will bring MacGregor to his knees is fear.* He will learn to say the right words when he knows there is no choice. Scargill should stop hiding from his members, get out of the hotel rooms and start building the strike.

No sell-out

The bosses and the TUC are trying to wear down the miners and the rest of the working class movement.

Now, more than ever, we have got to go on the offensive:

- mass meetings of striking miners and miners' wives must be called at every pit to involve the stay-at-homes and swell the picket lines
- pit delegates must be mandated from these meetings to reject any deals that fall short of *no pit closures, no redundancies*
- picketing of power stations, rail depots and steel plants must be organised jointly with rank and file workers in these industries — the only way to get the 'big bang' we still need
- contingency plans must be laid now to stop the movement of coal from pit-heads to power stations — only mass picketing will stop it
- real solidarity from other rank and file trade unionists, practical, physical and financial — don't expect any from the TUC.

- no victimisations: the coal board has already begun to sack militants. Several miners convicted on charges arising from picketing have already been dismissed. Many more have been sent their cards on the grounds of 'industrial misconduct' even before their cases come up in court. Others have been sacked on trumped up charges of trespassing on coal board property.

The defence of every sacked miner must be a top priority for the NUM. In all negotiations NUM representatives must insist on *no victimisations* as a precondition for any settlement of the dispute.

- an amnesty for class war prisoners: the state's kangaroo courts have already started to lash out with heavy fines and stiff prison sentences. Several miners are already in prison and many more will soon be joining them unless the NUM takes an aggressive stand in defence of its members.

The very least the NUM should do is undertake to pay all fines. But what is required is mass defiance of the legal offensive. This means turning the court cases into what they really are — open class warfare.

The TUC has announced a fund for the miners, promising that none of the money will be spent on picketing. The RCP has also announced a fund. The money we collect will go to finance more effective resistance and defence for every miner fighting for the right to work.

Every miner who goes to prison must be guaranteed total union support before, during and after his imprisonment. In all negotiations NUM representatives must insist on an *amnesty for prisoners of the class war.*



Charge of the heavy brigade: on the picket lines and in the courts, the NUM must organise effective resistance to the state offensive

Soldiering on

Militant miners in every area recognise that the determination of the rank and file is the only guarantee of success. Bilston Glen strike committee member George Purcell told the next step that he expected 'only words — nothing really' to come from the TUC:

'The TUC are not really recognised by workers. They carry no weight. What the leaders should do is get back to the rank and file.'

There is a growing recognition among active miners of the need for a change in direction in the strike.

Last month many strikers at Keresley colliery in the Midlands expressed deep misgivings about the course of the dispute, the secret talks, the absence of real solidarity and the drift back to work. Some agreed that Scargill's attachment to the *Plan for Coal* was disastrous for the miners and were open to discussing an alternative political strategy for the dispute.

'Seven questions for Arthur Scargill' — see pages 12,13



Six month slog: miners and their families need a new approach to take them forward

Not the miners' strike



Fighting a losing battle: rank and file workers at Tilbury were held back by their union leaders' 'no politics' approach

When the dockers called off their three week strike on 18 September it was a double defeat for the unions:

- For the dockers it meant a public climbdown over the issue of non-union labour and the immediate loss of 1000 jobs.
- For the miners it meant the loss of a vital ally and a victory for British Steel. The dockers' union — the TGWU — has guaranteed to transport enough coal to keep Ravenscraig steelworks going.

The employers could barely conceal their joy. Humiliation for the once proud and militant dockers, bitter divisions within the TGWU and another blow to the miners' strike — these were impressive achievements.

The conclusion of the September 1984 dock strike seems a far cry from the days when dockers were the scourge of British industry. As late as the sixties, wildcat unofficial dock strikes were commonplace. One government inquiry at the time complained that all it took was for one man to go around the docks shouting 'all out' and 'out they all came'.

In the early seventies dockers were in the front line of battles against the Heath government. The famous Pentonville Five dockers went to jail for fighting the Tories' Industrial Relations Act. They were quickly released after an all-out national dock strike.

Times change. By 1972 the militants' days were already numbered. The old unofficial organisations, born in the period of casual labour

on the quaysides, were turned into tame official shop stewards' committees. In return for greater job security for some, the dockers' union sold off 20 000 jobs between 1966 and 1972.

The scheme

The much vaunted Dock Labour Scheme was first introduced in 1947 and ratified after the 1972 dispute. But it turned out to be a massive redundancy package. 'Registered' dockers in the declining ports were guaranteed work. But in return the union accepted the bosses' severance terms for thousands of jobs. The union allowed the port employers to do as they pleased with the 6000 dockers in profitable non-scheme container ports like Felixstowe and Dover.

Today the number of registered dockers stands at 13 700, down from 82 500 in 1951. Since 1972 the dockers' leaders have avoided any confrontations that might jeopardise their agreements with the port employers.

No politics

The first of the two recent dock strikes began on 10 July — five months into the miners' strike. Until then dockers' leaders had been making regular statements of support for the miners. But they had also been quietly agreeing generous dispensations of coal supplies to steel plants and other industries through both registered and non-registered ports.

The dockers became involved in the miners' strike because of the actions of British Steel at Humberside's Immingham docks. The dispute arose indirectly from the miners' strike. Local railworkers acting in support of the miners refused to carry iron ore to Scunthorpe steelworks. British Steel responded by using non-registered labour to load iron ore into trucks at the docks. The dockers walked out.

The TGWU leaders insisted on restricting the strike to the defence of the Dock Labour Scheme agreement. While rank and file dockers around the country came out in a spirit of solidarity with the miners, their leaders denied any link with the miners' strike. When British Steel and the port employers agreed to uphold the scheme, the TGWU called for a return to work.

Second time lucky?

Striking miners were bitterly disappointed. But only a few weeks later it looked as though a real national dock strike might break out. The issue was a dispute at the Hunterston dockyard in Scotland, this time as a direct result of the miners' strike. On 2 August Hunterston dockers, taking seriously their union leaders' speeches about giving the miners a 'big bang' of support, promptly took solidarity action. They announced that all coal imports to the Ravenscraig steel works would be blacked.

The local TGWU told British Steel that it would not supply more than 18 000 tonnes to the Ravenscraig

plant, instead of the 22 500 tonnes requested by management. Talks over the quotas broke down and the dockers refused to unload the *Ostia*, a ship bearing coal for Ravenscraig. British Steel retaliated by going ahead and unloading the ship, using unregistered labour including members of the steelworkers' union.

From 24 August, the TGWU's 3500 members on the docks nation-wide were called out on strike. National docks secretary John Connolly circulated a statement condemning British Steel for breaching its previous agreement and using 'scab labour'. But again he rejected the notion that the dockers were engaged in political action in solidarity with the miners. He roundly condemned the government's 'increasingly frantic efforts' to convince dockers 'that it is a political strike'.

An all-out strike to back up the miners was the last thing the TGWU leaders wanted. But unfortunately for them the bosses had smelt blood. Already in the July strike the port employers had noticed a reluctance by some docks to come out over the dispute at Immingham, and outright opposition from non-scheme ports like Felixstowe. The dockland bosses have long wanted to get rid of the costly Dock Labour Scheme.

The TGWU leaders hoped they could ride on the back of the miners, and press the bosses into agreeing to uphold the scheme as they had in July. But it turned out that it was the bosses who made the more effective use of the miners' strike.

Enter Bibby

The employers exploited the TGWU leaders' attempts to deny that the dockers were making common cause with the miners. They used Tilbury scab Medlock Bibby as their mouthpiece to appeal to the more passive and moderate dockers. Bibby appealed to the strong sectional prejudices of the dockers, asking 'who are you striking for — yourselves or Arthur Scargill?'.

The result was that the militants who wanted to support the miners were put on the defensive. The leaders' vacillation and their attempts to win support for the strike by manipulating votes rather than by argument rebounded badly.

At Tilbury, dockers' chair Brian Nicholson was badly shaken by the experience of nearly losing the strike vote in front of a mass meeting of 2000 dockers. At Immingham the TGWU leaders faced the cruellest irony of all. The dockers there took the stuff about 'no politics' literally and argued that the dispute at Hunterston was not their concern. The TGWU's new General Secretary Ron Todd was treated with derision when he tried to speak, and departed to cries of 'out, out, out'.

The loyalty of most dockers to their union prevented a mass return to work. At Tilbury only a handful went back despite concerted efforts by scabs and bosses. It was the same in Bristol where the employers had also hoped for a mass return. Yet by early

September the strike was crumbling. Only half the registered dockers had voted to strike and goods were still flowing through the ports.

At sell-out talks convened by Labour Party mediators the union conceded on every point. It accepted the use of non-scheme labour and agreed to the supply of 22 500 tonnes of coal to Ravenscraig as originally demanded by British Steel. The strike was officially called off on 18 September.

Blame

Connolly blamed his members for letting their leaders down. He declared that the numbers supporting the strike were 'not what we wanted'. The air was thick with talk about disciplinary action, including expulsions for the dockers who had voted not to strike.

But who was really to blame for the bosses' success in dividing the union? Why can self-confessed scabs like Bibby now wreak havoc in a way that would have been unthinkable 10 years ago? The resonance for back-to-work movements — in the coalfields as on the docks — is a reflection of the fragmentation of the unions and the remoteness of the leaders from their membership.

The responsibility for this situation rests squarely on the shoulders of the union leaders. The bureaucrats flatter themselves that they are more militant and principled than their rank and file members. But it was the officials who insisted on keeping politics out of the docks when rank and file dockers showed they were ready to take action in solidarity with the miners. Back in May, Hunterston dockers refused to unload two coal ships for Ravenscraig — but Connolly intervened to negotiate a settlement.

Connolly is a left-wing Labour Party member. So are many of his TGWU colleagues. But what are dockers to make of these socialists who are ready to sell jobs by the thousand and then turn around and blame the workers who are still left for betraying trade union principles? This is the sort of left leadership that turns workers against socialism and encourages back-to-work movements.

* Fighting back

Trade unionism will never be the same again in Britain's docks. For the union bureaucrats the future looks bleak. But the weakening grip of the officials creates new scope for rank and file activists in the docks.

Militants can begin to unite the dockers and begin to take back their union by campaigning around the following issues:

- no redundancies — compulsory or voluntary
- guaranteed work for all — not just those protected by the scheme
- equal employment conditions for all dockworkers — scrap the distinction between registered and non-registered ports
- one union on the docks — an end to damaging inter-union rivalries.

Judy Harrison

'A book that needed writing'

JIM WALKER is a lifelong trade union activist, a member of the Transport and General Workers' Union and a delegate to Bristol Trades Council. He spoke to *Fenna King* about his experience with employers and unions — and his opinions on *Taking Control*.

'Before reading this book I must say that I had some misgivings, another "left" publication full of advice for trade unionists. It was only when I started to read it that I found that it contained between the two covers all the arguments I have used as a trade union steward and activist on workshop floors. It is a book that needed writing and I welcome its appearance.

The 'good old days'

'In the period of relatively high employment it was very fashionable to talk of managing capitalism, that all the contradictions between capital and labour had disappeared, that the class struggle had vanished. Those of us in trade union branches who still talked in these terms were gently chided and looked like characters left over from a bygone age.

'Reality was somewhat different. Working conditions in the foundry where I was a steward were bad, safety standards were non-existent or openly flouted by workers involved in piecework schemes which boosted otherwise low basic wages. I was against the piecework system. I found it led in many cases to worker fighting worker as to who got the good jobs and who got the bad ones. There were jobs where it was easy to earn your money and jobs where it was hard.

'The management knew this only too well and often used this practice to the full. The good boys invariably got the easy work, the awkward ones were stuck with the bad work. Overtime, another way to boost low basic pay, was used in very much the same way. Much of my time as a steward was spent in resolving disputes over bonus payments and making sure that the "cream" — as the good jobs were termed by the workforce — was distributed evenly and that overtime was worked on the basis of "one in, all in".

'I was against both bonus schemes and overtime working as both these hid the fact of low wages and dampened down the fight for a realistic wage for the job. The management of course saw both pieceworking and overtime as a way to boost production whilst keeping down costs. These "carrots" were used quite successfully to combat any action over poor working conditions. Workers would tend to move on to new jobs rather than fight for better wages and conditions in their existing workplace.

'As for my union work such as collecting dues, contacting my full-time official and so on, the management made it quite plain: I collected all union dues in my own time. If I

needed the full-time official I had to clock off and walk down the road to the nearest public phone box. If I needed to hold a discussion with the official that also meant losing money whilst we sat outside the foundry in his car and talked over my problems.

Free lunch

'The company I worked for was an old family firm, very paternalistic. It was known as a bad-pay firm, before it became unionised. We used to have this annual piss-up in November — I never went to it on principle. People used to say "there's free drink" but my view on it was that I don't work for payment in kind. If they want to splash out the money we should demand it of them and have a good time among our own kind. It took us ages after these piss-ups to get the workforce back into a "them and us" situation.

Wind of change

'The convenor in the early soft days won a lot of conditions: holidays, higher pay and better working conditions. But the firm was soon taken over by a bigger multinational company. The new director had worked with Michael Edwardes and he started issuing ultimatums: accept a five per cent increase in return for seven redundancies (not a lot, but it meant a lot to the seven concerned). He was demanding the answer of the workforce by such and such a date.

'The union gave the workforce no lead whatsoever. I asked the convenor what he'd do about it — he didn't know and asked for my view which was: accept the five per cent but reject the redundancies out of hand. But the union wouldn't have it, and the seven went down the road.

Conflicts

'Things were getting tough. The old stewards weren't tough enough to deal with direct appeals to the workforce. The stewards were talking to management and agreeing to deals without reference to the workforce. The workforce was getting more and more confused. The stewards at factory meetings took the views of management straight to the workforce. They didn't say what discussions with management had taken place. I thought that was wrong. As a steward I'd go to management meetings and put to them what the workers wanted. A mate of mine said that what convenors and stewards lacked was the ability to stand up and get away from the table which is true: they always came back

with a deal.

'I'll give an example. This concerns 53 redundancies — as soon as they were announced we withdrew all support from the works committee meetings. This was passed at our union branch and was official. Then comes a letter on the notice-board about an "ad hoc" committee meeting. This is how they were trying to get around our democratic decision. As branch chair I put up a notice to draw the attention of the TGWU members to our branch decision to abstain from future committee meetings. People were coming up to me urging me to stick to it.

'The notice proposed a change of name from the works committee to "Works Joint Consultative Committee" whose objective — agreed with the convenor — was to be "a committee by which employees and management can work together to achieve improved efficiency within the business to their mutual advantage". The letter wasn't challenged by the full-timers, only by the militants in the factory. It came down to the question: who runs the

factory? The convenor allowed these ad hoc meetings to continue and the 53 men went in the end, but not before a strike that lasted 3 weeks.

All aboard?

'More and more letters from the factory manager appeared on the notice-boards. One said: "The company has faced a lot of problems in the past two years, not least of which has been a very material fall in profitability and market reputation". The management were beginning to hold meetings on a regular basis where they would show us graphs and quote facts and figures about company performance and tell us of the need for all to pull together.

'I went to these meetings occasionally, to put the workers' point of view across. I used to sit there and wait till they finished and then told them what we wanted. The manager once came up with this analogy of a ship, to get his argument across. "We've got to work as a crew on a ship. We've all got to do our part to keep the ship floating". My answer to that was "from what I've seen of this ship over

A handbook for trade unionists

Mike Freeman

A handbook for trade unionists

TAKING CONTROL



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'Alien to my way of thinking — I'd rather work from the inside'

AUEW-TASS general secretary Ken Gill

Taking Control is a manual for active trade unionists and a guide to action. It aims to provide militants with the arguments and the strategies they need to overcome their isolation and make industrial action effective. *Taking Control* throws down a challenge to the employers and the government — and to the union leaders. Take it!

'Interesting and...controversial'

Nupe, deputy general secretary Tom Sawyer

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the last three years is that the officers have been steadily throwing crew members overboard. The upper deck was also getting bigger and bigger, not many of them would be disappearing as fast as the lower deck of the workforce."

Changes

'The really important change came with management's new aggressive approach and with the Thatcher government's policies of "shaking out" labour to create an army of unemployed. Good militants found themselves out of their depth and were really scared. The change that matters comes from this period. Today I would question what the unions are here for.

'I recommend *Taking Control* because it exposes a whole range of arguments for breaking away from this consensus approach between trade union and employers. While trade unionists have taken part in consultative bodies like Neddy, tribunals and all the lot, unemployment among the working class has risen. I think for anyone who thinks there's got to be a fresh

approach to trade unions and industrial relations and who needs a chronicle of failures of the unions to protect working class interests, and how in a great many cases the rank and file have fought for class interests, this book is a must. Workers involved in militant struggles have been sectionalised, demoralised and defeated by the inability of the trade union bureaucracy to recognise the very nature of the struggles that workers were involved in.

'What we're faced with now is an attack on the entire working class — the entire class is involved — even an attack on the trade union bureaucracy itself. These people seem to be more interested in surviving and preserving the structures of the union rather than defending their members. Any activist or militant trade unionist, whether shop steward or convenor or rank and file activist needs to read examples of where it went wrong and what needs to be done. He or she will find this book a source of information both to learn from past mistakes and as a guide for future action.'

Getting organised

Car workers are back once again in the front line. As the autumn pay negotiations draw near, management at British Leyland's Longbridge plant in the West Midlands and its Cowley plant in Oxford, and at Ford's Dagenham plant in East London are turning the heat on their workers.

The bosses are looking for an easy ride through the pay negotiations and quick, punitive settlements. Revolutionary Communist Party supporters give an inside view of what's happening in the car plants.

BL Longbridge

After years of settlements below five per cent and a two year spell with no pay increase many Longbridge workers have had enough. Since last November the bosses have been pushing the workforce over the edge.

● 9 November: more than 100 workers in the engine testing area walk out over the dismissal of a former shop steward, claiming it is a political victimisation.

● 28 January: design workers defy company attempts to introduce a two-shift day, arriving for work two hours later than instructed. The company stops paying late arrivers.

● 1 March: 80 men walk out over changes in work practices for workers unloading lorries.

● 19 March: 18 conveyor belt workers walk out over breakdown in pay upgrading talks. The company lays off 3300 workers.

● 20 March: 100 paint shop workers walk out in protest at lay-offs.

● 10 April: 5100 Metro workers walk out in a dispute over manning levels.

● 1 May: 600 trim workers walk out after six trim men are disciplined for not working hard enough.

● 4 June: 200 Stacca drivers walk out after black worker Zak Mills is sacked for hitting a foreman.

● 10 September: Management threaten to sack 200 workers for refusing to implement a new three-shift system.

Throughout the year Longbridge workers have demonstrated their willingness to strike back against the company offensive, but they have been held back by their union leaders.

Longbridge workers are being forced to put their hands up before going to the toilet. They are expected to submit to the same workload and flexibility that management expects from robots. Yet Longbridge convenor, Jack Adams, and his fellow officials can only celebrate the record productivity levels.

Proud

Engineering union full-timer Alan Beddows summed up the union leaders' attitude, claiming that the bosses 'have now achieved productivity levels that everyone can be proud of'. He admitted that there was 'a danger the workers would say enough is enough'. The union leaders are proud that Longbridge workers will work harder than any other plant in western Europe and terrified that their members might want to do

something about it.

Bob, a worker in the Longbridge plant, told the next step that sometimes he couldn't see the difference between the union leaders and management:

'Jack Adams, the convenor, talks like the company, about how we don't want to cause any trouble because we have got these new models coming out or about how they're giving us the work rather than Cowley. When we had a dispute in our shop over working practices he came down and told us there was nothing he could do "everything's going strong with the Rover and we don't want any trouble".'

As the positive response to an RCP bulletin distributed in the plant showed, many workers at Longbridge are willing to take strike action over the wage claim. But they have no confidence in the union leaders' ability to win. The unions are demanding a £22 a week rise, two days extra holiday and a 38-hour week. As Bob explained, most workers aren't satisfied with this:

'First the stewards should have come to see us and found out what we wanted and then composed the claim. If they had done, we in our section would have told them what it says in the RCP bulletin — a living wage of £150, a flat rate rise of £25, scrap the bonus scheme, and the same claim all round, not a different one for Cowley. I took the bulletin in and we discussed it at the tea-break. Everyone I've shown it to agrees with it. The major problem is that there is no communication between the unions and the men. All we got from the steward was a leaflet telling us what the unions were going for and that's it, no meetings to endorse it or anything.'

RCP supporters at Longbridge have been discussing the measures necessary to ensure a successful outcome in the forthcoming pay talks. Most workers agree that before we can make a start we've got to stop worrying about what the bosses say they can afford and start demanding the wages we need. As far as the bosses are concerned, £25 across the board is unrealistic. But as far as we are concerned, living on £80-£90 a week is not only unrealistic but impossible.

Workers never gain anything in the boardroom that they haven't wrung out of the bosses in the class struggle. But to change the balance of forces at Longbridge in the workers'

favour we need to start building a fighting machine now. Bob stressed the need for the rank and file to take independent action around the pay claim:

'The most important thing is to keep control of the dispute. Sometimes I wonder whose unions they are. We've been trying to get rid of this useless steward and replace him with another. Someone piped up and said we're supposed to get management's permission and make sure that the foremen recognise him. I said I paid my dues to the union. It's my bloody union not management's. It's time we got the upper hand down there.'

RCP supporters will be arguing for this approach in the weeks ahead.

Helen Simons and Pat Hughes

Ford Dagenham

On 12 September Dagenham paint shop worker and militant shop steward Nat Akimbayo was sacked for 'damaging a car' in an incident that had occurred 10 weeks previously. Aki had been suspended on full pay since June. According to management, Aki struck the roof of a Sierra and dented it during an argument with racist foreman Barry Moodie. Everybody knew that Aki had plastic joints inserted in his knuckles a year ago, which ruled out any rough stuff with a Sierra.

Management was looking for any excuse to get rid of Aki and send one more militant down the road. More than 7000 workers have lost their jobs at Dagenham since 1979. By getting rid of the union activists, the bosses hope to smooth the way for thousands more redundancies in the future — 500 are scheduled for next year. Workers in the PTA plant where Aki worked came out on strike immediately. RCP supporters, who were involved in the dispute from the beginning, argued that only all-out action and mass pickets would force management to reinstate Aki. Our call for a mass meeting of all workers to argue the case for a total shut-down was well received by workers on the picket line and at a shop stewards' meeting. The union officials had other ideas. They refused to make the strike official until at least 70 per cent of the workforce was out.

Rather than seize the opportunity to intimidate management with a show of strength before the pay round and get Aki reinstated, the union leaders backed off from any confrontation that might upset the forthcoming pay negotiations.

Management agreed to the union's demand for an independent medical inquiry to decide whether Aki was guilty or innocent. While the bosses withdrew the sacking and again put Aki on suspension with full pay, the bureaucrats declared a victory and called off the strike.



'You expect the union to defend you': Ford worker Nat Akimbayo

Aki told the next step his views on the strike and the union:

'They did nothing until I got sacked. Before then there were all sorts of delays. I didn't know what to do because when you're in this situation you expect the union to defend you. In fact, some of the other stewards wanted to take action straight away but the official said no because union procedure would be broken....I'm a real union man but it's hardly pulled out all the stops to get my job back. They've gone on and on about this medical inquiry but that doesn't guarantee I'll get my job back. It was really good that you were there on the picket line because of the pressure you put on the union to defend me.'

Dagenham workers have learned through bitter experience that relying on their union leaders in the past has led to a high toll of job losses and deteriorating conditions. To survive the current Ford offensive and get a decent deal in the pay round they can only rely on themselves.

Denise Taylor

BL Cowley

Eighteen months on from the infamous 'washing-up strike' — in reality a dispute about bonus payments (see the next step, May 1983) — the assembly plant at Cowley came out, again over bonus payments.

Since the beginning of the year there have been more than 120 stoppages, mostly in the South Works where the Maestro and Montego are built, and mostly over management attempts to force the workers to move from job to job as required.

Sean, who works in the paint shop where the strike started, told the next step that the workers were 'no further on than when we had the strike over washing-up time':

'We've lost our six minutes per shift and our bonus has fallen. The company and the unions promised we would be getting the same bonuses as the body shop within months. But for weeks now we've been getting no more than £3-£5. I work nights and I'm lucky to take home £125 a week. For the day shift it's barely £100.'

The last pay review was two years ago. A new agreement is being negotiated for early November and BL wants to sign a three year deal.

The unions are demanding £20 on basic rates and the consolidation of the putative £30 maximum bonus into the basic rate. In pursuit of this claim the assembly plant workers voted on 5 September for an immediate ban on all 'non-essential' overtime. Within days the company had locked out more than 2000 men.

'This was a deliberate provocation', one of the workers told us:

'They want to force us on to our knees so they can get us to agree to a low pay deal. That's why we didn't listen to the stewards when they tried to get us to work the extra half hour management wanted.'

The Cowley workers are now back at work and the bonus issue remains unresolved. But only the resolve of rank and file workers, not 'peace' negotiations between union officials and management behind closed doors, can beat the bosses.

Gareth Evans

Fight racism, not idiots

Many students want to do something about fighting racism. This year they must make sure that they take up issues of real concern to black and overseas students — discriminatory fees, passport checks and deportations — not waste their time on idiots like North London Polytechnic's National Front member Patrick Harrington.

● **Wrong target:** last year, radical left student activists in London spent their time pursuing National Front 'student organiser' Harrington, as he paraded from his private taxis to his private tutorials at North London Polytechnic.

They chose the wrong target and made a media personality out of a nobody. The threat to black students comes not from the feeble

remnants of the National Front but from the British state.

Anti-racist students should have been campaigning against state attacks on overseas students and challenging the failure of the organised labour movement and the National Union of Students to take a stand against them.

● **Wrong campaign:** instead of simply beating Harrington off the campus, the campaign asked the college authorities to expel him and argued its case in the courts. The left's reliance on the law rather than direct action to deal with Harrington only encouraged other college authorities to introduce new powers of suspension, aimed at anybody expressing 'radical views'.

● **Wrong politics:** the left's campaign against the 'fascist menace' in the unmenacing form of Harrington served only to revive the flagging fortunes of the National Front. Harrington was 'a soft target for the liberal left casting around for an issue on which to prove its anti-racist credentials.'

● **Real issues:** in the year ahead revolutionary communist students will be directing their sights on the real racists in the Tory government and the respectable nationalism of Tory, Labour and NUS leaders. We will be campaigning against real issues — a 10 per cent increase in overseas students' fees and deportations. Join us! (see page 23 for details).

Kirk Williams

'Reds seize factory'

'Whilst we regret having to take this action, the union representative here agrees that we have no alternative.'

This was how management told three workers that they had been sacked from their jobs at J & C Crabtree's Barlington works in Thornbury, Bradford for supporting an occupation in protest at 40 redundancies. On 30 August 40 mainly Asian machinists were made redundant at the Bradford wool-combing factory. Bradford RCP supporters helped organise the occupation.

The day before the redundancies took effect a Crabtree worker told us that his union — the general, municipal and boilermakers — had no intention of taking any action. He asked us if we could do anything.

The following day, after discussions with many Crabtree workers in the canteen we decided to occupy the factory in a fight to save the 40 jobs. Most workers were sympathetic and most were disgusted at the union's failure to take action. Some went off to other parts of the factory to persuade more workers to join us. Others took over the switchboard room and the managing director's office and switched off machines.

At this point, the shop steward Jack Kendall arrived on the scene. He immediately threatened to call the police and tore into the workers, claiming that nothing could

be done about their jobs because the firm didn't have the money. Most workers treated him with contempt. He left, accompanied by the personnel manager.

Once outside, Kendall began explaining the company's problems to the other workers. He even appealed to the white workers that their jobs were not on the line, but might be if they allowed this sort of action to go ahead. We decided to hold a mass meeting to have the arguments out with the whole workforce.

Kendall spoke first, arguing that it was useless to fight redundancies when the company's order books were empty and that any action could only jeopardise the future of the firm.

An RCP supporter argued that unless the workers took a stand immediately they could be certain that the 40 redundancies would not be



Fighting for the right to work: RCP supporters join Crabtree workers on the picket line

the last.

More union officials arrived on the scene, including regional GMBATU secretary Joe Kitchen, who had sped over from his headquarters in Leeds. Kitchen told the workers that what they were doing was illegal — as a Leeds city Labour councillor and a magistrate he should know!

When we started the action everybody had agreed that it was better to have the argument and lose than to do nothing and lose anyway. All the workers who supported the occupation were convinced that if it hadn't been for the union's blackmailing role we could have won. As it was

we lost by about 70 votes to 45.

Since the occupation the workers have continued to demand reinstatement and further action from the union. On 1 September we demonstrated outside Bradford Job Centre and three days later we sent a delegation to the TUC to lobby the GMBATU delegates.

On 6 September we held a protest outside the factory gate as workers arrived to collect their redundancy payments. We confronted Kendall about his consent to the victimisation of three workers involved in the occupation. He denied all knowledge of this until we

showed him management's letter which made his complicity very clear.

The redundant Crabtree workers have distributed a bulletin to the remaining workforce. They are calling for a fightback against all redundancies:

'We the workers of Crabtree's are against all redundancies and demand the right to work and the reinstatement of all those who have been sacked by Crabtree bosses. We would further like to state that we are totally disgusted by our union's complicity with management in allowing them to throw 40 workers on the dole.'

Grant French

Watch this space

Scotch jobs on the rocks

In early August, the Distiller Company Limited announced the closure of two plants in March 1985 — White Horse in Glasgow (415 jobs) and Vat 69 at Queensferry, Edinburgh (350 jobs). Action only started in mid-September when management at Vat 69 demanded 100 voluntary redundancies by 13 October and announced a three-day week. Twelve workers occupied the factory overnight. On 18 September Vat 69 workers protested outside DCL's headquarters and followed this up with a lobby of the shareholders' meeting on 20 September.

RCP supporters issued a bulletin arguing that rather than plead for mercy, the unions — the GMBATU and ASTMS — should step up the action. We urged workers to send delegations to other DCL concerns, particularly two in Glasgow — Buchanan at Stepps and Johnnie Walker at Shieldhall — to argue for solidarity action. These two firms are targeted to take over the work of the two plants threatened with closure.

Your time is up

In December 1983 two Leeds hospitals — Roundhay Hall Women's and Hyde Park Terrace Maternity — were closed down and their facilities transferred to the new Clarendon wing of the Leeds General Infirmary. The new wing's cleaning contract was given to Hospital Hygiene Services. Some 97 hospital cleaners lost their jobs after months of negotiations between unions and management (see *the next step*, February 1984).

While cleaning went private, catering stayed public. A Nupe in-house tender fought off six outside contracts. The union tender incorporated an attack on wages and conditions, suspended for up to 12 months.

The 12 months reprieve is now over. From November catering staff will be working fewer hours, less weekend overtime and will face a drop in wages and 10 per cent cut in bonus. Cooks will have to do their own cleaning. Kitchen porters will lose their weekend overtime and suffer a 10 per cent cut in bonuses. Any semblance of union organisation in the Clarendon wing disappeared months ago. Catering workers never see a steward from week to week. One catering worker said he stayed in Nupe only because 'it's too much trouble to get out'.

To defend themselves against the latest onslaught, health workers at the Leeds General Infirmary will have to start rebuilding their union from scratch.

Council clampdown

Left-wing labour councils make a lot of noise about fighting the Tories but they seem to spend much of their time fighting their own workers.

Who cares?

Camden council bills itself as 'the council that cares'. If you were one of Britain's 70 000 families officially homeless you might conclude that Camden was the place to be. But before committing yourself to Camden's care you would do well to stop by at the offices of the Homeless Person's Unit on King's Cross Road to find out why the workers are on strike.

The Homeless Person's Unit has been on strike in a dispute over regrading since 14 August. The total staff is 29 and each of the six advisers has a caseload of 100-140 a week. After the unit asked the Council to review staffing in April last year the council agreed to appoint two extra advisers. In August, however, it said that three jobs must go.

Behind all its rhetoric about fighting the Tories the Labour council is getting ready for rate-capping. Council leader Phil Turner recently told the Nalگو branch that there was no way

the council would kow-tow to the government. But if he really means what he says, how does he explain the council's recent closure of four children's homes and three old people's homes?

On Sunday 16 September Camden strikers joined Hackney residential social workers and other council workers in a protest organised by the RCP outside the labour council's benefit against rate-capping at London's Festival Hall to demand a real defence of jobs and services.

Gareth Evans

Blunkett City

Sheffield Labour council leader David Blunkett is fond of extolling the virtues of the citadel of the 'Socialist Republic of South Yorkshire'. Workers in the city's housing department find it hard to reconcile Blunkett's rhetoric with his blunt response to their strike over a new technology agreement — 'the Council is one of the best employers in the country and you should be grateful to have a job'.

More than 600 workers in the housing department walked out on 5 September when management suspended 10 workers for refusing to

carry out extra work.

The council union Nalگو at first agreed to pay only a fraction of the 60 per cent of normal pay it is authorised to pay out to striking members.

Local official Mike Horne maintained that if more workers came out on strike, the less chance they had of getting more strike pay.

Clerical workers in the treasury department who wanted to come out in sympathy asked to be balloted by the union. They were told to forget it. Only under pressure from the rank and file did Nalگو's emergency committee finally decide to increase strike pay from £22.50 to the 60 per cent entitlement. But the workers were asked to pay a heavy price — Nalگو would take direct control of the strike and there would be no escalation of the action.

RCP supporters in Sheffield argued for acceptance of the 60 per cent with no strings attached and urged rank and file workers to take direct control of the dispute to make the strike bite. A mass meeting of 600 workers accepted the Nalگو stipulations, but rejected an invitation to resume normal working from 24 September when negotiations got under

way.

The mass meeting endorsed a call for Nalگو to consult the views of the members before accepting any settlement. But the resolution passed by the 600 workers effectively handed control to the bureaucrats. The Sheffield dispute remains unresolved, but if they are to deal with their Labour employers council workers must first get a grip on their union.

Colin Burns

Strathclyde sell-out

Since 1981 the Strathclyde Regional Council's social work department has been understaffed by 10 per cent. For more than a year the social workers have been blacking a tenth of their workload to apply pressure on the council to fill the vacancies.

In mid-August the Nalگو social workers' disputes committee decided to suspend the blacking as a gesture of 'good faith' pending negotiations with management. This step was taken without consulting the social workers. The negotiations came to nothing and the council reaffirmed its threat to suspend workers who carried on the blacking.

Sabena Norton



Cross-Border collaboration

The Hurd instinct

Douglas Hurd replaced James Prior as Northern Ireland secretary last month amid speculation about political initiatives and deals with Dublin. Hurd landed in Belfast to find himself in the middle of crossfire between Irish establishment spokesmen demanding a new London-Dublin initiative on the North, and Loyalist leaders warning him against any scheme to unite Ireland 'by the back door'.

But the Loyalists need not concern themselves about the new man's intentions towards Dublin. Hurd made clear that his arrival meant a change 'in personalities, not policies'. Like Prior before him, Hurd's relations with the Republic will be directed at strengthening cooperation between the two governments in the war against the IRA.

Rumours of a new political initiative with the South had been fuelled by developments within the British government. On 3 September Margaret Thatcher kept a London lunch date with Irish premier Garret FitzGerald at which they announced a full-scale Anglo-Irish summit for November.

Two days before Hurd's surprise appointment to Belfast, Northern Ireland Office minister Nick Scott appeared on the Channel 4 series *From the shadow of the gun*.

Scott excited programme presenter Mary Holland, the *New Statesman's* liberal commentator, by suggesting that Britain might consider 'some pooling of sovereignty' with the Republic over the Six Counties.

The announcement that Hurd was to get the Northern Ireland job raised further speculation about new initiatives. Hurd is a former diplomat from the Foreign Office, the section of the British government which traditionally sees Irish issues in terms of London-Dublin relations.

Hurd was also a close adviser to former premier Edward Heath. In 1973 Heath tried to introduce power-sharing, the most radical attempt at a political solution Britain has come up with over 15 years of war.

Loyalists reacted angrily to what they perceived as moves undermining Northern Ireland's position as a

province of the United Kingdom. Thatcher's talks with the Irish premier earned her a rude note from Democratic Unionist Party leader Ian Paisley.

Paisley warned Downing Street that discussing the Six Counties with Dublin would give 'further encouragement to the gunmen'. The IRA would 'see these meetings as a weakening by Her Majesty's government and a victory for their violence'.

Scott's talk of 'pooling' sovereignty prompted Official Unionist MP Robert McCartney to denounce the Member for Chelsea for talking 'absolute codswallop'.

Sovereignty

Loyalist fears of radical new departures in Anglo-Irish relations have little basis in reality. Both the departing Prior and incoming Hurd were careful to insist that no sweeping political initiatives could be expected from the November summit.

Whitehall is certainly keen to achieve better relations with the Dublin government. But the aim of any closer cooperation would be to defend the Border dividing Ireland, not to remove it.

A fortnight before Scott made his controversial remarks about 'pooling' sovereignty, former junior Northern Ireland minister David Howell appeared on

Mary Holland's Channel 4 chat show to lay down the Tory line on talks with Dublin.

Howell made clear that 'any collaboration with Dublin to further unification aspirations' would be 'totally blocked'. But talks on a 'good neighbour basis' would be welcomed, 'particularly if they produced results in terms of a still tighter grip from both

North and South on terrorist activity'.

Scott himself was at pains to point out that 'pooling' responsibility for the Six Counties could not mean 'any diminution of British sovereignty' within Northern Ireland. He had in mind closer cooperation between the Royal Ulster Constabulary and the Irish gardai in

Look who's talking

The British Labour left has welcomed moves towards talks with Dublin, but called for Sinn Fein to be included at the negotiating table.

The left presents talks with Sinn Fein as a radical departure from Tory repression. Yet last month it was revealed that the new director of British terror in Ireland, Douglas Hurd, has had his own 'dialogue' with republicans.

Hurd hosted ceasefire talks between the British government and the IRA in 1972 and visited Belfast to talk to Sinn Fein leaders in 1978. His was one of several British attempts to talk the national liberation movement into giving up its guns and accepting 'peace' on Britain's terms.

The Labour left claims to support Irish self-determination. Yet its motives for starting a political dialogue with Sinn Fein are consistent with Britain's past efforts to persuade republicans to give up the armed struggle against imperialism.

It is worth recalling the events that occurred three years ago this month, when Labour's search for a 'dialogue' began. Left leader Ken Livingstone was hounded by the gutter press for his assertion that republicans were 'not criminals or

lunatics' immediately after the Chelsea barracks bombing. Livingstone wrote to the press to clarify his position:

'To seek to crush the IRA as if they were simply lunatics or criminals will not work. It is the policy that has been tried for generations and still the killing persists. The IRA bombers and their supporters believe that they have strong political motives. For this reason, if one is caught others come forward to take his place. This is not the case with individually motivated psychopaths; once arrested, the crimes cease.' (*The Times*, 14 October 1981)

Livingstone concluded that 'a political solution' was 'the only way to bring about lasting peace'.

The left understands the British state's attempts 'to crush' the 'IRA bombers and their supporters' so that 'the crimes' of the national liberation movement 'cease'. But it believes jaw-jaw would be more effective than war-war in imposing a British solution in Ireland. British workers who want a real 'lasting peace' for the Irish people must support the republican fight for Irish freedom.

pursuing republicans on their respective sides of the Border. He was certainly 'not talking about having the gardai on the Falls Road' in Belfast.

During his time at the Foreign Office, Hurd displayed the same fine sense of the limits to Anglo-Irish cooperation. In the summer of 1982 Dublin ministers protested that Prior's plans for the Ulster Assembly did not involve consulting the Twenty-six Counties, and were thus in violation of the existing Anglo-Irish accord. The Irish ambassador in London was summoned to the Foreign Office. Hurd told him there was 'no such agreement to discuss the administration of a part of the United Kingdom with a foreign government' (*the next step*, October 1982).

Whatever his limitations, Hurd can be relied upon to pursue a similarly forthright defence of British imperialism in his relations with the Republic today.

Security

Despite Loyalist anxieties, any initiative London may get into with Dublin will centre on security operations against the IRA. Thatcher's talks with FitzGerald are compatible with Paisley's recent demand that Britain should seal the Border with an electric fence in recognition of the 'war situation'.

The sort of cooperation Hurd will be looking for from Dublin was illustrated at the beginning of August. The South extradited republican Seamus Shannon to the North to stand trial for the killing of leading Loyalist Sir Norman Stronge in January 1981.

Shannon was taken to the Border in a Free State army landrover for a rendezvous with the RUC. The landrover crossed a few yards into Northern Ireland, and

promptly ran over a republican protester. This was a fair indication of how much use the Republic's boasted new 'influence' within the Six Counties will be to the nationalist community in its fight for freedom.

Gas and guns

The Irish establishment may declare the need to reform the 'undemocratic structures' in the North. But its first concern is to keep the lid on the Six Counties. To that end it will accept the need to collaborate with the gunmen of British imperialism.

No matter how disappointed Dublin is by Westminster's refusal to give it any say in the political or economic affairs of the North, the Republic has no choice but to cooperate on security.

Last month the Tories pulled out of a deal to pump natural gas from the Republic to Northern Ireland. Irish Labour leader and deputy premier Dick Spring condemned the British action as 'outrageous', but insisted it would not affect cross-Border collaboration against the republican threat.

'The Northern Ireland situation is so serious that upsets in normal business, normal commercial deals, even if they have major socio-economic implications for Ireland as a whole, can't be allowed to distract from the major problem.'

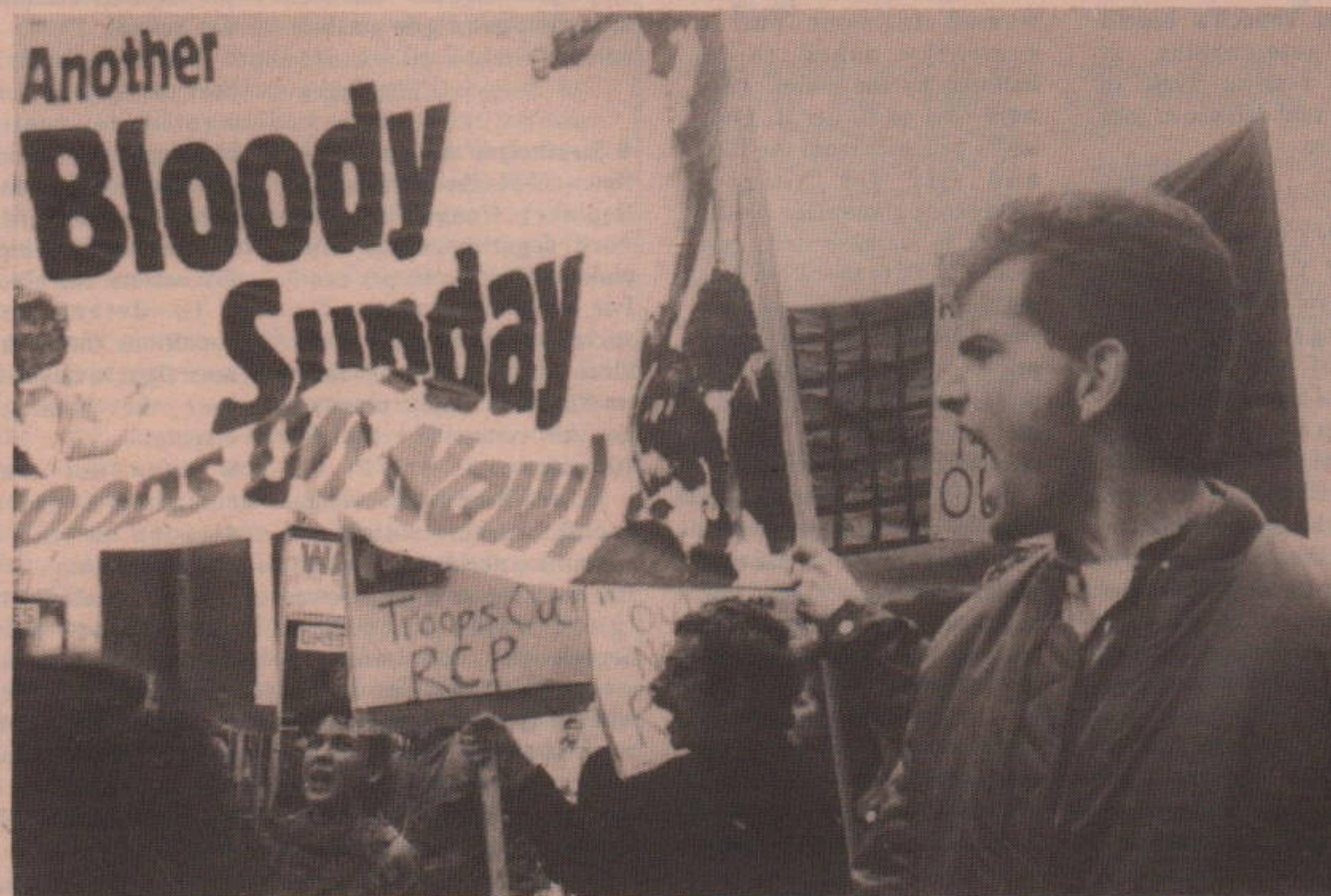
While the Free State politicians gas on about the need for 'fundamental change' in the North, the Royal Navy continues using Irish gas rig platforms off Cork as helicopter training bases. The only British initiatives which count in Ireland are those which come out of the barrel of a gun.

Mick Hume

On Saturday 9 September 100 Irish Freedom Movement supporters travelled north to join Glasgow Revolutionary Communist Party on the first Troops Out march in Glasgow's city centre for five years. The 2500-strong march overcame attacks by 500 Loyalist thugs to record a great success.

The post-march rally heard speeches from Sinn Fein's Francie Molloy, Clydeside Troops Out Movement, the Irish Freedom Movement, Republican Band Alliance and other Scottish and Irish republican groups. The Labour Party was invited but refused to appear alongside speakers supporting the armed struggle against Britain.

Rally chair Matt Montgomery of Clydeside TOM



praised Glasgow Revolutionary Communist Party for having 'done a lot to build Irish solidarity and — unlike other parties on the left — made Ireland a major priority'. Matt Montgomery welcomed the Irish Freedom Movement as 'the major exception' among solidarity groups, 'the only English-based organisation to have come up to support us today'.

Mike Wall for the RCP denounced Labour spokesmen who condemn violence against the state in Ireland and the miners' strike. An Irish Freedom Movement speaker called for the opening of a 'second front' to defeat British imperialism at home, and urged marchers to back the 'Lessons of the Irish War' conference in Birmingham on 24 November.

Fiona Ryan (relief)

Labour against racism

The Anti-Golliwog League

British society is more racist than ever before. Yet in contrast to three or four years ago, racism has ceased to be a public political issue. **Frank Richards** explains why.

Racism continues to dominate the life of black people. Every establishment report concedes the existence of a colour bar in virtually every sphere of life.

This summer's Policy Studies Institute report *Black and white Britain* documented how racist practices have become part and parcel of the British way of life.

In June, the *Employment Gazette* confirmed that racial discrimination plays a major role in the labour market. According to the Department of Employment the rate of unemployment among black people is double that for whites. Other reports have provided conclusive evidence of discrimination in housing, social services and the health service.

Racism is not restricted to the formal institutions of British society. On the streets, racists go on the rampage while the police look the other way or join in. Racist violence has become acceptable. Recent revelations about the high level of racist violence against Asians in East London were duly acknowledged by the media and quickly forgotten.

As the casualties of racist terror have continued to mount the British establishment has simply raised the threshold of what it considers an acceptable level of violence.

Scarman returns

In early September, Channel 4 accompanied Lord Scarman on his journey back to Brixton. Three years on from his inquiry into the causes of the unrest in Brixton, Scarman went back for a second look.

Not surprisingly, things have got worse. Since the events of 1981 unemployment in Brixton has doubled. And as Scarman was forced to admit, 'racial disadvantage is still perceived as the lot of young black people'.

Despite all the cosmetic gestures, life in the inner cities has deteriorated even further. But Scarman could not explain why there has been no repetition of the riots of 1981.

Consensus

Since 1979 the Tories have established a political framework that legitimises racial oppression. They have managed to outflank the far right and no longer need to make a big play of the racist card. This is the result of years of hard work.

Since 1979 the government has reduced immigration to an all-time low, stepped up its internal policing of black people and passed through Parliament a comprehensive Nationality Act. With this record behind them the Tories are under little pressure to demonstrate their racist credentials.

Having established a consensus around its policies, the Thatcher government has set about refining its techniques of racial oppression. Coercion is still important. Repression played a key role in the establishment's response to the 1981 riots and is still used systematically in the inner cities. But its use is now less public and more selective.

The policing of the recent Notting Hill carnival showed the new techniques in action. As far as the public was concerned the police played a limited role at Notting Hill. The media enthused about the 'good-humoured' stickers and badges distributed by the police. But anybody who took part in the carnival could not have failed to notice that a virtual police army of occupation made its menacing presence felt throughout the proceedings.

Diplomacy

This understated and more diplomatic form of repression is part of the new technique of racial domination. The government has its hands full trying to manage a collapsing British capitalism. The last thing that it needs is an explosion in the inner cities. In other words, the Tories want to pursue a form of racial domination that will not provoke resistance.

To this end the government has attempted to establish a relationship with a section of the black community. Government ministers have organised much publicised initiatives on behalf of black businessmen. In Bradford, the Tory council boasts of its special relationship with the black community.

To prove its commitment to eliminating racial discrimination the government has backed the Commission for Racial Equality's *Code of Practice* on monitoring employment patterns. Numerous publicity stunts have been launched in the cause of good 'race relations'.

Brunel University is running a 'race awareness' course for police officers. And in August the government announced that the immigration department of the Home Office is to follow the example of the police and receive race awareness training.

The absurdity of civil servants who enforce racist immigration controls attending racial awareness classes indicates the government's cynical approach to the issue. Unfortunately, this ap-



Nick Sierra (reflex)



Labour's policies mean no change for black workers

proach has worked, not because it has aroused any enthusiasm, but because it has not been challenged. Indeed, the traditional opponents of the government in the Labour Party and in the anti-racist movement have themselves become imprisoned in the expanding race relations industry.

Since 1979 the combined

efforts of the CRE, the Manpower Services Commission and local government have led to the institutionalisation of anti-racism. This is a major achievement for the British state. The same state that legitimises and enforces racial oppression has also been able to neutralise and incorporate the anti-racist movement.

In the aftermath of the 1981 riots hundreds of black activists were given jobs in parastatal organisations in the race relations industry. Most started with the best of intentions. All have since been neutralised and many have been corrupted.

Incorporation

The institutions that were established in the post-riot period served a specific purpose. They either channelled black unrest into the law courts and tribunals (law centres, advice centres) or contained it (community projects, youth clubs). These developments only confirmed the old Marxist dictum that the capitalist state cannot be used for progressive ends.

The main instrument for domesticating the anti-racist movement has been Labour-controlled local councils. Following the riots, left-wing councils in particular made a lot of noise about redressing the balance in favour of black people and fighting racism.

Led by the Greater London Council, local authorities have spent millions hiring race relations advisers and specialists, publishing reports and organising conferences and concerts. A few black people have been taken on to council payrolls, but these token gestures have done nothing to improve the lot of the vast majority of blacks.

Complicit

Every left-wing council has made pompous declarations about racial equality and organised special race relations courses for selected staff. The GLC proclaimed 1984 an anti-racist year. All this struck a chord with the British liberal's sense of fair play, but the campaigns involved nobody outside of the new army of race relations experts.

Labour's extravagant publicity exercises have allowed every windbag to hold forth but have failed to initiate any action whatsoever. Some of the more vocal left-wing councils have even been complicit in tolerating racism within their own back yards.

Earlier this year the CRE published a study of housing allocations by Hackney Labour council amid a fanfare of publicity. The radical council and the CRE congratulated each other for unearthing a cesspool of institutionalised racism. The CRE went on to point the finger at Lambeth and Lewisham Labour councils for operating racist housing allocation policies.

Municipal anti-racism consists of handing out grants to select ethnic groups to keep them quiet, adopting non-enforceable codes of practice, and spouting a lot of empty rhetoric. Labour councils

have avoided confronting racism directly and are especially loath to challenge their own employees on the question.

Trivia

One of the most serious consequences of these developments has been the trivialisation of racism.

At a time when racist violence is on the increase and discrimination in the labour market condemns black youth to a life of economic insecurity, Islington Labour council has discovered a more pressing problem for black people.

The chair of the council's anti-racist working party has launched a crusade against the sale of golliwogs in a gift shop. This follows the committee's major victory in May when it successfully banned Robertson's jam adverts depicting golliwogs.

Golliwogs are certainly a racist caricature. But it is a caricature of anti-racism to launch a campaign against Robertson's jam adverts when racist attacks are rife on Islington council estates. Such campaigns are a diversion from the hard task of fighting racism where it really matters.

The municipal anti-racists not only address the wrong problems, they have been complicit in making anti-racism acceptable to the British establishment. They have helped foster a form of machine politics which has a long and sordid record in the USA.

The current debate about black sections in the Labour Party is a good example. The debate is not about political issues but about the future relationship between black and white politicians in the party. It is a controversy which is of direct concern to politicians but which is devoid of significance for working class people, black or white.

Independence

Labour's involvement in machine politics has a long history. In the past, corrupt right-wing Labour administrations stitched up the Catholic vote in Liverpool and Glasgow. Today, it is the left wing-of the party which is doing the wheeling and dealing. The main beneficiary is the ruling class. Municipal anti-racism complements the Tories' own efforts to stabilise race relations and disorients genuine anti-racists.

The institutionalisation of the anti-racist movement represents the end of an era. It reveals the urgency of building an anti-racist movement in the working class. The struggle against racial oppression is more important than ever before. To succeed, anti-racism must be independent of the state and anti-capitalist.

Revolt in South Africa

Sharpeville '84

South Africa is once again convulsed in class struggles. The slaughter of seven black miners during the recent strike was preceded by the spectacle of peaceful protesters being batoned off the streets when they demonstrated against the constitutional elections in August. Thirty five leaders of the moderate United Democratic Front were arrested after the organisation called for a boycott of the poll.

Riots swept through the black townships of Sharpeville, Sebokeng, Evaton and others in a wide belt around Johannesburg, in response to a 30 per cent increase in rents. Bombs exploded in the Rustenberg power station, blacking out huge areas of north-west Transvaal and Bophuthatswana, and in the Johannesburg supreme court. Forty two were killed in the disturbances that instantly recalled the 69 deaths at Sharpeville in 1960 and the 600 who died in the aftermath of the Soweto riots in 1976.

The Republic of South Africa is regularly afflicted with sporadic revolts because the apartheid regime is unable to contain the resistance of the three quarters of the population that is black. The current recession has led to more repression and poverty and fuelled further unrest among the black South African masses.

The Soweto riots of 1976 came in the wake of the liberation of Angola and Mozambique from colonial rule in 1975 and coincided with the first signs of recession for the South African economic 'miracle'. Today, the government has succeeded in enforcing deals with its northern neighbours to protect it from any external instability. But the domestic problems resulting from the recession remain unresolved.

Black July

In 1984 the recession that South Africa first experienced in the mid-seventies returned with a vengeance. Gold, which provides half of the country's export earnings, has been priced at \$340 an ounce since July, down from its 1980 peak of \$850. The rand has also dropped sharply against the dollar, making exports more expensive and provoking a flood of imports. In agriculture, the drought has destroyed the last two seasons' harvest of maize, turning the country into a food importer for the first time. Public expenditure has gone through the roof and some foreign investors are already packing their bags.

To shore up the economy the new finance minister, Barend du Plessis, imposed a stringent austerity budget to curb consumer spending, cut imports, reduce inflation and strengthen the rand. An influential financial paper described the measures introduced after 'Black July' as 'the single most restrictive monetary and fiscal package in the post-war years' (*Standard Bank Review*, August 1984). These conditions provided the gloomy backdrop for the August black rebellions.

Apartheid reform

The apartheid regime has made strenuous efforts to

prevent a recurrence of the Soweto riots. Its reform programme had a dual purpose. On the one hand, it aimed to cultivate a black elite by removing some of the excesses of Apartheid. On the other hand, it was designed to contain black workers' militancy by legalising their unions while leaving the restrictive Pass Laws intact.

The constitutional elections in August marked the culmination of this strategy. The new constitution, which enfranchised Asian and 'coloured' voters for the first time but left the majority of blacks without the vote, was an attempt to aggravate divisions among the non-white communities.

None of these measures has succeeded. As the recession has hit home, the apartheid reform programme has collapsed just as surely as the price of gold.

The government's failure to integrate any section of the black community is most evident in the two million-strong township of Soweto. It is served by a single supermarket. Most people have to travel 20 kilometres to the white-dominated Central Business District of Johannesburg to get anything more than the bare essentials. The only successful black business has been the 20 000 mini-bus operators who provide an alternative to the crowded public transport system. They are constant targets for official harassment.

African NUM

The experience of the past year has confirmed that no amount of token reforms can keep the lid on black militancy. In schools, on the streets, in factories and now the mines, black workers have proved their determination to resist every act of repression and every divisive scheme that the apartheid regime throws at them.

The school students of Soweto led the 1976 insurrection. Earlier this year, they demanded the lifting of the ban on students over 20 completing their high school education. They called for representation within the schools and the relaxation of corporal punishment. The authorities replied by closing every school in the Pretoria area. Today, an estimated 120 000 students are locked out and on the streets. They have refused to return until their arrested comrades are



Under the whip but undeterred: black workers in South Africa are fighting back against apartheid terror

released.

In January 20 000 black workers in car plants, refineries, mines and supermarkets were on strike in South Africa. The legalised unions are under tremendous pressure from their members to fight for better wages and conditions to maintain living standards. Now 24 black unions representing a quarter of a million workers are meeting to form a national trade union federation.

This year's mushrooming trade union struggles climaxed in the strike by the two year old National Union of Mineworkers in pursuit of a 25 per cent wage claim. The union recently qualified for a legal strike under South Africa's prolonged disputes procedure. With 70 000 members, the union represents only a minority of the 400 000 miners in the industry, but its resolutions have a decisive impact on the whole workforce.

The prospect of a miners' strike caused such a panic that the authoritative South African economic journal the *Financial Mail* dropped its liberal pretensions:

'Any strike they launch will be legal, but that will not protect the strikers from being fired and shipped back to the homelands....However, in the event of the employers using the firing weapon, they might not only have to deal with violence and rioting in the mines but might also find the only way to ship the strikers home would be at the point of a gun.' (17 August 1984)

At the end of the day, even the most liberal wing of South African imperialism welcomes the use of bantustans and guns to deal with any revolt by the black working class.

Solidarity

The recent elections held to

endorse the new constitution only succeeded in highlighting the political oppression of the black population. Even this carefully controlled exercise rebounded on the South African authorities. The government's efforts to extend the franchise failed dismally in the face of black hostility. More than 80 per cent of the minority Cape-coloured and Indian communities boycotted the polls in solidarity with the excluded 23 million blacks.

From the start, the government made it quite clear that it intended to ignore the views of the minority communities. Only their votes were required.

Constitutional affairs minister Christopher Heunis admitted that 'the new constitution will be implemented irrespective of the size of the poll...it would not necessarily reflect coloured opinion because there had been a lot of intimidation' (*Financial Mail*, 24 August 1984).

Heunis was so busy defending the poll that he failed to notice that his own remarks helped to discredit it in the eyes of the Indian and 'coloured' communities. The new constitution has not altered the apartheid regime's approach to its non-white population. Repression remains the mainstay of the relationship.

Sharpeville is not just a symbol of oppression for the South African masses. It has become a day to day reality. Last year alone, there were 90 judicially approved executions and 40 000 sentences of corporal punishment in South Africa's prisons. That's on top of the random murders perpetrated by the police and the white death squads. Yet the South African masses have not been cowed by apartheid terror. Sharpeville '84 testifies to black workers' enduring resistance to their imperialist rulers.

Andy Clarkson

A painful transition

'The long and painful transition from the barricades to the boardrooms has at length been accomplished, and today the TUC exerts its influence not so much through strikes and demonstrations, as through reasoned arguments before an independent arbitrator or an industrial court — or in the Cabinet Room.'

(*The Times*, 2 November 1946)

'The government has deliberately set out to cut them (the TUC) down to size and has succeeded so well that it has left itself with virtually no responsible interlocutors on the labour scene.'

(*The Times*, 7 September 1984)

After almost 40 years of riding high the TUC has been transformed from a powerful national institution into a general object of public sympathy. The decline of this once influential body was so striking at this year's congress that sections of the ruling class expressed their concern that they might lose the services of their labour lieutenants altogether.

The TUC has tried to disguise its decline by blustering even more than usual. For some time the leaders of the official labour movement have been going to great lengths to convey an image of confidence. They have been trying hard to pretend that they are conducting business as usual. The prevailing attitude in the ruling circles of the trade union movement has been to hope that the problems will go away and to make out in public that nothing has changed.

The miners' strike has blown the TUC's cover. It has raised directly the issue of union power. It has led to serious questions about the ability of trade unions to survive in their present form.

The widely aired view that this year's TUC conference was 'the most important since 1926' is an illustration of the union bureaucrats' doubletalk. It was really an acknowledgement that until now the tensions and rivalries that have accompanied trade union decline could be negotiated behind the scenes and 'not in front of the children'. But the prolonged miners' strike — the most important industrial dispute for decades — has put the TUC on the spot.

The TUC had to take a stand or reveal its own irrelevance. But it could do neither. It could not take a stand because it is so far out of touch with its members that it cannot mobilise the rank and file. It could not admit to its irrelevance because of its instinct for survival. So it went through the motions of taking a stand — and succeeded only in revealing its irrelevance.

The TUC's declaration of support for the miners was not worth the paper it was written on and everybody knew it. But this did not stop the union leaders from pretending that something important had

taken place. The dishonesty of the trade union leadership was most flagrantly displayed by the left. The trade union left is fully committed to deceiving the working class because it has no realistic alternative. The Communist Party's *Morning Star* assured its readers on the day of the TUC's key debate on the miners' strike that 'the trade union movement will today officially line up with the miners and swiftly move towards giving increased financial and industrial solidarity'.

Arthur Scargill went a step further and heralded the monumental significance of the TUC congress. In the following Sunday's *Observer* he predicted that 'the Trades Union Congress of 1984 will be remembered as the week in which the British trade union movement began a determined and united fightback against the destruction of British industry'. The man who had predicted that power cuts would take place before the summer was again off target. Within a week, the dockers' strike had collapsed and TUC leaders were meeting behind closed doors to discuss what they could do to get the miners back to work as fast as possible.

The public humiliation of the TUC this summer is the industrial equivalent of Labour's electoral humiliation last summer. It illustrates the impotence of the official labour movement and the political crisis of Labourism. The first victim of this crisis is always the left wing of the movement. At last year's Labour Party conference the left took the rap for the June catastrophe and humbly united behind a new leadership moving fast to the right.

At this year's TUC the left cringed and crawled in a desperate attempt to maintain at least a semblance of purpose. It enthusiastically applauded right-wing engineering union leader Gavin Laird for his support for the TUC line on the miners' strike. It adopted the moderate David Basnett of the general, municipal and boilermakers' union as one of its own.

The emergence of Gavin Laird as a major TUC personality sums up the current direction of British trade unionism. Laird is against strikes and any fight for workers' rights. Instead he favours no-strike deals, collaboration with employers and harmony between the classes. Laird's style of business unionism is the only realistic option for a union bureaucracy that has become an integral part of the capitalist system. His carefully worded speech in support of the miners was in reality a demand for surrender.

Laird outlined terms for surrender that would avoid further humiliation and embarrassment for the whole trade union leadership. Scargill knows full well where Laird is coming from. But he puts more faith in public gestures of bureaucratic solidarity than in winning real support

from rank and file workers.

In case anybody really believed that the TUC was about to join battle a series of resolutions were passed at Brighton that indicated its true direction. The congress decided to declare its support for Nato, to do nothing about the liquidation of trade unionism at the government's Cheltenham spy centre, GCHQ, and to crawl back and rejoin its favourite quango, Neddy. It also elected Norman Willis as the its new General Secretary.

Willis is the perfect match for Neil Kinnock at the head of the official labour movement. Now both wings of the movement are led by nonentities. Like Kinnock, Willis is a transitional figure whose main qualities are a loyalty to the bureaucracy and a lack of any principles that could cause offence to any section of the labour leadership. Just as Kinnock is the front man for Healey and Hattersley, Willis does the song and dance routine while Laird and Basnett call the shots.

The consolidation of the trade union bureaucracy under a right-wing leadership indicates that the left is now conscious of the bankruptcy of its alternative policies. It is prepared to endorse views which until now have been the monopoly of the right wing. More or less the same process is under way in the trade unions and the Labour Party. This right-wing shift would be of little concern if it simply meant the political reorientation of a small number of bureaucrats. But unfortunately it is the working class that pays the price.

Bureaucratic deception breeds cynicism and passivity among rank and file workers. The politics of Labourism discredits socialism and helps to stifle any expression of working class revolt against the system. Unless the leadership of the official labour movement is challenged, it will guarantee the defeat of the miners and the further fragmentation of the working class.

Gavin Laird personifies the future of the official labour movement. The widespread acceptance of his policies would mean disarming the working class before rising unemployment, falling living standards and attacks on political rights. It would mean the demise of the working class. The pathetic retreat of the dockers' leaders and the frenzied search for a sell-out settlement of the miners' strike are the inevitable outcome of Laird's acclaimed gesture of solidarity with the NUM at Brighton. The only beneficiary of this solidarity is Scargill who has been given a breathing space to save his own neck.

The cynical reorientation of the leadership of the labour movement creates many dangers for the working class. But it also provides us with important opportunities. Not since the Depression years of the early thirties have the interests of the labour bureaucracy diverged so far from the needs of the working class. The events of the last few

months show that the future of the trade union leaders depends on their success in duping the masses and dividing the working class still further. The Labour Party is even worse. Labour's indecisive policies and ineffectual campaigns reinforce the conviction that it is impossible to fight back.

The crisis of the labour bureaucracy demonstrates the urgent necessity for rebuilding the labour movement from top to bottom. The stagnation of the miners' strike indicates that this is no abstract question for the future. It is an immediate precondition for the survival of the workers' movement. It is not just the miners who will suffer if their courageous struggle is betrayed. The official labour movement has become a death trap for every group of workers who want to fight for their rights.

The treacherous manoeuvres of the labour bureaucrats will come as no surprise to regular readers of *the next step*. Since 1979 we have argued that deepening recession will hit the working class with a vengeance and expose the inadequacy of the existing leadership of the labour movement. More recently we have accurately predicted the course of the miners' strike. We have consistently pointed to the dangers faced not only by the miners but by every section of the working class. Readers of *the next step* have been fully prepared for recent events.

What has changed is that now our arguments can reach a wider audience. The crisis of Labourism and the collapse of trade unionism can no longer be 'hidden from the children'. The drama now playing before an audience of millions can become a source of further demoralisation. Or it can become a crucial experience that will stimulate militant workers to rid their class of the fatal influence of TUC bureaucrats and Labour Party politicians. Willis and Kinnock, Laird and Healey represent one option for the British working class. We represent the other.

The first step in the renewal of an effective labour movement is the building of the Revolutionary Communist Party. The official labour movement is collapsing because its institutions have no foundations independent of a system whose survival now depends on crushing the working class. Indeed the TUC and the Labour Party have become so much a part of the system that they fear the independent organisation of the working class.

Only a movement that is totally independent of the capitalist system can sustain the working class in the struggles to come. The Revolutionary Communist Party is fighting to build a fighting working class movement that can consign both capitalism and its corrupt caretakers to the dustbin of history.

Seven questions for Arthur Scargill

Since the miners' strike began back in March the Revolutionary Communist Party has given its full backing to the striking miners and their fight for the right to work. We have also consistently challenged the strategy of the NUM leadership in the dispute. As the strike drags on to the end of its seventh month *Helen Swift* looks at the crucial issues in the miners' battle for jobs.

1. The Plan for Coal

Has it not been a mistake to link the miners' fight for jobs to an alternative corporate strategy for the coal board?

Since the strike began Arthur Scargill has argued ceaselessly that the miners are not fighting only for jobs but also for the future of the British coalmining industry. Indeed, for Scargill the strike is not so much the miners' fight for the right to work, but what he calls 'the miners' battle for Britain'. Scargill has claimed in a hundred interviews that 'we produce the cheapest deep-mined coal in the world'. He maintains that the plans of the government and the coal board to balance the books by reducing output, closing pits and reducing manpower are not in the best interests of the British coal industry. The NUM leadership offers an alternative approach to making British mining profitable, by expanding output and preserving pits and jobs.

Scargill's alternative strategy is not only nonsense, it is dangerous nonsense. The British coal industry is a capitalist concern, under capitalist management, under a capitalist government in the midst of a capitalist recession. There is only one way to create a prosperous capitalist coal industry in Britain in 1984 and that is by the methods approved by Thatcher and MacGregor — cutbacks, closures and mass redundancies.

Under the present system there can be no economic case for keeping every pit open and opposing every redundancy. The only justification for this course of action is *political* — the assertion that irrespective of the economic problems of the coal board and the government the economic needs of the miners must be satisfied. If miners followed this approach it would bring the basic conflict between workers

and bosses in the coal industry out into the open, instead of avoiding it. The miners came out on strike to save their jobs, not to squabble with the employers about how their industry should be managed.

By trying to justify the strike on economic grounds Scargill has laid miners open to the bosses' propaganda attack. To many workers, and to many miners, it does not make sense to go on strike to safeguard a loss-making industry. The course of action consistent with the NUM's commitment to a prosperous, competitive industry would be to refuse to join the strike and to accept redundancies and wage cuts and so allow the price of British coal to be reduced to South African levels. Working miners in several areas have followed this logic at least half way.

Given the absurdity of his economic arguments, Scargill has been forced to rely in the end on emotional appeals to try to unite the miners and to win wider solidarity. But why should miners in profitable coalfields come out on strike to save the jobs of miners in loss-making coalfields if their goal is a prosperous coal industry? Why should train drivers or lorry drivers or steelworkers risk their jobs for bigger profits in the coal industry? As the miners' strike has proved, workers cannot be united if they are all pursuing the interests of their own employers. The fight for the right to work can unite miners and other workers because every worker needs a job.

Why then has Scargill wasted seven months fighting 'the miners' battle for Britain' when the miners needed a leader to lead their battle for jobs?

2. Bureaucratic control

Why has the NUM leadership lagged behind — and held back — rank and file militancy throughout the dispute?

The miners' strike has been dogged from the start by the cautious moderation that lies behind the rhetoric of the rally platforms. The strike began after a five month long overtime ban over last year's wage demand — an issue which remains unresolved. The coal board used these months to tour the coalfields whipping up divisions in the miners' ranks. It advised its customers to lay in supplies, built up its own stocks and chose the moment to provoke the miners into strike action. While MacGregor prepared, Scargill slept. Unlike in 1972 and 1974 this time round there were few major rallies or pit-head meetings in preparation for a strike. The NUM leaders appealed for more talks while the employers prepared for war.

The NUM leadership followed its troops into battle. Miners in Yorkshire walked out in response to the threatened closure of Cortonwood colliery and their pickets spread the strike through the coalfield. The Yorkshire area executive later endorsed the action. Flying pickets spread the strike to other areas, and their leaders gave it official backing. The NUM leadership approved a strategy of area-by-area strike action because this gave it maximum control over the course of events. It prevented the strike from acquiring a national focus and it prevented activists from different areas linking up to pursue a nation-wide coordinated plan of action. The strike had been going for six weeks before the national NUM leadership took formal control — and by then it had already begun to lose momentum.

The NUM leadership, at national and area levels, has continually tried to restrain picketing

and protest demonstrations. Militants in all areas have faced difficulties of disorganisation and reluctance to release resources to make strike action effective. When pickets have threatened the movement of coal or scabs — as at Orgreave in July and at numerous pits in the abortive 'back-to-work' moves in August — NUM officials have responded to appeals from the bosses and the police to scale down the picketing. Picketing of steel plants and other industrial sites has been rendered ineffectual by deals among local union officials to allow the use of coal. When the TUC leaders got nervous about having too many protesting miners in Brighton last month, Scargill obligingly diverted them elsewhere.

While the miners have been fighting to win on picket lines, the NUM leaders have been looking for a compromise in the committee rooms. Virtually from the start of the dispute there has been an incessant round of formal and informal, public and private negotiations between the NUM and the coal board. Rank and file miners find out about these talks on television. They have not been consulted about the terms under discussion, they have had no say on the conduct of the talks and they will only be asked to rubber stamp any deal that finally emerges. For the NUM leaders the talks are crucial. To them rank and file miners are a stage army that they try to march up and down according to the state of negotiations. But without the militancy of the rank and file, the NUM leaders would have no negotiating power at all. But do the rank and file need the bureaucracy?



On the spot: Scargill and the NUM leaders have a lot to answer for

3. The ballot

Why did you refuse to consult the rank and file in a campaign to win nation-wide backing for all-out strike action?

The NUM leadership avoided calling a national ballot at the beginning of the strike (in the manner customary in the miners' union for almost a century) because it feared it would not win a big enough majority for strike action. It later tried to justify its evasion of the membership and its manipulation of the union rule book with arguments about past union policy and moralistic assertions that 'nobody had the right to vote away another man's job'.

The NUM leaders refused to call a ballot because they had no confidence that their strategy could win majority support. This lack of confidence was entirely justified: the NUM's arguments could not sway miners who were not already committed to the strike. A hard fought campaign around the ballot would have exposed the incoherence of the NUM's 'battle for Britain' strategy. It would also have forced the NUM leaders to confront the conservative, passive and sectional tendencies among the miners. It would have forced them to discuss openly the issues in the strike and the conduct of the strike in every miners' welfare and at every pit-head in every coalfield in the country. This

was why Scargill feared a ballot and preferred to confine the discussions and the decisions to a tight clique of activists and officials.

It was for the very same reasons that the RCP called for a ballot — and more importantly for a campaign to win a ballot — in the first six weeks of the dispute. A campaign around a ballot could have forced a debate about the key issue of the strategy of the strike. It could have provided a focus to link up rank and file activists in every area. And it could have drawn the passive majority into active involvement in the strike. What is more, it could have been won and provided solid backing for a united and victorious nation-wide coal strike. This would have isolated the scabs and undermined their influence on the course of the dispute. The NUM leaders' refusal to call a ballot gave the Notts miners an effective veto on the whole dispute.

Once the division between the striking and the working coalfields had become entrenched the prospects for winning a ballot receded. But so too did the chances of a successful outcome to the dispute.

4. The Nottinghamshire miners

How do you explain your failure to win the unity of the miners in all areas for strike action?

The miners and the NUM leaders tried to picket out the Notts miners. They tried to order them out by edict from their area officials. And finally they tried to carry on the strike without them. But while a heroic minority of Notts miners braved brutal harassment by police and working miners, the majority stayed at work. The output of the Notts coalfield has helped to keep the power stations and industry going and has played a crucial role in weakening the impact of the miners' strike.

The NUM leaders and their sympathisers have produced a number of explanations for the Notts miners' refusal to join the strike. Some argue that the Notts miners are a different breed from miners in other areas and lack a tradition of militancy. But the record shows that the Notts miners were active participants in national strikes in 1920 and 1921, and more recently in 1972 and 1974. And far from being a breed apart most Notts miners are migrants from other coalfields in Scotland, Durham and South Wales (see Frank Richards, 'Scabs or Scapegoats', *the next step*, July 1984).

Others maintain that the Notts miners have been bought off by higher bonuses since the labour government introduced area productivity deals in 1978. Again, the record shows that miners in North Yorkshire and the

militant Barnsley area receive higher bonuses than the Notts men (see figures published by *Incomes Data Services*, May 1984). Jobs in Nottinghamshire are also under threat from pit closures and new technology. The notion of the labour aristocrats of Notts is a myth.

Another explanation of Notts conservatism is the legacy of the Spencer union, the company union set up in the area after the defeat of the General Strike. But the Spencer union was imposed on the Notts miners by the bosses. The Notts miners fought a long and bitter struggle in the thirties to defeat it.

The NUM leaders cannot face the real explanation for the moderation of Notts because it lies too close to home. The Notts miners work in Britain's most productive and profitable coalfield and their area union represents in a more extreme form the sort of collaboration with the employers that is common throughout the NUM. When miners in other areas argue that strike action is necessary to safeguard the pits in their area, the Notts miners reply by saying that staying at work is the best way to keep the Notts pits prosperous. The NUM's collaborationist approach fosters sectionalism in every coalfield. The Notts monster is the NUM's creation.

5. The collapse of solidarity

Why have you allowed other union leaders to get away with making endless empty promises?

From the beginning of the strike national leaders of the more left-wing unions made repeated public declarations of support for the miners' cause and pledged sympathetic action by their members to make the strike bite. The leaders of the key transport workers' unions — the TGWU, the NUR and Aslef, and the seamen's union — were prominent supporters of the miners. But week after week and month after month, the coal kept moving and the wheels of British industry kept turning.

Rank and file activists in many industries were prepared to take action in support of the miners. But their union leaders failed to go out and campaign for active backing for the miners from the mass of workers. They failed to organise the sort of sympathetic action that could have been effective. They wanted to make gestures of support to show public solidarity with the miners. They did not want hard hitting industrial action which would have brought them into confrontation with their own employers, with the government and with the law.

The result was that the militants became isolated and their action proved ineffectual. The posturing of the union leaders created

maximum scope for the more passive workers to exert the decisive influence. When militant railworkers blacked coal shipments and were suspended, the rail unions made up their wages while other workers shifted the coal. When dockers and railworkers refused to move coal, lorry drivers moved it in convoy without union interference. The result was that militants became disillusioned and sympathy remained at the level of paper resolutions and hot air.

Instead of selecting the key industrial targets and going out to convince the workers there to support the strike, the NUM leaders settled for soft targets. They chose steel — a dying industry with a feeble union — as the main focus of attention. But a concerted drive to stop the power stations, the big car factories and other closely market-dependent industries with strongly organised unions could have put real pressure on the government.

An active campaign for solidarity with rank and file miners linking up with activists in other unions and arguing the case for action at mass meetings could have won genuine sympathetic action. Why did the NUM leadership always insist on going through the official union channels which in the end delivered nothing?

6. Law and order

Why has the NUM not organised effective resistance to the state offensive against the unions?

Up to the end of September more than 6000 miners had been arrested in the course of the strike. Many have been beaten up and intimidated by scabs as well as police. Several have already been imprisoned by magistrates specially appointed to dish out the bosses' justice in the coalfields. Despite the unprecedented state assault on the miners the NUM leadership has carried on as though it was running a series of everyday area disputes.

Miners on picket duty have been assailed by police on horseback and in full riot gear under top level computerised control. Yet the NUM has not yet begun to marshal its men even for their own defence, let alone to ensure effective picketing. Although some activists have tried to get organised, there has been no effective national or even area-level coordination and planning of picketing. Miners have not been drilled, trained or equipped for picket duty in the way that every police officer is prepared as a matter of course. The NUM leaders have sat back and allowed their men to be brutalised. Scargill's gesture of solidarity was to get himself beaten over the head: but the miners need a

leader to organise their resistance, not to share the results of his own incompetence.

The NUM has also failed to provide a coherent strategy for its members who are hauled before the courts. Every miner now faces the magistrates as an isolated individual. But the NUM could have turned the legislative attack on the miners into a powerful collective gesture of defiance. It could have coordinated the refusal to pay fines and the repudiation of bail conditions. It could have defied the state to imprison all 6000 miners. The government would have been faced with the choice of opening special concentration camps for miners or backing down. But the NUM has baulked at any serious defiance of the courts and given the magistrates a free hand to wreak vengeance on militants.

By focusing on the issue of law and order the establishment set out to turn the miners' strike into a wider issue of class power. By refusing to coordinate a collective, class response the NUM leadership conceded a crucial propaganda and political advantage to the bosses.

7. No politics please

Why have you allowed the TUC and Labour Party leaders to work behind the scenes to betray the miners' struggle?

For the leaders of the official labour movement the miners' strike is a serious embarrassment. The TUC has long wanted an end to an industrial dispute outside its control which threatens the uneasy relations between unions and employers throughout British society. The Labour Party also wants a settlement at all costs to a strike that links scenes of picket line violence to the party's traditional trade union allies and which the media presents as an electoral liability. Both the TUC and the Labour Party have used their influence to try to

get a return to work on any terms.

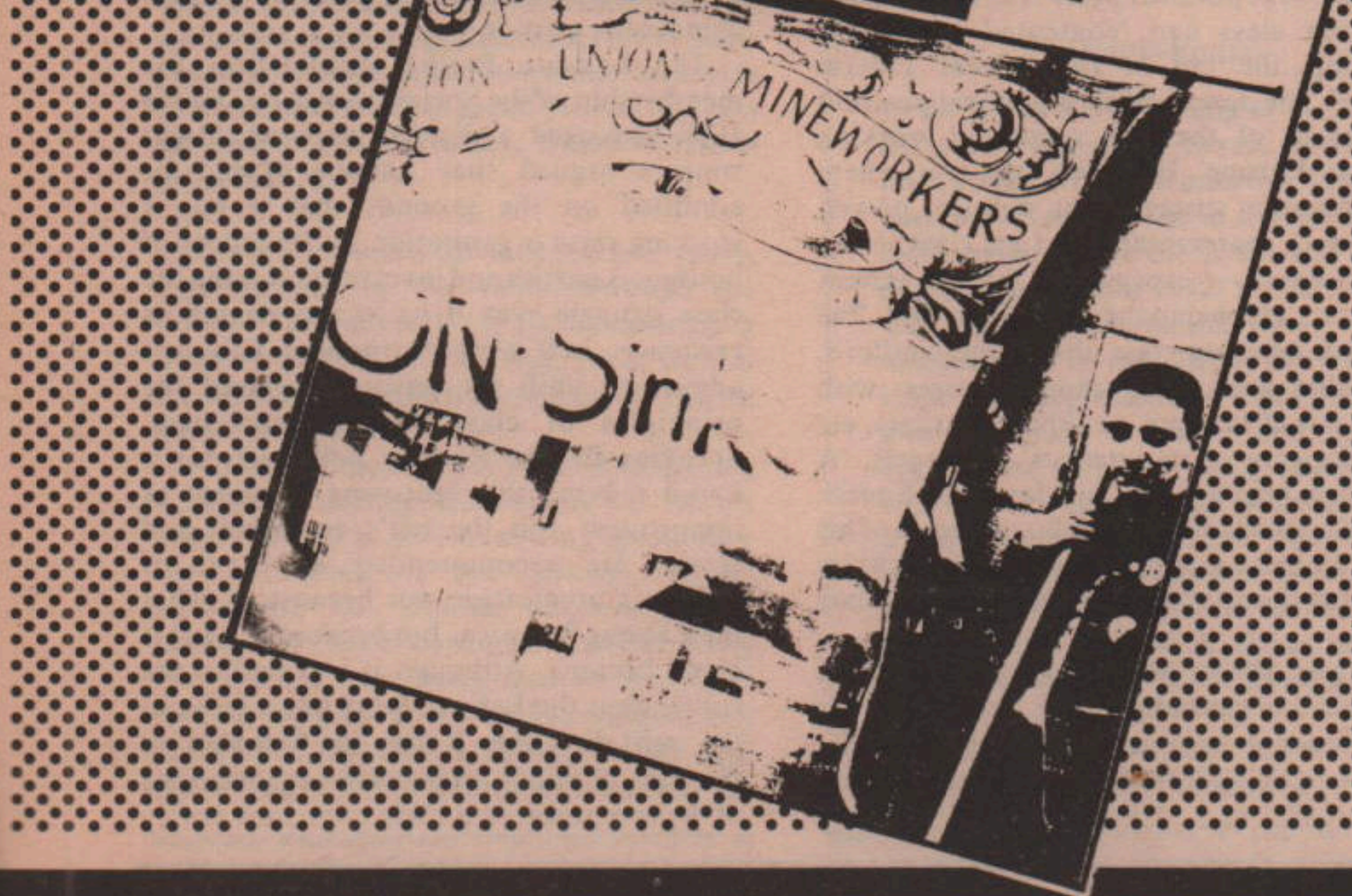
Yet Scargill has welcomed the services of new TUC General Secretary Norman Willis and Labour's senior statesman Stan Orme. But they have come to bury the miners' strike, not to win it. Their concerns are directly antagonistic to the needs of striking miners. The labour bureaucrats want to negotiate a compromise to end the strike. The miners are fighting for victory, to save their jobs. Any compromise negotiated by the bureaucrats can only mean defeat for the miners.



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Frank Richards The miners' next step



Where we stand

Before they can take a step forward the miners have to begin to make some fundamental changes in the strategy and organisation of the NUM.

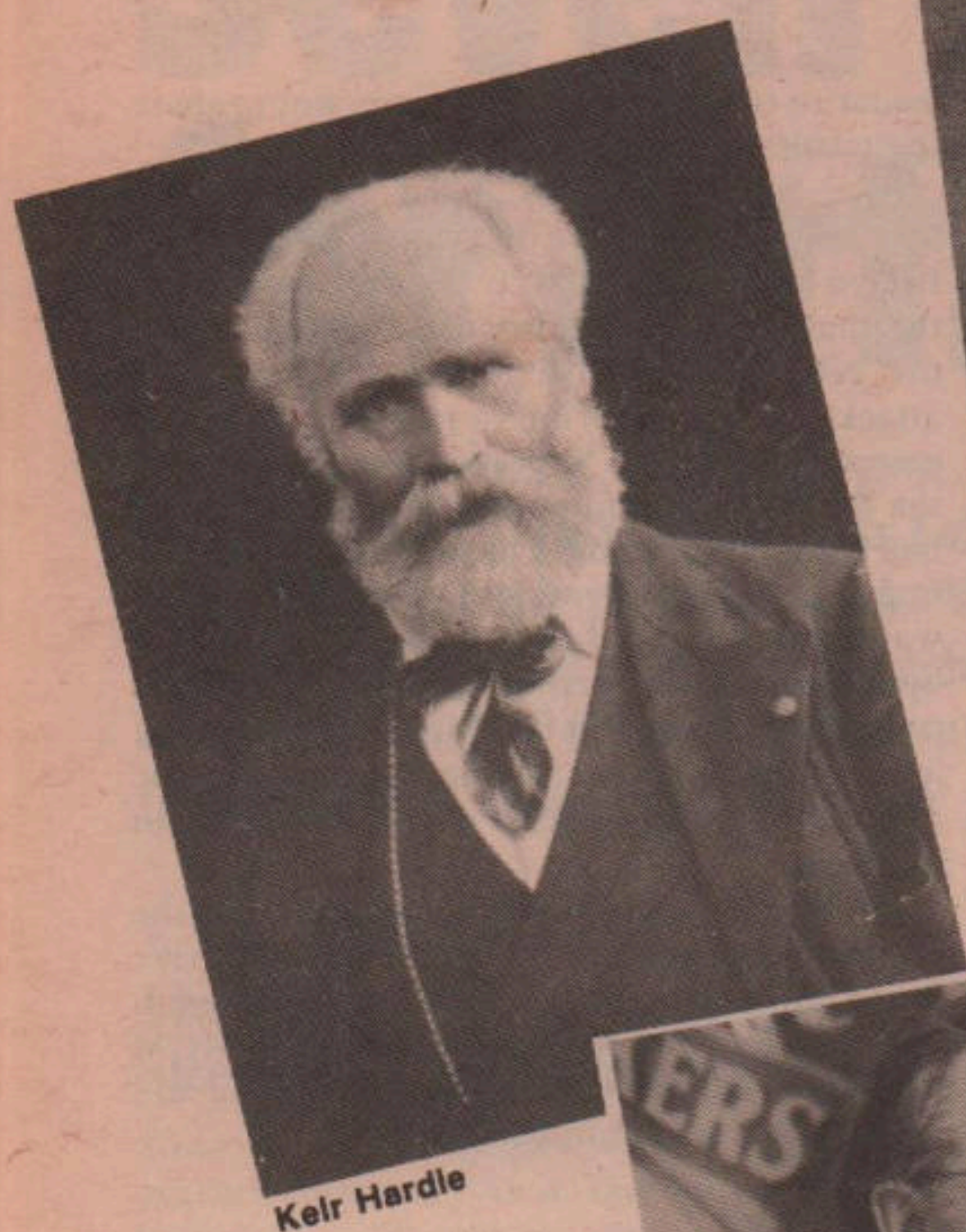
We need to break with the past:

- Throw out the *Plan for Coal*
Both Scargill and MacGregor swear by this bible of collaboration but it codifies a commitment to disaster for miners.
- Boycott colliery review procedures
Pit review procedures mean consultations that pave the way to pit closures; to fight the bosses we need an independent union with no ties to the employers.
- We need a basic programme of demands, beginning from resistance to MacGregor's closure plan:
 - no pit closures, no redundancies — every worker who leaves must

- be replaced
- a nationally agreed basic living wage and an end to divisive area productivity deals
- mass meetings — democratic decision making and accountable leaders
- strike committees — including activists, women and other workers

We need a fighting union:

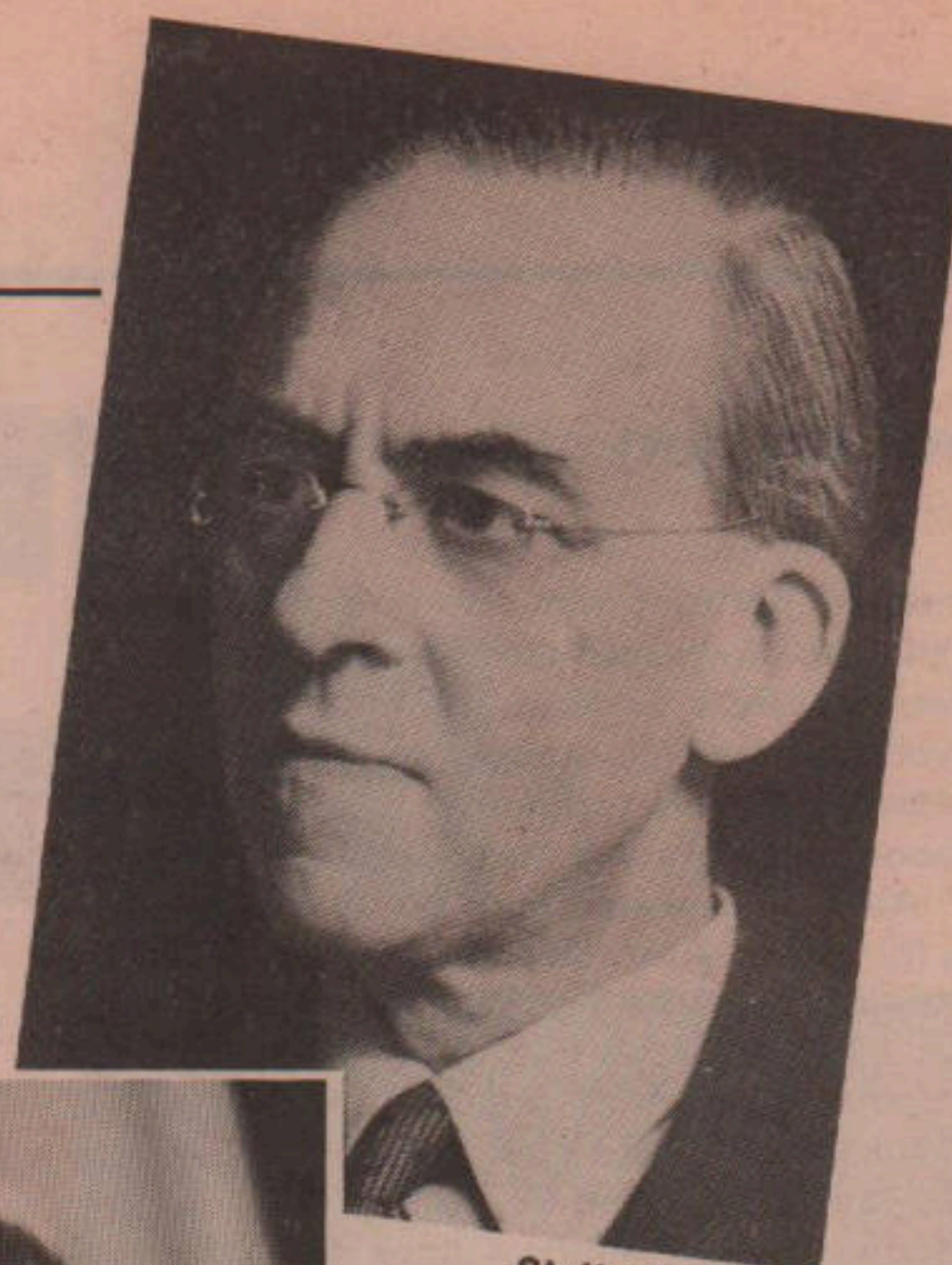
- regular elections for all officials
- an end to craft divisions
- a representative executive
- an independent NUM — boycott all links with bosses and quangos
- one union for energy workers.



Keir Hardie



Victor Grayson



Stafford Cripps



Aneurin Bevan



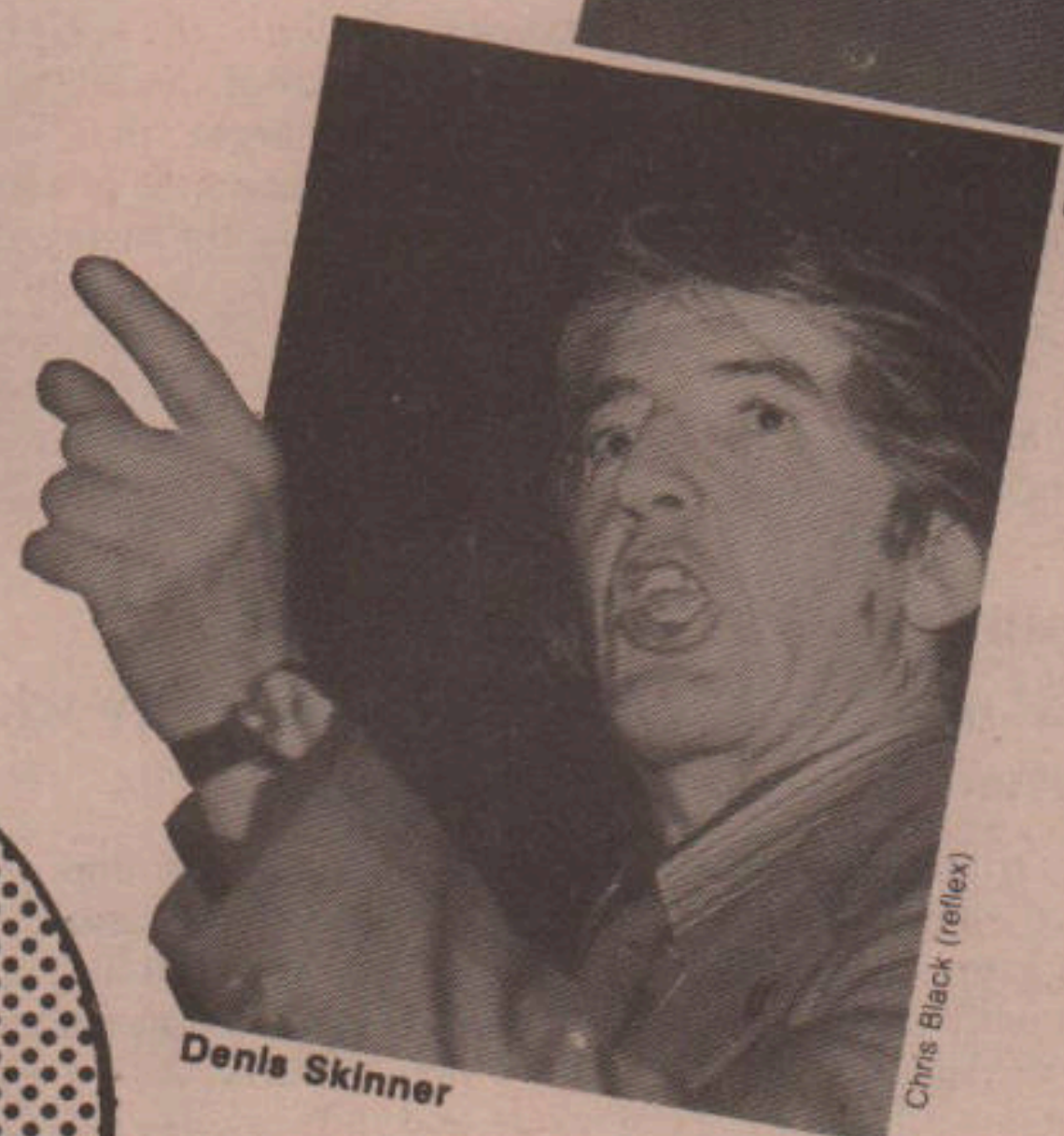
Chris Black (reflex)

Eric Heffer



Chris Black (reflex)

Tony Benn



Chris Black (reflex)

Denis Skinner

The old and the new: Labour left wingers have been trying to change the Labour Party for 80 years without success

When you can build a revolutionary party... Why build the Labour Party

Supporters of the Revolutionary Communist Party are often asked how can they justify refusing to join the Labour Party and work within it? We can best reply by asking supporters of the British left a more pertinent question. Given the record and current performance of the Labour Party, how can they justify continuing to support it?

LAST MONTH *Socialist Organiser*, the paper of one of the Labour Party's left-wing entrust factions, commented on the danger of militant striking miners tearing up their membership cards 'because they think Neil Kinnock is behaving like the political equivalent of a scab'. *Socialist Organiser* regards the miners' revulsion for the Labour Party as 'understandable' but regrettable. It urged militant miners to pursue a different course:

'Striking miners should not be leaving the Labour Party. They should be flocking into it, to help the serious left fight the right wing and the Kinnock-spirited left.'

The article continued, providing a summary of the dominant approach of the British left to the Labour Party which is worth quoting at some length:

'The trade unions need a reliable, honest, militant, and principled political wing, led by leaders who have all those qualities. The Labour Party is the political wing of the trade unions. Miners should take part in the continuing fight to reclaim it for the working class, out of the hands of current politicians. Despite Neil Kinnock, the Labour Party

has helped the miners, though of course it would be a far greater help if it had leaders with guts and properly strung backbones - Tony Benn or Eric Heffer or Denis Skinner, for example.'

We will come back to *Socialist Organiser* and its comments on the Labour Party's role in the miners' strike, but first let's look at the general orientation towards the Labour Party that it embodies.

Labour affinities

Socialist Organiser is critical of the Labour Party, but it is critical from the standpoint of a group that supports the party and is actively committed to building up its membership and influence. Its criticisms of the Labour Party are concentrated on the right wing and on the leadership. It upholds the left of the parliamentary party as a real alternative to the existing leadership. This approach is common to other left-wing groupings in the Labour Party such as the Militant Tendency and the Socialist League.

Left-wing organisations such as the Workers' Revolutionary Party and the Socialist Workers' Party are formally independent of Labour. They draw the line

at joining and building the Labour Party. But they also extend 'critical support' to Labour, especially at election times. They also view the Labour left more sympathetically than the right. Supporters of all these groups regard themselves as Marxists and Leninists and mostly as Trotskyists too. Yet their orientation to the Labour Party is alien to the Marxist and Bolshevik tradition in Britain.

As early as 1881 Friedrich Engels urged the English working class to establish an independent political party. The fact that the working class had 'contented itself with forming...the tail of the "Great Liberal Party"', he described as 'a political position unworthy of the best organised working class of Europe'. He noted that 'everywhere the labourer struggles for political power, for direct representation of his class in the Legislature — everywhere but in Great Britain'. He bemoaned the fact that 'the English working class allows the landlord, capitalist and retail trading classes, with their tail of lawyers, newspaper writers, etc to take care of its interests' (F Engels, 'A working men's party' in Marx and Engels, *Articles on Britain*). In the last 10 years of his life Engels encouraged all tendencies towards the establishment of a working class party.

Engels' efforts were in vain. A number of socialist organisations — including the Independent Labour Party and the Social Democratic Federation — were launched in the 1880s and 1890s, but no effective

working class party emerged. It was not until 1900 that the trade union leaders set up the committee to push their interests in Parliament that renamed itself the Labour Party in 1906. Although the new party was supported by workers and socialists it was itself neither working class nor socialist. It was directly sponsored and controlled by a labour bureaucracy that had already drawn closer to the employers and the state than it was to the rank and file. The bureaucrats' political outlook was closer to the British Liberal Party than to the European social democratic parties.

The Labour Party's application for membership of the Socialist International in 1908 provoked a divided response. Right wingers argued that Labour should be admitted on the grounds that it was a working class organisation, independent of bourgeois parties and involved in waging the class struggle even if its leaders denied its existence. Left wingers opposed Labour's admission until the party recognised the principles of class struggle socialism. Speaking for the Russian Bolshevik party, Lenin rejected the right-wing argument as opportunist and the left's as formal and static. He recommended approval of Labour's application not because of what the Labour Party was but because of what it could become. Although it was tied to the ruling class the Labour Party was a move in the right direction. It was 'the first step on the part of really proletarian organisations of Britain towards a class conscious policy

and towards a socialist workers' party'. (VI Lenin, 'Meeting of the International Socialist Bureau', *Collected Works*, vol 15).

Independence

Lenin repeatedly urged British socialists to go beyond their organisational break with the Liberal Party and forge an independent political approach. He constantly criticised the policies of the Independent Labour Party, which now formed the left flank of the Labour Party. Focusing on the key word in its title, Lenin wrote that the ILP was 'independent only of socialism and dependent on Liberalism'. The strictures of the Bolsheviks reached a climax in the years after 1914. On the outbreak of the First World War, the leaders of the Labour Party and the leaders of European social democracy supported the imperialist policies of their respective national ruling classes and betrayed the international proletariat.

For the Bolsheviks the First World War was a watershed. It marked the total capitulation of the social democratic parties (including the Labour Party) to the class enemy. To move forward the working class had now to establish new communist parties separate from the old socialist parties of the labour bureaucracy. Once they had seized power in Russia in 1917, the Bolsheviks made the formation of a new Communist International to replace the discredited Socialist International a top priority.

Britain was one of the world's leading powers and had a highly organised working class movement. Lenin and the Bolsheviks devoted considerable energy to promoting the formation of a communist party in Britain. Lenin advised British communists to follow a distinctive anti-capitalist line on all political issues:

'In Great Britain the communists should constantly, unremittingly and unswervingly utilise parliamentary elections and all the vicissitudes of the Irish, colonial and world-imperialist policies of the British government, and all other fields, spheres and aspects of public life.' (VI Lenin, 'Left-wing' communism, an infantile disorder, 1920)

Lenin was unrelenting in his condemnation of the Labour Party. It was a 'thoroughly bourgeois party led by reactionaries'. It was 'an organisation of the bourgeoisie which exists to systematically dupe the workers' (VI Lenin, 'Speech on affiliation to the British Labour Party', *Collected Works*, vol 31). Lenin urged a clear break with the Labour approach, advising British communists to work 'in a new way, in a communist way, in the spirit of the Third (communist), not the Second (reformist) International' ('Left-wing' communism).

Following Lenin's death Trotsky maintained the continuity of the Marxist tradition. In his writings on Britain in the twenties Trotsky rated the issue of building the Communist Party as the 'question of questions'. He emphasised that the Communist Party could only be built 'in the process of a permanent and irreconcilable struggle' against the politics of 'the conservative bureaucracy in the trade unions and in the Labour Party'.

'The Communist Party will prepare itself for the function of leadership only by a merciless criticism of the entire dominating staff of the English labour movement, only by a constant unmasking of its conservative, anti-proletarian, imperialist, monarchic, lackeyish function in all fields of social life and the class movement.' (Leon Trotsky, *Where is Britain going?*, 1925)

The need to build an independent party, from scratch in the 1880s, through the Labour Party up to 1914, and by destroying it after the First World War, is the central theme of the Marxist tradition on the British labour movement.

A second theme that runs through the writings of leading Marxists on the British Labour Party is an unremitting hostility to the left wing of the official labour movement. Keir Hardie was one of the founders of the Independent Labour Party and the Labour Party and he has been revered by generations of left wingers as a pioneer of British socialism. Engels had scant respect for his moralistic socialism, his

chauvinism and his opportunism. He dismissed him as 'an over-cunning Scot whose demagogic artfulness one cannot trust' (Kenneth O Morgan, *Keir Hardie: radical and socialist*, 1975).

In Lenin's day Ramsay MacDonald was one of Labour's leading politicians. He was respected by the left because he took an

equivocal pacifist position during the First World War. He supported the British side discreetly rather than with the outspoken jingoism of the other Labour leaders. Lenin regarded MacDonald's position with contempt. He condemned him as 'a thorough faced bourgeois pacifist and compromiser', comparing him and his

continental counterparts with 'bourgeois liars, sophists and pedants' (VI Lenin, 'Report at the Second Congress of the Communist International, 1920', *Collected Works*, vol 31).

Trotsky was equally scathing in his polemics against the Labour left of the twenties. He concentrated his fire on George

'We are not going to take our instructions from any outside body unless we agree with them.'

Labour leader Ramsay MacDonald puts the left straight at the 1928 Labour Party conference



Can it be changed?

The faith and the hope that the Labour Party can be transformed into a genuinely working class party has sustained generations of left-wing activists. Their experience of trying to change the Labour Party is eloquent testimony to the impossibility of this project. The left may win occasional battles, but in the long run it always loses out to the right. Prominent left wingers who have made even minor challenges to the leadership have found themselves suppressed or expelled.

Victor Grayson was returned as the independent socialist MP for Colne Valley at a by-election in 1907. He was an outspoken campaigner for the unemployed and he staged disruptive protests in the House of Commons. Grayson was shunned by the Parliamentary Labour Party and became isolated and ineffectual. In 1939 the Labour Party expelled Stafford Cripps, then leader of the left. His offence was to circulate a memorandum calling for a union of anti-government parties 'to act together at once for the sake of peace and civilisation' (R Miliband, *Parliamentary socialism*, 1960). Cripps' document made no mention of socialism — he merely wanted faster preparations for war than the Labour leadership.

Witch-hunts

In the fifties the leadership of the Labour left passed to Aneurin Bevan. Bevan had been a minister in the post-war Labour government and he was in line for a more senior post in the sixties had he not died prematurely in 1962. His differences with the Labour leadership were marginal. Yet in the early fifties his circle was suppressed and was forced to meet informally as a secret underground organisation within the party. Many left wingers were hounded out of the party in a wave of investigations and inquiries, expulsions and denunciations at every level (See Mark Jenkins, *Bevanism: Labour's high tide*, 1979). Bevan himself was on the verge of expulsion on a number of occasions.

The latest left faction to receive Labour's witch-hunt treatment is the

Militant Tendency. Militant's politics are little different from the politics of the traditional Labour left. Indeed, Militant has adopted Cripps' enthusiasm for nationalisation and his scheme for introducing the socialist transformation of society by an Act of Parliament. Militant's leaders have none of Grayson's fire but share all of Bevan's chauvinism. This has long been apparent in their condemnation of the national liberation struggle against British imperialism in Ireland. It became particularly clear in their capitulation to jingoism over the Falklands War. Yet Militant calls itself Marxist and Trotskyist and the media has used it as an issue to embarrass the Labour leadership. Thus Foot and Kinnock have been obliged to denounce and suppress Militant and kick its leaders out of the party.

The left always fails for two reasons. The first is that it lacks a coherent political alternative to the Labour leadership. The left holds out the hope that it is possible to defend workers' living standards and rights without fighting the capitalist system. The right is always there to remind it of the harsh realities of life. The left dreams of a better world without a struggle to get rid of the present society. The right never forgets that the price of sustaining the present system is forcing the working class to accept that it must make sacrifices. As Labour's latest policy document *A future that works*, unveiled last month by Roy Hattersley, puts it, Labour cannot 'promise too much too soon'.

When it comes to the crunch the left always succumbs to the right because its alternative is based on wishful thinking, not a commitment to an anti-capitalist programme. In the twenties Trotsky observed that the Labour Party 'continues to be led by the extreme right wing'. He noted that the right wingers are 'victorious despite the fact that the lefts are more numerous'. 'The weakness of the left wingers', wrote Trotsky, 'comes from their lack of cohesion and this arises from their ideological shapelessness'. The right on the other hand has a system, 'they have 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' (Leon Trotsky, *Problems of the British labour movement*, 1926). Behind Roy Hattersley stands the British establishment; and behind Tony Benn stands... Roy Hattersley.

Bureaucrats' party

The second reason why the left fails arises from the nature of the Labour Party. The Labour Party cannot be transformed into a party of the working class because it is bound hand and foot to the trade union bureaucracy. The bureaucracy launched the party, and it controls its headquarters, its finances and its organisation.

In recent years the grip of the bureaucracy has become even tighter and more obvious. The party leadership is now elected by an electoral college in which trade union bloc votes are decisive. The key bloc votes are cast by a handful of people who make the decisions in the same smoke-filled rooms where the Labour leadership has always been decided. Labour Party policy is drawn up at a party conference where the same bloc votes are decisive. Conference proceedings are stage managed by a 'conference arrangements committee' which is controlled by the representatives of five big unions. Even if something goes wrong at conference and the left wins a vote against the leadership, the leader in practice still retains a veto on the contents of Labour's manifesto.

The Labour Party cannot be 'democratised' to serve the rank and file. That would contradict the whole purpose of the organisation, which is to serve the bureaucracy. The entire structure and operation of the party works to frustrate the expression of rank and file interests and to safeguard the concerns of the bureaucracy. While the party managers can tolerate a show of debate at party conferences, the slightest real threat to bureaucratic control will always be met — as it always has been — with bans and proscriptions.



Poplar pacifist George Lansbury



Wheatley



Kirkwood

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Lansbury, still praised by the left today as a pacifist and council campaigner in Poplar, and the Clydeside group of the Independent Labour Party — John Wheatley, James Maxton and David Kirkwood. Trotsky emphasised not what was distinctive about the left wingers, but singled out the crucial views they held in common with right-wing Labour leaders such as railway workers' leader Jimmy Thomas:

'The characteristics of conservatism, religiosity, national conceit, will be found in varying degree in all the present day official leaders, from the extreme right Thomas to the left Kirkwood.' (*Where is Britain going?*, 1925).

Trotsky warned that the radicalism of 'men of the type of Lansbury, Wheatley and Kirkwood' is 'bounded by democracy and religion and poisoned with a national conceit that completely subjects them to the British bourgeoisie'.

Marxists' hostility to the left followed from their commitment to building an independent working class party. Left-wing Labour politicians were a barrier because they presented Labour Party politics in a militant style that made the party more appealing to anti-capitalist workers. But on all key issues the programme of the left was the same as that of the right. The difference between left and right was one of form not one of content. While opportunist politicians tried to tell militant workers that they offered something different, Marxists ceaselessly pointed out that the Labour left was selling the same old product with a different packaging. This approach was essential to expose the dead-end strategy put forward by the reformist left and to convince workers that their true interests lay down the revolutionary road.

The Bolshevik strategy for Britain was to build an independent communist party. Its aim was to replace the Labour Party as the leading organisation of the working class — not to transform the Labour Party or to change its leadership. 'It would be completely erroneous to imagine that the Independent Labour Party is capable of



Huffing Hattersley: condemning violence means scabbing on the miners

Labour and the miners' strike

The role of the Labour Party in the miners' strike brings out the different styles of the right and left and the division of functions between the two wings of the party. For the Labour leadership the key thing is to present the approach of an alternative government.

In his comments on the strike Neil Kinnock had been at pains to present himself as a potential Prime Minister, no matter how unlikely a prospect that appears. He can express sympathy for the miners, but only insofar as he interprets their union's fight as one for the best interests of the British coalmining industry, not as a battle for jobs regardless of the coal board's account books. Kinnock's most important concern is to condemn miners' attempts to resolve the dispute in the same way as the government — by force. Picket line militancy is an embarrassment to Labour's attempt to project a respectable electoral image.

The main thrust of Kinnock's intervention is to push the miners' leaders into negotiating a return to work on terms that can only lead to massive job losses. As many miners have recognised, the role of Kinnock and his messenger boy Stan Orme has been the equivalent of that of scabs crossing the picket lines. But because they have much more influence, the Labour leaders' actions have been much more damaging.

Labour swamp

The left criticises Kinnock but argues that the Labour Party as a whole has helped the miners. Left-wing Labour MPs have spoken on hundreds of miners' platforms and local Labour Parties have collected money and food for the miners and their families. Many Labour Party supporters genuinely want the miners to

win and have worked to achieve this end. But their activities must be set in the context of the national role of the Labour Party in the miners' dispute.

In the first two months of the strike, when it had a forward momentum and victory was still possible, the Labour Party sat on the fence. Virtually no local solidarity activity was undertaken by the Labour Party in March and April. After May the divisions among the miners became consolidated and most of the Notts miners stayed at work. The strike lost momentum and the prospect of victory receded. Now the Labour Party became actively involved in the strike. At national level it tried to press the NUM leaders into settlement talks with the coal board. And at local level in the coalmining areas Labour Party activists built up the links with miners that were essential to allow the Labour leaders to play their role as mediators between strikers and bosses.

Some miners' families may have benefitted from Labour's food collections. But the major beneficiaries were Kinnock, Orme and company who were working harder than 'Silver Birch' to betray the strike. The good intentions of hundreds of Labour Party supporters cannot be separated from the potentially disastrous consequences of the Labour leadership's attempts to reconcile the NUM leaders to the demands of the coal board.

The fact that striking miners have been threatening to tear up their Labour Party membership cards suggests a growing recognition of Labour's treacherous role among miners. Now is the time to begin to offer them a real alternative party, not to offer them the tired and cynical apologies of generations of Labour politicians and point them back into the swamp of Labourism.

developing into a revolutionary party of the proletariat', wrote Trotsky in 1925. The task was to build the Communist Party and to destroy the Labour Party. All tactical discussions about how communists should work in practice with regard to the Labour Party followed from the strategic objective of building the Communist Party at Labour's expense. Lenin's comments about affiliation to the Labour Party and on electoral tactics towards the Labour Party and Trotsky's later remarks on communist tactics towards the TUC and Labour leaders during the 1926 General Strike all assumed that building an independent workers' party was the top priority. Indeed, Trotsky criticised the Stalinist leadership of the Communist International in 1926 for its attempt 'to supplant the growth of influence of the Communist Party by skilled diplomacy in relation to the leaders of the trade unions'.

Since the twenties the British left has lost sight of the goal of building an independent party. The Stalinist degeneration of the Communist Party in parallel with the decline of the international communist movement soon destroyed its early promise. The left has increasingly turned back towards the Labour Party. Over the years the traditional Marxist approach to the Labour Party has been turned upside down. The left has become absorbed with tactical manoeuvres towards the Labour Party and lost sight of the original object of the exercise. For 50 years the left has argued about whether or not to vote Labour and on what terms, about whether or not to join the Labour Party and how. It has debated affiliation or entristment, abstentionism or liquidation into the party. But it has forgotten that for the Bolsheviks all these issues were secondary to Trotsky's 'question of questions' — how to build a revolutionary party and destroy the influence of the Labour Party?

Fearful of coming clean and arguing that Lenin and Trotsky got it wrong, the sages of the British left will respond that times have changed since 1916 or 1926. But the changing times make the case for building an independent workers' party even more urgent and the prospects for giving the death blow to the Labour Party better than at any time since the early twenties.

Labour in power

How has the Labour Party changed over the past half century? In the early twenties the Labour Party was a relatively new and rising party. It was untested by either the British establishment or by the working class. Since it formed its first brief minority administrations in 1924 and 1929 Labour has enjoyed five spells in government — 1945-50, 1950-51, 1964-66, 1966-70 and 1974-79. Both bosses and workers have had plenty of experience of the Labour Party in action. For the ruling class the experience has been generally a positive one.

The Labour Party has become a trusted alternative party of government and its leaders respected establishment figures. Labour proved its fitness to govern — its deference to capitalist demands — in 1924. It helped British capitalists through the difficult slump years from 1929 to 1931. After 1945 Labour provided solid backing for the post-war construction of British industry. Labour was again called upon in the early years of the current recession. It won the acquiescence of the labour movement to wage restraint, austerity cuts and rising unemployment.

Workers' experience of the Labour Party in power has been overwhelmingly negative. In 1931 Labour left office in disgrace after attempting to cut unemployment benefits by 20 per cent. After the war Labour maintained rationing and austerity measures for five years, and used the army regularly against striking workers. In the sixties and seventies Labour governments enforced incomes policies, threatened anti-union laws and pursued repressive policies in Ireland and elsewhere. Labour's record in opposition since 1979 has been even worse than its record in government. Unemployment has soared and the unions have been ravaged. Riots have flared in Britain's black ghettos and war has raged in Ireland. But the Labour Party has been so preoccupied with its petty internal squabbles that it has done nothing to defend working class interests.

Workers' disillusionment with Labour has contributed to the electoral and

organisational collapse of the party. Some workers continue to support the party, but reluctantly, almost apologetically, because they can see no alternative. Only the left has any faith in the Labour Party and in many areas it is only the activities of the left that keep the party going.

How has the Labour left improved since Engels, Lenin and Trotsky turned their invective against its leaders? Trotsky wrote of the left's 'conservatism, religiosity and national conceit'. As the Labour Party has become weaker, especially since its catastrophic General Election defeat in June 1983, the left has become even more conservative. While Kinnock strives to present a middle of the road appeal to the electorate, the left has succumbed to pressure not to rock the boat. Hence at this month's annual conference at Blackpool Militant has agreed to withdraw its candidates for election to the national executive in the cause of unity. The rest of the left will be half-heartedly trying to conserve the existing system for reselecting MPs. This gives power to activist cliques and is to be replaced by the leadership's new scheme for giving effective power to the sitting MP. Today's left is so conservative that it refuses even to defend itself against witch-hunts or attacks on its own past achievements.

Trotsky pointed out that the religious prejudices expounded by Lansbury and the Clydesiders were one indication of their ideological subservience to the ruling class. What would he have made of Tony Benn's frequent sermonising on Christian morality or Eric Heffer's devotion to the Church of England? And when it comes to 'national conceit' today's left yields nothing to its chauvinist forebears. At a Broad Left rally outside last month's TUC conference in Brighton Denis Skinner fulminated against Thatcher's parallel between the mighty British miners and 'those little Argentinians' who skulked in the Malvinas under the vastly superior firepower of British imperialism. Reading the writings of Lansbury and the rest it is difficult to argue that the left has got much worse. But listening to today's left it is impossible to discern any improvement.

In Lenin's day the Labour Party was a more dynamic and heterogeneous political force than it has since become. Its ruling bureaucracy aspired to a higher standing within the British establishment but its position was by no means guaranteed. In 1926 the employers and the government joined forces to teach the Labour leaders a harsh lesson and to confirm their inferior status. It took another 20 years and another major war before the labour bureaucrats became a full estate of the realm. In the early twenties the bureaucracy could not ignore intense rank and file militancy on the trade union front and on the issue of unemployment. The Communist Party contained the hard core of the most militant and politically conscious workers — its problem was to win the mass of workers away from the Labour Party. Lenin's tactical advice to the early Communist Party was to affiliate to the Labour Party and to give it critical support in elections. This aimed to give the advantage to the Communist Party in those rapidly changing times.

Labour in decay

Today the Labour Party is a stagnant and fairly homogeneous political formation. Its leading elite is part of the furniture of the House of Commons, Whitehall, Westminster Abbey, and Robin Day and Brian Walden interview shows. Labour leaders are kept under pressure by the bosses and their media. But this is more to keep them in a place they have long accepted than to drive them out of the system. The Social Contract and five years of ineffectual opposition have demobilised rank and file resistance to the labour bureaucracy. Workers continue to vote Labour without enthusiasm or expectations. The party's only active support comes from middle class professionals in the quango sector. Meanwhile, the old Communist Party is passing through an agitated phase of its senile dementia.

To justify joining or supporting the Labour Party today the onus is on the left to explain how the party has improved. Is it not obvious that, far from improving, the Labour Party has in fact degenerated even further? It follows that the particular tactics recommended by the Bolsheviks in the twenties are no longer appropriate.

Before the Labour Party ever formed a government it was reasonable to argue that revolutionaries should help to put it in office the better to expose its reactionary character to the working class. The fact that communists had already organised the leading sections of the working class in a party that constituted a distinctive alternative to Labour made the Bolsheviks' tactics feasible. Now the Labour Party has been in government seven times and fully demonstrated its bankruptcy. Two successive general election defeats, the split to form the Social Democratic Party, and other internal divisions have reduced it to an ineffectual rump. The problem, however, is that there is no developed working class party that can present itself as a realistic alternative to the Labour Party.

The working class needs to build a new party now — not to waste its energies trying to return Labour to government in 1987 or 1988. Workers need a working class party today much more than they need another Labour government in the future. We need a real left-wing party that can fight the capitalist system in defence of trade union rights, the unemployed, women and blacks. Now is the time to build a revolutionary party, not to resuscitate the sick body of Labourism.

A workers' party

This brings us back to *Socialist Organiser*. This entrust faction which calls itself Trotskyist says that the unions need 'a reliable, honest, militant and principled political wing'. It should be clear that the Labour Party has none of these qualities — unless its leaders' consistent loyalty to the British establishment is taken into account. This is at least reliable and at times militant, even if it is dishonest and unprincipled. But does the left which *Socialist Organiser* upholds have these qualities in any greater supply?

Can the working class rely on the Labour left figures recommended by *Socialist Organiser*? Where were they when Thatcher dispatched the task force to the South Atlantic? They were silent until the troops were half way around the world and then they quibbled about the methods used to bring Argentina to Britain's heel. Where were Benn, Heffer and Skinner when Thatcher starved 10 Irish hunger-strikers to death in 1981? Not one spoke out in defence of Bobby Sands and his comrades' demands for political status. Where were they when young blacks fought with police in every British city? They were sitting again in silence, wringing their hands over the demise of the British bobby.

Is the Labour left honest? Do they tell the working class the truth? Liverpool's Militant-dominated Labour council recently made a compromise in its conflict with the government over its rate support grant. There is nothing wrong in principle with workers' representatives accepting compromises in the course of the class struggle. As it happens this was a bad compromise on a moderate demand. But much worse than making a bad compromise is the left's attempt to present it to the working class as a victory. Yet this is how Militant and other sections of the Labour left (although not factions with a grudge against Militant) presented the Liverpool settlement. This sort of dishonesty is typical of the traditional Labour left and has done much to discredit not only the Labour Party but left-wing politics in general.

What about the left's principles? These are difficult to discern. It is far easier to identify the absence of principles which workers need in their political leaders. The Labour left is not anti-imperialist, although it occasionally complains about the excesses of imperialist barbarism — the sinking of the Belgrano, the use of plastic bullets in Belfast, Cruise missiles. The Labour left does not support anti-imperialist movements, unless they have the discretion to attack foreign governments such as South Africa or the USA, not Britain like the IRA. The Labour left is not anti-capitalist, though it dislikes monopolies and multinationals, the City of London and rich speculators. It is in favour of state enterprise and small businesses, especially sweatshop co-ops. The only real principle the Labour left has is its commitment to the Labour Party. For the left, the unity and success, or even the survival, of the Labour Party comes before everything — including the interests of the working class.

Mike Freeman

What is sectarianism?

The left has defined sectarianism as a refusal to support the Labour Party. But sectarianism means putting the concerns of a particular organisation before the interests of the working class. The left assumes that the interests of the Labour Party and those of the working class are the same. The record shows not only that rank and file workers do not share the same interests, but that their interests are in conflict.

Centre ground

The left's identification of the labour movement with the Labour Party reveals its ignorance of the past, its fatalism in the present and its pessimism for the future. The Labour Party has reached its present position in British society as a result of 50 years of defeats and setbacks for the working class movement. Its ineffectual leadership, its pathetic performance in opposition, its irrelevance to every important struggle, are all expressions of the decay of working class politics. The Labour Party, with its careerist, corrupt, and opportunist politicians, sums up all that is rotten in the traditions of the British labour movement. Yet the left views this end product of decades of degeneration as the apogee of political achievement for the British proletariat.

Kinnock's strategy to save the Labour Party reveals the antagonism between the party's policies and workers' needs. To stand any chance of winning an election, in Kinnock's view, the Labour Party must appeal to the centre ground, to middle of

the road public opinion. This means that workers who are forced to fight the police on picket lines to save their jobs will get no support from the Labour Party. It means that women or blacks who fight back against harassment or discrimination will find Labour looking the other way in embarrassment. It means that the Irish people will have to carry on fighting British terror alone. The Labour Party will have to make it perfectly clear to the press and television that it is opposed to violence — when it is used by the oppressed.

Left flank

While Kinnock betrays the working class on every issue the left will criticise him, and help to prevent the Labour Party from being totally discredited. But the left will not criticise too strongly, because it knows that Labour must stay united, and it is the left's responsibility to keep the party together.

The left has one other function for the labour bureaucracy. That is to protect the Labour Party from those who argue that it is way past time to put an end to the charade of Labourism and time to build a real workers' party. This is a mortal threat to the Labour Party and its loyal left-wing servants respond ferociously. They are ready to churn out the smear 'sectarian' and will resort to lies, slanders and endless manoeuvres to try to block the rise of a revolutionary communist party. But we know that they are the real sectarians and that while they represent the past of the labour movement, we represent its future.



Hitting Labour where it hurts: RCP candidate Dave Hallsworth fighting for workers' rights at the polls

Gail Daniels (reflex)

What we give and what we get



Chris Black (reflex)

In 1983 115 women joined 1203 men at the annual TUC conference and there was very little debate about issues of concern to women workers. At last month's TUC conference in Brighton there were more women delegates, but there was even less discussion about what the unions are doing for women.

For the union bureaucrats the three per cent increase in the proportion of women delegates was an indication of progress in the fight for women's rights. But 37 more women delegates to the TUC are scarcely an adequate representation of the 40 per cent of union members who are women.

Women are in the front line of Tory attacks on jobs and living standards. Yet the unions have made no progress whatsoever in defending women:

- Women are losing their jobs twice as fast as men and bear a disproportionate share of the burden of mass unemployment.
 - Women make up 40 per cent of the workforce but are ghettoised into a narrow range of second-rate jobs.
 - Women earn only 65 per cent of men's wages and make up 60 per cent of Britain's four million low-paid workers.
 - About 40 per cent of all women workers work part-time for miserable rates of pay, in lousy conditions, with little or no legal protection.
 - In declining private sector industries such as textiles, women are being employed on temporary, short-term contracts to fill in for redundant workers during busy periods.
 - Women are bearing the brunt of government attacks on the public sector — in the health service, the civil service, teaching and local government.
- Kate Marshall looks at what the unions have to offer women workers and outlines what we should demand of them.

NOWADAYS TRADE UNION bureaucrats make a lot of noise about women's rights and sexual equality. Nupe deputy general secretary Tom Sawyer recently urged the unions to 'listen to their women members', arguing that 'how the unions respond to the needs of women will be crucial for their future' (*New Socialist*, September). Other union leaders have expressed a similar concern for the needs of their women members.

Some unions have taken sexist language such as 'chairman' out of the rule book (NUT), produced leaflets about sexual harassment (Nalco) and put adverts in the feminist magazine *Spare Rib* (Nupe). Most unions have organised special courses for women shop stewards and creche facilities at national conferences. A few, mainly professional unions such as the NUT and Natfhe, give baby-sitting money to women workers with children so they can attend branch meetings. A spate of paper resolutions has urged the unions to ensure greater participation by their own members. But the unions have failed to take action on the issues that really count.

Colourful brochures on how to organise workplace nurseries (Nalco) which avoid the crucial issue of how to force employers to pay for them are not much use to women workers. Most unions don't even provide free nursery facilities for their own employees, never mind organise a campaign to force their members' employers to provide them. So why do the unions bother

with fine words if they are meaningless in practice? Engineering workers' leader Terry Duffy let the cat out of the bag when he admitted that 'recruiting non-unionised women is one of the few possible growth areas for the union' (*Financial Times*, 6 March). And as left-wing Nupe bureaucrat Tom Sawyer explained, unions which have a large female membership such as his own need to be responsive to their demands if they want to hold on to them. Trade union membership fell by half a million last year in line with massive job losses. To stem the tide the unions need to convince women workers that they will look out for them. Two issues have become popular with the unions over the last two years: low pay and sexism.

Low pay = low priority

Women's jobs tend to be low-paid, unskilled, insecure, part-time or temporary. Women get low pay because they are second class workers. Few women earn enough to survive independently. Half of all women workers get less than two thirds of national average earnings and 80 per cent of part-timers earn less than the hourly equivalent of two thirds of the national average. Since the Equal Pay Act came into force in 1975 the gap between men's and women's earnings has changed very little. The average hourly pay of full-time women workers is 74 per cent of men's compared with 72 per cent in 1975.

Women's lack of economic independence

is the bedrock of the modern nuclear family. As long as women are forced to enter into relationships and marry merely to survive, the capitalist class need not worry about the disappearance of the family. Media reports about the unprecedented number of marital breakdowns are part of the drive to persuade the public that whether a woman is a 'worker' or a 'housewife', her true role in life is in the home. This familial arrangement suits the bosses and is not challenged by the unions which do not accept women's right to economic independence. Unions often defend part-time work because it allows women to combine their domestic responsibilities with a job.

In recent years the TUC has made great play of defending women workers through its campaign against low pay. There are two aspects to this campaign. The first is to press for government action to protect workers on low incomes. The 1983 TUC agreed to initiate discussion on the advisability of pressing for the introduction of a statutory national minimum wage. In the past year the union bureaucrats have accepted that there is little likelihood of progress down this road. The government's declared policy is to allow market pressures to force wages down as far as possible. Last month's TUC conference expressed its opposition to 'the concept of incomes which are too low for decent, dignified lives'.

The TUC also expressed its refusal to fight the reality of low pay. It passed a resolution instructing the general council to compile merely a report on low pay and discrimination against women for the 1986 congress — in two years' time. The trade union leaders' appeal to the state to guarantee wage levels is an abdication of their own responsibility to fight for decent wages. It simply raises false hopes that the state can defend workers at the very moment when it is leading the attack against them.

The second aspect of the TUC's low-pay campaign is the promotion of a low-pay threshold as a basis for wage claims. After much deliberation the TUC settled on the figure of two thirds of the national average (male) wage — roughly £98 a week in 1984. The TUC took it as a virtue that 'a target at about this level would also be around the

official poverty line definition for a family'. However, the TUC noted that the target of £98 'seems to be so far above what the really lowest-paid groups of workers already receive as to be of limited relevance' in their wage demands.

A TUC document prepared for its July conference on low pay saw 'no value in setting down policies which will not be seen as practicable by affiliated unions'. The TUC resolved the 'difficult problem' that the £98 might appear to be too high in some sectors by abandoning it. Its July conference merely considered how collective bargaining could be made 'more effective' to help the low paid.

Like the discussion about equal pay in the seventies, the present debate about low pay can only undermine rather than build working class unity against the Tory offensive on wages. The TUC's discussion paper for the July conference argued that higher-paid workers should not seek to emulate larger pay increases won by the low paid. Left-wing Nupe leader Rodney Bickerstaffe stressed that a low-pay policy would involve restraint by higher-paid workers. The TUC added that if better-paid workers tried to match the 'significant increases' implied for low-paid workers in moving to the TUC target 'this could have significant effects on costs and prices and be self-defeating' (*Financial Times*, 16 July).

Many workers will be familiar with this argument. Wage restraint or incomes policies have been sold to the working class in the past on the grounds that they help the low paid. They never have. The only way to improve workers' living standards is to force the bosses to pay, not demand sacrifices of the higher paid. The TUC's arguments reflect the realism of the bosses: wage rises all round are out because profits are too low and wage rises cause inflation. Only a labour movement which starts from what workers need, rather than what the bosses say they can afford, can unite low-paid and higher-paid workers, women, and men, in an effective defence of working class living standards.

Sexist diversions

The labour leaders have learnt a lot from the women's liberation movement. In the seventies the women's movement dropped its original demands for equal pay, free abortion on demand and free 24-hour nurseries. Instead, it took up issues such as rape, pornography and male violence against women. The individualist preoccupations of today's feminist movement results from its inability to link the fight against women's oppression with the fight against capitalism. The TUC's inability to put forward a strategy for

defending working women has led it down the same road as the women's movement. It has even taken over much of the same vocabulary.

The 'feminist' approach of the TUC serves a dual purpose. It relieves the bureaucrats of any responsibility for fighting for the things that women really need. It also effectively divorces the struggle for women's rights from the class struggle — something the union leaders are always keen to avoid.

Out have come the brochures on sexual harassment, the reports on images of women, the calls for men to do their fair share at home and for the removal of sexist language from official union publications. These issues are popular because they reduce the fight against women's oppression to token gestures and make no demands on the state.

In March, the TUC published a report, *Images of inequality*, which criticised the media for reinforcing sexist stereotypes and undermining women's confidence about entering male-dominated jobs. The media and advertising world has more sense than the TUC. It knows there is no point in portraying women as firemen or construction workers when these images contradict people's real experiences. The Labour-controlled Greater London Council often has firewomen pictured in its brochures, but most Londoners have never seen one in a fire engine. Media images reflect rather than cause women's second-class role in the labour market and thus

reinforce the picture of them behind the kitchen sink. Images of women won't change until women's position in society changes. Rather than waste their time trying to persuade the BBC that women should be 'represented fairly and realistically', the unions should put some energy into changing the reality of women's subordinate position in the labour market.

The trade union movement treats the issue of sexual harassment in the same way. The unions can take the occasional hard line with obnoxious men without ever questioning why women are often treated with contempt. Women are sexually harassed because they are seen to occupy an inferior place in society. You can only grope or insult somebody for whom you have no respect. Men are often contemptuous of women because they always seem to be servicing men, at home and at work.

In the debate on sexual harassment at this year's CPSA conference a woman delegate complained from the rostrum that a male delegate had sexually accosted her at a dance the previous night. The union sent him home. This might seem like a right on gesture, but it will not get the average woman, without a microphone and an audience of hundreds, very far. The CPSA can make the headlines with such cheap gestures while failing to do anything about the thousands of women in the civil service who face mass redundancies, attacks on union rights and segregation in the lowest grades.

The unions are content to ask men to improve their language and behaviour or to do more at home. All this is an easy alternative to really challenging women's oppression at home and at work. It only appears to be radical because it questions entrenched views about women's role. In reality, it is reactionary because it blames men, not capitalism, for women's oppression. The TUC's solutions to low pay (men to make sacrifices), to sexism (men to behave better) and to the burden of domestic work (men to share it) neatly avoid taking on the system that consigns women to domestic slavery at home and second class jobs at work.

Women's fightback

Women have joined unions in their thousands and demonstrated their militancy in countless strikes, and they have a right to expect a lot more than they are getting:

- *A living wage*: the unions should base wage claims for every worker on the amount of money required at current prices to feed, house and clothe two adults and two children, with enough left over to have a good time. There may only be a minority of women workers in this situation. But it is a sufficiently large minority to justify making the typical family the basis of wage demands. Indeed, there are many women workers with heavier responsibilities — unemployed husbands, elderly parents,

disabled relatives, large families.

- *No segregation*: the Equal Pay Act has brought women little gain because they remain segregated in a narrow range of jobs in both the public and private sector. Only a fight to end the dual labour market for men and women can make equal pay a reality.

- *Real jobs*: Part-time work only reinforces women's marginal and inferior position in society. The expansion of part-time work also has the general effect of lowering working class living standards and weakening trade union organisation. The unions must fight for full-time jobs for women workers.

- *All-day nurseries, free abortion on demand*: fighting for the full participation of women in the labour market means fighting for the facilities to make this possible. The unions must campaign for all-day nurseries, free abortion on demand and better social welfare and health services to relieve women of the burdens of family life.

- *Break all links!*: the TUC must withdraw from all state bodies which help organise the oppression of women — the Equal Opportunities Commission, the Manpower Services Commission and social security boards.

The unions should make every effort to actively involve women in branch meetings and union life and provide the facilities to make this possible. But women will only start getting involved in large numbers when the unions begin to fight for them.

On an early Friday morning in late September almost 100 people braved torrential rain to join a mass picket organised by striking women cleaners and the Revolutionary Communist Party outside Barking Hospital in East London. The militant and vocal demonstration brought together health workers from other hospitals, workers from other industries and services, students and local supporters in solidarity with the Barking women. The mass picket intimidated the scabs and the police and boosted the morale of the strikers who have been outside the hospital gates nearly as long as the miners have been out of the pits.

The lively mass picket stood in stark contrast to the unions' weekly efforts. These are staid affairs whose numbers have dwindled as the strike has dragged on over the months. Only 58 women remain on strike out of the original 90. The Barking strikers are just as determined to win their dispute now as when they started. But a lot of the heart has been knocked out of the struggle as a result of the union's failure to give a lead and take the sort of action necessary to win. One striker expressed her frustration at the union's lack of leadership:

'Nupe have run this thing wrong right from the beginning. I don't know what they're up to.'

Up against it

The Barking strike began back in March when Crothall's, the private firm which has run cleaning services at the hospital since 1970, submitted a tender for a renewal of its contract. The new deal accepted by the hospital authorities involved a cut of 876 hours' cleaning time and cuts in wages of up to 60 per cent. Sick pay and holidays were also cut. When the cleaners came out on strike in defence of their jobs, management responded by sacking them in the sixth week of the strike.

Crothall's made it clear from the beginning that there was nothing to negotiate about. Rather than back down in the face of this determined stand and intimidation from both police and scabs, the women realised they needed to step up the action to win. They soon discovered that their unions — the GMBATU and Nupe — were not up to it. The GMBATU officials tried to come to an arrangement with Crothall's over terms and conditions for their own members. The women would have none of it. Nupe meanwhile sought to put pressure on Crothall's to continue to recognise the union and negotiate concessions on the proposed cuts in hours and wages. In

The battle of Barking



Barracked at Barking: scabs run the picket line gauntlet

June, unbeknown to the Barking women, Nupe national officials and their cronies in the South-East Region TUC were huddled in secret talks with Crothall's managing director. The bureaucrats offered concessions to Crothall's on the Barking dispute in return for guarantees on the union's right to organise, but Crothall's wouldn't play ball.

The unions have also failed to deliver on their promises of solidarity action. After a tumultuous reception and pledges of

national action at the annual Nupe conference in May, the Barking women believed they were on the way to victory. Nothing came of all the loud noise at Bournemouth. Indeed, it seemed as if Nupe was deliberately obstructing sympathetic action by other workers.

Big bluster

Kitchen staff and porters, most of whom are Nupe members, were right

behind the women at the start of the strike. But the union wasted the opportunity to use their support to bring the hospital to a standstill by summoning them out on half-day and one-day stoppages. In the end, the porters and kitchen staff refused to throw away their wages by supporting what they considered to be ineffective action. Workers at other London hospitals also responded to Nupe's early calls for one-day stoppages. But the union never tried to take it further and go out to win support for all-out action.

Wheeling and dealing

After more than six months of inconclusive action Nupe is pressing for a settlement. At talks in late August, Crothall's offered 30 jobs back and £15 000 to be shared out among the remaining 58 strikers. The women refused to countenance working with scabs. In mid-September the women heard rumours of new talks on television — as one striker put it, 'the union never tells us what they're up to'. The women believe that Nupe national negotiator Bob Jones will be asking for 58 jobs back on Crothall's terms instead of fighting for the original 90 jobs and restitution of all hours. The local Nupe area organiser Les Perkins has told the women that once back in, their hours will not be enough to keep the hospital clean and Crothall's will be forced to employ more women. Rather than take the action necessary to force the employers' hand, the union bureaucrats indulge in wishful thinking.

The women at Barking have put up a courageous struggle in defence of their jobs and conditions. Their six-month fight has inspired thousands of women workers in the health service and elsewhere facing similar attacks. But they have faced tremendous obstacles in winning, not just in the shape of the bosses but also from their union leaders. Nupe has 700 000 members — two thirds are women and half are part-timers. Most are hospital ancillary workers, cleaners, catering staff and council workers in the front line of the attack on the public sector. Nupe is under pressure to resist this offensive particularly against its women members as its membership rolls are falling fast. But the union bureaucrats are more concerned to preserve their negotiating rights under the private contractors on any terms than to defend their members against the privatisers.

Ruth Bennett

Send donations and messages of support to Barking Hospital Strike Fund, Barking and Dagenham Link, 14 Porters Avenue, Dagenham, Essex.

Women and the unions

Weekend conference

Saturday 3 and Sunday 4 November

10am-8pm at Emmanuel Hall, corner of

Broomsleigh Street and Dornfell Street, London NW6 (nearest West Hampstead)

Sessions on the health service, nurseries, sweatshops, the law, Labour councils, sexual harassment, plus panel discussions led by activists in different unions on women's strikes and how to make the unions fight for women's rights, plus Saturday night social — food, drink and dancing.

The cost of the conference is £4 (£2 unwaged) or £2.50 (£1 unwaged) for one day only. A creche and refreshments will be available.

Write to Kate Marshall, BM RCP, London WC1N 3XX or phone her on 01-274 3951. Make cheques or POs payable to RCP Association.



Their Trotskyism and ours

John Callaghan, *British Trotskyism: theory and practice*, Basil Blackwell 1984, pp255, hbk £19.50. THIS IS THE FIRST attempt to write a serious study of British Trotskyism. Unfortunately, the book suffers from two major flaws. First, Callaghan relies overmuch on documents, pamphlets, newspapers and reviews and therefore presents an analysis of political statements rather than of a social movement. The title of the book is misleading. Except for an occasional reference, there is no discussion of the practice of British Trotskyism. The second defect is one of political approach. Callaghan's superficial understanding of his subject matter leads to a vulgar presentation of Trotskyism.

Trotsky - the idiot

Callaghan follows the formula that has been perfected by academics over the past decade. The idea is to present Leninism as crudely as possible and then criticise it so that the author comes across as a profound thinker. Callaghan succeeds in this endeavour and his brilliant insights contrast favourably with the simplistic views of Lenin.

It is entirely legitimate for an author to give his own interpretation of Lenin. But to attribute views to Lenin that were alien to his thinking is unacceptable. Facts are facts and an interpreter of integrity must ensure that his critique is directed at what Lenin actually said rather than at what other academics claim he said. Callaghan is blind to the facts and we must assume on the most charitable interpretation that he has not read Lenin.

Callaghan condescendingly argues that Lenin and Trotsky had a simplistic and mechanical theory of imperialism and that this is the source of many of the problems of the contemporary left. He writes that 'Lenin assumed that monopoly capitalism signified the demise of competition and economic growth'. If it were true that Lenin and Trotsky believed that imperialism marked the end of competition then they would indeed have been idiots and Callaghan would indeed be a clever chap for pointing out this error. What Lenin said was rather different. He argued vehemently against the view that imperialism leads to the demise of competition:

'Nowhere in the world has monopoly capitalism existed in a whole series of branches without free competition, nor will it exist.... To maintain that there is such a thing as integral imperialism without the old capitalism is merely making the wish father to the thought.' ('Eighth Congress of the Russian Communist Party', *Collected Works*, vol 29)

Using the same procedure, Callaghan attributes to Lenin an absurd theory of reformism:

'We will simply note that by attributing political conservatism among wage earners to the higher standard of living enjoyed by a minority layer within the proletariat, Lenin implies that poverty is the source of the class struggle and revolutionary consciousness, and that the bulk of the workers are only held back from revolution by a corrupt minority.'

Lenin would have dismissed with contempt the notion that 'poverty is the source of the class struggle'. That's why in the absence of documentary evidence Callaghan has to use the term 'implied'.

This grotesque presentation of Lenin's theory is not intended merely to prove Callaghan's erudition. Its main purpose is to validate his contention that the weakness of the British left is the outcome of its dogmatic adherence to the theories of Lenin and Trotsky:

'A review of the central theoretical assumptions and practices of the early Comintern will illustrate the deficiencies of the British far left.'

For revolutionaries the problem is the opposite. The weakness of the British left stems from its rejection of the politics and theory of the early Communist International.

The best thing about Callaghan's book is its faithful review of the debates within the Trotskyist

reviews

movement. Unfortunately, Callaghan misunderstands the nature of these debates. He is irritated by the endless arguments and concludes that British Trotskyism has demonstrated 'a growing tendency to turn to matters of theoretical and programmatic hair-splitting in search of a solution for the practical problems of political isolation'.

British philistinism

In fact, one of the major weaknesses of British Trotskyism has been its disdain for theory. The British left is imbued with the British empiricist's suspicion of theory. Callaghan gives an important illustration of this trend when he cites Socialist Workers' Party leader Tony Cliff's explanation of how he arrived at the theory of state capitalism:

'When I came to the theory of state capitalism I didn't come to it by a long analysis of the law of value in Russia.... Nothing of the sort. I came to it by the simple statement that if the emancipation of the working class is the act of the working class then you cannot have a workers' state without the workers having power to dictate what happens in society.'

Cliff is right: his theory is not a theory but a statement. All the heated discussion among British Trotskyists about the character of the Soviet Union has remained at the level of debating labels — state capitalism versus the degenerated workers' state.

British Trotskyists are so contemptuous of theory that they regard it as an academic indulgence for their intellectual supporters. There has not been one theoretical debate of significance that touches on Britain.

Callaghan is right to note that the tortuous debates within British Trotskyism have a lot to do with the problem of political isolation. British Trotskyism has become the victim of political isolation because of its lack of theoretical clarity. Virtually all the splits and every argument on the left have centred on the question of how to overcome this isolation. To this day, the debates have always been about whether or not to enter the Labour Party, which social group to relate to and how to do it. There have been innumerable debates and Callaghan does a good job in sifting through them. But even a limited inspection shows that all of them have been concerned with tactical issues devoid of any theoretical substance. And that explains the dead end of British Trotskyism. In the absence of theoretical clarity, discussions about tactics lead only to ideological incoherence and ultimately to reformism.

Enter, Enter!

The dismal record of British Trotskyism is a result of its ideological incoherence. The movement's lack of theoretical independence has rendered it incapable of advancing independent proletarian politics. British Trotskyism has never elaborated a political alternative to Labourism. Indeed, for most of its existence British Trotskyism has operated as the most radical component of the Labour left. Thus, in the fifties the group around Gerry Healy (the present leader of the Workers' Revolutionary Party) identified the forces around the left-wing Labour leader Aneurin Bevan as progressive. According to Callaghan and other sources the Healy group worked closely with the Labour left and 'even joined in selling *Tribune*'. The betrayals of Bevan are well known but the WRP has learned nothing and forgotten nothing. Today, WRP members look up to Ken Livingstone and Ted Knight and sell the Labour left newspaper *Labour Herald*.

Even parties that operate outside of the Labour Party are drawn into Labour's orbit. The Socialist Workers' Party prides itself on its organisational independence, but politically it is indistinct from the Labour left. The SWP became an enthusiastic supporter of Tony Benn during his campaign for the deputy leadership of the Labour Party in 1981. *Socialist Worker* declared that 'every militant, everyone with a spark of hope for the socialist transformation of society will support Benn' (13 June 1981). Two weeks later it enthused about how trade union militants had been inspired 'by Benn's stand and are developing an interest in all socialist ideas. It has become easier to sell *Socialist Worker* as a result' (27 June 1981).

Of course, Benn did not have this magical effect on militant workers and *Socialist Worker* did not become any easier to sell. But the fact that the SWP could harbour such illusions and end up worshipping at the altar of Benn was no accident. It was the logical response of a radical left which is overwhelmed and disoriented by its fear of political isolation.

British Bolshevism

Callaghan is oblivious to all this. The problem with the British left is not its subservience to Lenin and Trotsky as Callaghan argues, but its affinity with British Labourism. There is no continuity between the revolutionary tradition of Bolshevism and British Trotskyism. A simple contrast between Trotsky's searing attacks on the miners' leaders in the 1926 General Strike and British Trotskyists' hero-worship of Arthur Scargill in 1984 is a measure of how far the British left has travelled down the reformist road.

Readers of *the next step* should read Callaghan's book. It provides a warning to those who are trying to build a revolutionary movement today. The real issue is not where we stand in relation to this or that writing of Lenin or Trotsky. Even the most brilliant exposition of Bolshevik theory cannot be a substitute for developing Marxist theory in the eighties. The starting point of revolutionary theory cannot be the fear of isolation, only a scientific understanding of the obstacles before us and the potential for change.

What we have to take from Lenin and Trotsky is their relentless determination to pursue the independent interests of the working class. The question of tactics is secondary. Tactical mistakes can always be corrected through the systematic application of Marxist theory. But theoretical confusion cannot be corrected by making tactical adjustments. The history of the British left shows the urgency of building a party in which revolutionary theory can be developed, tested and modified in relation to new developments.

Frank Richards

Sunny Palestine

Shannee Marks, *Where is Palestine?: the Arabs in Israel*, Pluto Press 1984, pp113, pbk £3.95

SHANNEE MARKS is a sociologist and journalist. Most of all, however, she is a tourist. *Where is Palestine?* is a traveller's guide to the slums of Jerusalem and Haifa, and to the villages of the West Bank, Gaza and Golan.

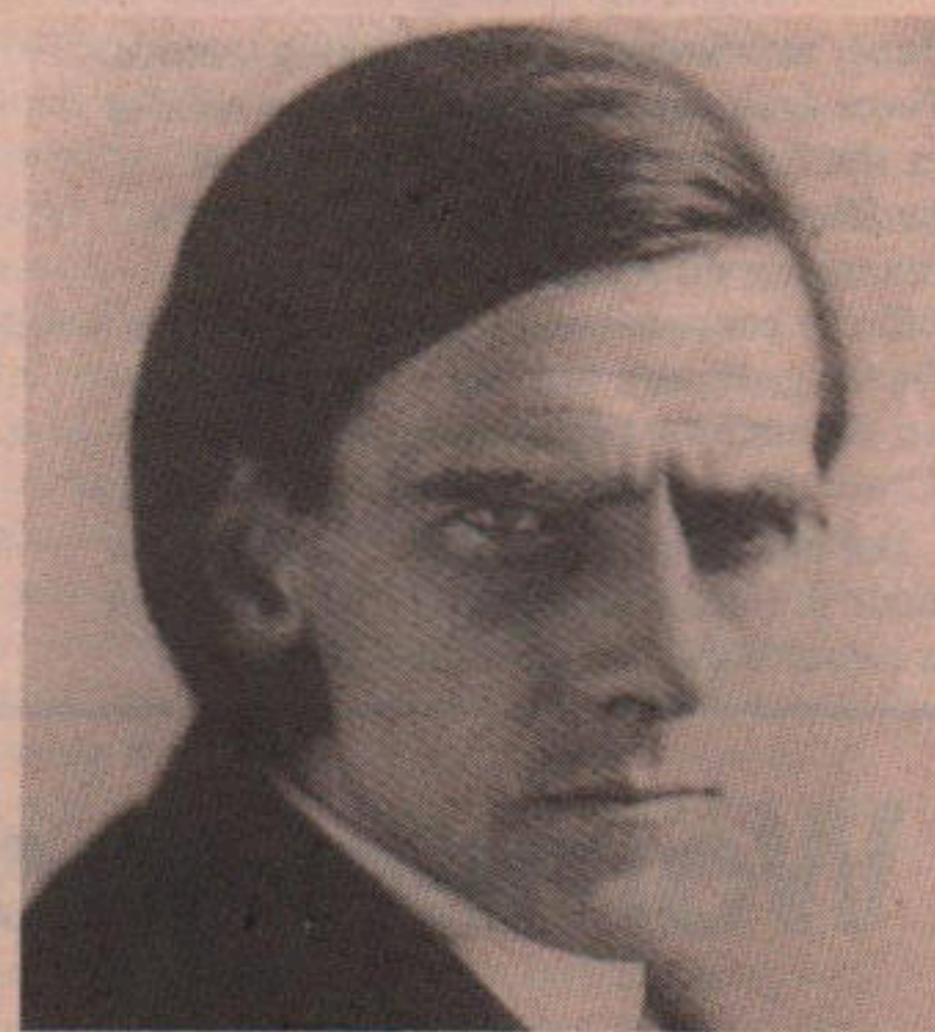
Marks surveys the effects of Israeli occupation: the daily round of military and police repression, the bulldozing of villages, the murder of friends and relatives, and the campaign to suppress Palestinian culture. She constantly interrupts her narrative to remind the reader that *she* is the centre of the story.

Every day illegal Palestinian workers assemble in the 'cattlemarket' in Tel Aviv's bus station hoping to find work for the day on a construction site. Palestinian workers are treated no differently than livestock — except for the heavy police patrols in the 'market'. Marks turns this into a series of photocalls. She recounts the reactions of the workers on the rack to *her*.

Marks hopes her readers will adopt her standpoint of political voyeur. The result is a distasteful account of a cheap holiday in other people's misery.

John Johnston

Radical Scotland?



ILP leading light James Maxton

William Knox ed, *Scottish Labour leaders 1918-1939*, Mainstream Publishing 1984, pp304, hbk £20

THE NOTION THAT the Scottish labour movement is more militant than its English counterpart is widely accepted north of the border, and even among militant workers south of the border. William Knox's excellent book questions the identification of Scottish militancy with the record of the Scottish labour leaders. Knox and his co-authors have written more than 60 concise and scholarly biographies of Scottish Labour MPs, trade union leaders and working class activists. A perceptive introductory essay draws out some of the themes that recur throughout the biographical entries. It provides many useful insights into a period of major defeats for the working class movement.

Knox challenges the idea that it was increasing recruitment from the middle class which led to the acceptance of 'middle class ideologies' in the Scottish labour movement. He argues that most figures in his book were from working class backgrounds but joined a movement which was 'essentially an alliance between the petit-bourgeoisie, the professional classes and the

skilled workers'. They found that 'the labour movement provided avenues of social mobility for its members'. This labour elite generally married women of a higher social status and encouraged its children to join the 'respectable' professions such as law and medicine. Knox explains 'the embourgeoisement of the Scottish labour movement as a consequence of the movement itself, and its political success in becoming a party of government'. Knox's narrow sociological approach cannot provide all the answers. Only a critique of the politics of the Scottish labour leaders can provide a real understanding of how the Red Clydesiders turned pink.

In the 1920s the Independent Labour Party was the dominant force in the Scottish labour movement. The 10 Clydeside ILP members elected to Westminster in 1922 constituted the first battalion of the Labour left. Bridgeton MP James Maxton was its leading light. As ILP chair, Maxton cooperated with the Communist Party and supported left-wing causes until his death in 1946. At the 1932 Bradford ILP conference Maxton was one of the prime movers behind the break with Labour over Ramsay MacDonald's 1931 'betrayal'.

Exponents of the 'radical Scotland' thesis present politicians like Maxton as extremely left-wing. In reality, Maxton succeeded only in discrediting Marxism. Maxton scorned theory, preferring westerns and detective novels to the works of Marx and Lenin. The ILP's socialism was generalised rhetoric about the 'evils' of capitalism and the moral superiority of socialism. Maxton promoted nationalisation as the socialist alternative and the capitalist state as the vehicle for socialist change.

The Communist Party in Scotland never offered a revolutionary alternative to the politics of Labourism. After a while it stopped trying. Most Scottish communists, like Helen Crawford and Tom Bell, ended up ignoring British politics and running 'Friends of the Soviet Union' branches. Scotland's most renowned communist Willie Gallacher called on workers to 'rally behind the Churchill government' during the Second World War and for shop stewards to 'boost production by exposing idleness and inefficiency in the munitions factories'. This was a far cry from Gallacher's days as leader of the Clyde Workers' Committee in 1915 when he hampered the war effort through strikes and go-slows. Workers who emulated these tactics in the Second World War were attacked by Gallacher as 'insane Trotskyists'.

Knox argues that the labour leaders adopted religion and temperance to better themselves. The convergence of temperance and Labourism was a hallmark of the Scottish movement. Most workers were attracted to the Independent Order of Good Templars and other societies because they paid their members good sick pay and funeral benefits. Few shared the campaigning zeal of the remarkable Edwin Scrymgeour, Dundee Labour MP from 1922 to 1931. The widespread influence of religion in the Scottish labour movement reflected the strength of the Catholic and Presbyterian churches. Keir Hardie claimed he learned his socialism in 'the New Testament, where I still find my chief inspiration'. Knox quotes British Socialist Party leader John MacLean's 1918 declaration that 'the mantle of Jesus Christ has fallen on the Bolsheviks'. ILP organiser John Wheatley worked hard to win Irish Catholics to the party through the Catholic Socialist Society. The influence of the Catholic church meant that the Red Clydeside MPs kept quiet on questions of abortion and contraceptive rights and desegregation of schooling.

Pacifism was also influential in the Scottish labour movement. Many Scottish socialists were imprisoned for opposing the First World War. Prominent Labour politicians like Glasgow councillor Pat Dollan were staunch pacifists in the twenties and thirties. This meant supporting British interests through diplomacy rather than war. Clackmannanshire MP Tom Johnston wanted to see the 1935 Abyssinian crisis sorted out through the League of Nations rather than 'a last minute effort with modern high explosives, tanks and gas'. As war with Germany drew closer the Labour pacifists lined up behind the British state. Johnston demanded 'non-military efforts in defence'. When war came, the labour leaders supported it. After the 1941 collapse of the Nazi-Soviet Pact the Scottish TUC adopted the Communist Party slogan for 'the successful prosecution of the war'. Lord Provost Dollan launched a campaign to mobilise workers, machinery and armaments behind the war effort. From September 1939, Johnston became an enthusiastic supporter of the war. Churchill was so impressed with Johnston that he offered him a post in the War Cabinet.

The Scottish labour leaders not only established the first Labour left at Westminster. Their politics have also had an enduring influence on the left wing of the Labour Party and the unions ever since. The leaders of the ILP in the thirties at least fought for their convictions. James Maxton was regularly suspended from Parliament for his outbursts. Today's Labour left is tame in comparison. Apart from the maverick figure of Denis Skinner, not a single left-wing MP has made his presence felt in the House of Commons or been ejected for his pains. The modern Labour left shares the same anti-working class politics of its forefathers but none of their better traits. Knox's book is a valuable contribution to the history of British Labourism.

Mike Wall

Catholic capitalism

Rupert Cornwell, *God's banker: the life and death of Roberto Calvi*, George Allen & Unwin 1984, pp263, pbk £2.95

A FINANCIAL SPECULATOR whose interests stretched from Europe to Latin America, Roberto Calvi was the chair of the largest private bank in Italy, Banco Ambrosiano. On 18 June 1982 he was found dead, hanging from scaffolding under Blackfriars bridge in the City of London. Calvi's bank collapsed nearly two months later after it was unable to account for \$1287m. The Christian Democrat administration in Italy fell and the Socialists under Bettino Craxi were subsequently installed in government. Ironically, Craxi's party was a substantial beneficiary of Calvi's largesse. It was not alone. The former supporter of Mussolini had also topped up the funds of the secret P2 freemasons' lodge, the Christian Democrats, the Communist Party, the Sandinistas in Nicaragua and Solidarity in Poland. Cornwell gives most space in his book to a detailed description of the convoluted maze of transactions made by Calvi to breach every known law of international banking. However, he takes most delight in exposing the involvement of the Vatican in the greed, deception and murder that surrounded Calvi.

The Roman Catholic church is an easy target for the liberal establishment. The wealth, corruption and air of conspiracy emanating from Rome put it in the same league as the mafia: an institution on its own, outside the accepted norms of capitalist society. Liberal tirades against the Vatican find a ready audience, particularly in Britain where anti-Catholicism is just as strong as ever. Like the current vogue for attacking secret societies such as the freemasons, condemnations of the Catholic church are a convenient distraction from the real problems facing the working class. As a correspondent for the *Financial Times*, Cornwell is in no position to plead 'more holy than thou' in his fulminations against the Vatican. Ironically, his efforts to present Catholicism, with its ritual and secrecy, as an institution apart from bourgeois society backfire. *God's banker* proves only that the corruption, intrigue and reactionary role of the Catholic church are perfectly compatible with the day to day workings of capitalist society.

Over the last century, the Vatican has relied on the donations of 'St Peter's Pence' from the faithful to finance its operations. Since 1942 the Institute of Religious Works (IOR) has been responsible for managing the Catholic treasury. The IOR is more commonly known as the Vatican bank. It began to expand its activities from the late sixties when Pope Paul VI replaced the more popular Pope John XXIII and donations of St Peter's Pence declined. In addition, the Vatican wanted to sell off its Italian interests and invest abroad. In 1971, Pope Paul VI appointed his minder on international tours, Chicago-born Archbishop Paul Casimir Marcinkus, as chair of the Vatican bank. In the same year, Marcinkus joined the board of an offshore subsidiary of Calvi's Banco Ambrosiano based in Nassau in the Bahamas. Calvi had just been appointed general manager of the bank and was about to embark on his gigantic swindle.

Hail Marys

Cornwell is convinced that Marcinkus and the IOR 'collaborated with (Calvi) in perpetuating a fraud'. The priest's blunt defence of money-making certainly should have salved the conscience of the spiv:

'The IOR is not a speculative organisation and I'm not a speculator. But can you live in this world without worrying about money? Even the Church has to see to its financial dependencies....You can't run the Church on Hail Marys.'

Calvi jumped at the chance of a close financial relationship with the Roman Catholic church. The obvious benefits accruing to the bank from its privileged status as God's banker was supplemented by another perk. The Vatican's unique position as a separate state within the city of Rome provided opportunities for the illegal export of money from Italy. Cornwell believes that only the Vatican knows the answer to the whereabouts of the missing \$1287m, 'a sum...to match the entire proceeds of St Peter's Pence since donations to the Pope began in 1860, and enough to cover the Vatican's total declared expenditure for a decade'. Ever since Banco Ambrosiano went broke in July 1982, the Vatican has consistently denied gaining any money out of its connection with Calvi.

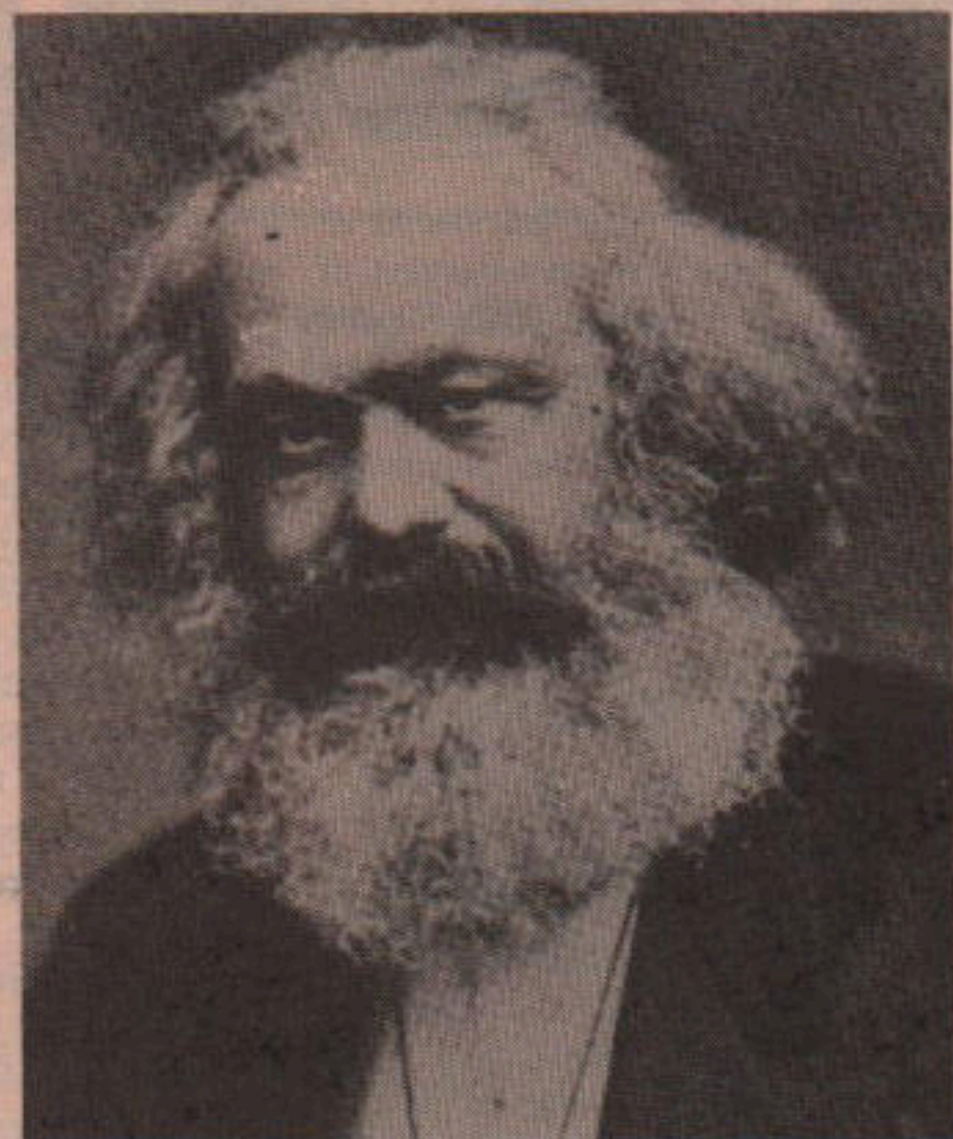
The Italian government did not share the faith of the flock in the infallibility of the Vicar of Christ. It delayed signing a new Concordat regulating its relationship to the Vatican state for 18 months until the scandal was cleared up. Pope John Paul II was forced to declare 1983 a 'Holy Year' to take some of the heat off. The previous Holy Year had been held only eight years before, but the resulting flood of pilgrims raked in millions for the Italian ruling class. Eventually, the IOR was persuaded to cough up \$250m to smooth things over with Ambrosiano's creditors. Pope John Paul II has kept Marcinkus on as head of the Vatican bank.

God's banker won't tell you anything new about the corruption of the Roman Catholic church, and

its purpose is transparent. But no doubt it will make compulsive reading for all those with a hang-up about Catholicism and freemasonry.

Andy Clarkson

Left in crisis



Chris Harman, *Explaining the crisis*, Bookmarks 1984, pp184, pbk £3.95

EXPLAINING THE CRISIS is a rehashed version of a collection of articles from the Socialist Workers' Party journal *International Socialism*. Harman assumes the mantle of the true Marxist, polemicising against those revisionists who have attempted to dismiss Marx's theory of capitalist crisis. He berates the revisionists for their rejection of the law which is fundamental to Marx's theory of capitalist accumulation, crisis and collapse: the law of the tendency of the rate of profit to fall. Within pages, however, Harman occupies the ground he has previously lambasted. *Explaining the crisis* succeeds only in revealing the crisis of radical left theory. Central to Marx's analysis of capital accumulation is an appreciation that recession, mass unemployment, poverty and war are inherent to capitalism. This is what makes the struggle for socialism a necessity for revolutionaries. In revising Marx's law of the tendency of the rate of profit to fall, the SWP rejects the necessity for socialism. If crisis is not endemic in capitalism then crisis-free capitalism is a possibility and socialism is just a nicer way of organising society. In rejecting the inevitability of capitalist crisis, the SWP sustains the illusion that capitalism can be reformed. As always, revising Marx means revising capitalism.

Marx called the inherent tendency for the rate of profit to fall 'the most important law of modern political economy and the most essential for understanding the most difficult relations'. The aim and driving force of capitalism is the production of the maximum amount of profit. However, the means by which capital attempts to increase the mass of profits has the effect of tending to reduce the rate of profit.

Labour is the source of all value. All profit derives from surplus-value. Surplus-value is the difference between the amount the worker is paid (the value of labour-power: the equivalent of the value of the commodities the worker needs to live and reproduce) and the value he creates in production. The main method capital employs to increase profit is to reduce the value of labour-power through increasing the productivity of labour. By increasing productivity, capital lowers the cost of the commodities the worker needs to survive and thus lowers the value of labour-power. Capital increases productivity through technological innovation — introducing more machinery and raw materials (the means of production). This results in a tendency for the organic composition of capital to rise. The organic composition of capital is the ratio between machinery, raw materials, etc and living labour, expressed in value form as constant over variable capital. This leads to the replacement of living labour by dead labour: the labourer by machines and raw materials. There are relatively fewer workers to be exploited compared to the total amount of investment both in constant and variable capital. Hence the rate of profit, as the ratio of profits to the total investment, tends to fall.

Revising Marx

The hallmark of revisionism is the rejection of the importance of this tendency and therefore of the inevitability of capitalist crisis. Revisionists have pointed to periods of economic expansion since Marx wrote *Capital* as empirical proof that Marx was wrong and capitalism is not crisis-ridden. Harman begins by slating the revisionists:

'(Many Marxists) give verbal acceptance to Marx's analysis, but they throw in so many riders (in the form of 'counteracting economic factors') that they rob the analysis of its ability to tell us anything about the real world.'

Harman is referring to the revisionist view that Marx underestimated the counteracting tendencies to the tendency of the rate of profit to fall. However, he quickly reveals his sympathy with the revisionists:

'If certain counteracting tendencies are seen to be built in to the structure of capitalism for a certain period of its development and not just seen as afterthoughts (as Marx himself, unfortunately, tended to present them), then and only then can it be seen how they have failed to operate at other periods.'

Poor Marx — if only he'd given some thought to the counteracting tendencies first and analysed the main tendency afterwards!

Harman presents an updated version of the theory that has been the distinguishing feature of the SWP and its predecessors since the 1950s — the theory of the Permanent Arms Economy. Common to all its versions is the view that capitalist stability in the post-war period was sustained by the arms budget of the major capitalist economies. According to the SWP theoreticians, spending on armaments slows down or stops the rise in the organic composition of capital and therefore offsets the tendency of the rate of profit to fall. Harman argues that if capital is not invested 'productively' in goods which are either consumed by workers or used as means of production, then the law of the tendency of the rate of profit to fall cannot operate. He states that arms production has this effect because guns or fighter planes are not consumed by workers or used productively in industry.

Harman's thesis follows that of Michael Kidron, one of the originators of the theory of the Permanent Arms Economy, who follows a Polish economist Von Bortkiewicz, writing at the turn of the century. Von Bortkiewicz tried to show that the rate of profit was not affected by the rising organic composition of capital in those parts of the economy producing luxury goods. This false assertion rests on a simple confusion between what happens in the sphere of production and in the sphere of consumption. Although armaments do not re-enter the production process but are consumed unproductively they are still produced as commodities embodying value and surplus-value. Marx explained how an average rate of profit is formed by capital flowing from less to more profitable spheres of production. Although they rely on state expenditure, the private defence industries are still branches of capitalist production and therefore enter into this averaging out process. When the organic composition of capital rises in the arms industry this contributes to the general fall in the average rate of profit across industry. What matters is not how a firm distributes its guns but how it produces them. One gun might be used unproductively by a British soldier to shoot Irish nationalists who threaten the stability of the British state; the other might be used productively by a capitalist farmer to shoot wild animals which threaten his livestock. The final use to which the guns are put is different, but both guns are produced as commodities and affect profit rates accordingly.

The Marxist understanding of luxury production is the opposite of Harman's. Rising productivity in the sectors producing the workers' means of subsistence and the means of production operates as a counteracting tendency to the tendency of the rate of profit to fall. Cheaper commodities in these sectors directly or indirectly lower the value of the commodities the workers need to survive and thus reduce the value of labour-power. This partly offsets the tendency of the rate of profit to fall. With luxury or armaments production there is no such counteracting tendency because here lower prices do not affect the cost of restoring labour-power. Consequently, investment in luxury or armaments production tends to make the rate of profit fall faster than investment elsewhere. This runs directly counter to the assumptions enshrined in the theory of the Permanent Arms Economy.

Empiricism rules

The post-war boom had nothing to do with arms production. The ruling class was able to overcome the slump of the thirties, raise the rate of profit and recommence capital accumulation for two reasons. First, the enormous destruction of capital during the war meant that production could be restructured and made more efficient. Second, the catastrophic defeats inflicted on the international working class allowed the bourgeoisie to go on the offensive and increase massively the exploitation of the working class. The tendency of the rate of profit to fall did not cease to operate during the boom; it simply took time — 15 to 20 years in some countries — before the gains made by the ruling class during the war were dissipated. The post-war increase in the mass of profits disguised the fall in the rate of profit.

The SWP has been forced to go through tremendous convolutions to justify the theory of the Permanent Arms Economy in the recession. If arms production explains the post-war boom, how can the SWP explain the crisis at a time when arms spending is rocketing as each imperialist power tools up in preparation for a third imperialist war? A theory that is based on an empirical observation of a specific stage of capital accumulation inevitably founders when a new phase of capital accumulation begins. Rather than use Marxist theory to understand the world, the SWP moulds its theory to fit its empirical understanding of new developments.

Harman's most damning achievement is not his revamped version of an outdated and vulgar theory, but his articulation of the dangerous consequences of this theory for the working class.

Rather than prepare workers to take on the system and combat the war drive, Harman tells us that there is no threat of a third imperialist war:

'Today war itself has become so expensive and dangerous that it is not easy to use military power in order to protect a national capitalism.'

The SWP's inability to understand that crisis and war are inherent in the capitalist system leads it to the absurd conclusion that war can be averted by the subjective desires of tight-fisted individual capitalists. At a time when the drive towards war poses a real danger to the international working class, the SWP tells workers that militarisation is not a problem. Harman's book is a useful aid to understanding the crisis: the crisis not of the capitalist system, but of the radical left.

Phil Murphy

Great power plays

L Carl Brown, *International politics and the Middle East: old rules, dangerous game*, IB Taurus & Co Ltd 1984, pp363, pbk £9.50

BROWN'S BOOK presents imperialist interference in the Middle East as a 'great power game'. The Middle East is the stage and all the imperialist powers merely players. For Brown, contemporary politics in the Middle East 'can best be understood in terms of a discernible pattern which emerged out of the gradual decline of the Ottoman Empire'. Brown treats the history of international diplomacy in the Middle East as a 'system' of recurring supra-historical patterns. Rather than use his excellent material to show the emergence of Europe's imperialist designs in the region in the late nineteenth century, Brown presents the 'Middle East Question' as a game in which the rules haven't changed in centuries.

Brown sets out to trace the eternal 'schemings' of the world powers in the region, particularly Britain, France, Russia, Italy and Germany up to the First World War, and Britain and the USA after 1945. His main concern prior to the First World War is to examine the internal opposition forces in the Ottoman Empire and the way they were manipulated by the European powers. Showing his disdain for historical specificity, Brown equates the motives of rival local warlords in Tunisia, the Crimea and Albania in the seventeenth century with those of twentieth century nationalist and pan-Arab movements.

The beauty of Brown's ahistorical approach is that it absolves imperialism of its crimes in the Middle East. European and US imperialism are merely players in this very complicated game. Brown presents the machinations of the Ottoman warlords in the same light as the adventures of the 'great powers'. As a consequence, he cannot explain the failure of the Ottoman Empire's attempts at modernisation in the nineteenth century.

The Ottoman sultans' industrialisation projects were financed by loans from the European powers. The burden of repayment and a series of military adventures finally bankrupted Tunisia in 1869, Egypt in 1876 and the Ottoman central government in 1875. From the mid-nineteenth century onwards, the Ottomans were at the mercy of the European powers, unable to pay back the exorbitant interest on the loans. They were forced to relinquish control over large parts of the economy and foreign trade and make territorial concessions, mainly to Britain and France. Any hopes of independent capital accumulation and industrialisation were dashed. France and Britain took control of the production and sale of cotton, silk and tobacco and fully exploited the territorial concessions wrested from the Ottomans.

Brown notes that from about the 1870s onwards Britain began to forge a strategy to hasten the disintegration of the Ottoman Empire. He cannot explain why. Up to the 1870s, Britain backed the Ottomans as part of its policy of containment against Russia. Thereafter, it switched its support to the movements for autonomy against the Ottomans. The architects of this shift in policy were Liberal Prime Minister William Gladstone and Tory foreign minister Lord Salisbury. Gladstone and Salisbury were less concerned with cohering the traditional British Russophobia and more concerned with protecting British imperialist interests by guaranteeing the Suez route to India. British attention moved away from the Grand Porte in Istanbul to the arc of Egypt, Saudi Arabia and Transjordan.

Brown is oblivious to the reasons for the qualitative change in British policies in the Middle East in the 1870s. Nor can he explain the unique role of US imperialism in the region in the post-war period. For Brown, the game hasn't changed from Salisbury's time to Kissinger's — only the players are different. The forces impelling the world powers in search of new markets and spheres of influence remain a mystery. Without an understanding of the emergence and development of imperialism from the late nineteenth century up to today, Brown's book resembles a more sophisticated game of *Risk*, in which the players throw the dice and armies move across the world according to how the dice fall.

Inez Landa

Write to . . .

the next step

BM RCP London WC1N 3XX

Le Lett Letters

All washed up

A dozen women cleaners at the Newport Road DHSS offices in Cardiff went on strike early last month when their contracts were due for renewal. Gordon Knight Services Ltd tried to cut the hourly rate of the cleaners from £1.71 to £1.60, and all their holiday entitlement and reduce the staff by three. The women's response was to walk out.

The staff had been employed by this private company for the last six years. They normally work from five to seven o'clock in the evening from Monday to Friday. Many of them have young children and the job is the only one they can do.

All the cleaners had been members of the general, municipal and boilermakers' union (GMBATU) for many years. This was the first time they had taken industrial action. Gordon Knight Services also employ cleaners at the other DHSS offices in the city and at the Welsh Office. These workers are not unionised and some of them were given £3 an hour to scab on the Newport Road DHSS strike.

The union's district officer Charles Docherty is based only a stone's throw from the picket line in Cardiff. He told the press at the start of the strike: 'No way will we accept that the women should get less than what they get at present'. He then proceeded to sell them out.

The women began with great faith in Docherty's ability to resolve the dispute in their favour. But while he was wheeling and dealing with the bosses, RCP supporters got involved on the side of workers. The strikers were particularly interested in reading about the experiences of the Barking Hospital workers in the September issue of *the next step*. Philip Ashill, a CPSA national official based in the Cardiff DHSS offices, was approached to win the support of his members for the women. All he promised to do was to complain to the DHSS management that the cleaning conditions were unsatisfactory since the strike started.

Next we suggested that the strikers visit the scabs and persuade them to stop. For those who persisted we took a more aggressive approach. We brought a camera to take photos of the scabs going into work to intimidate them. The scabs made several attempts to enter the buildings but our cameraman followed them about. One of the scabs then came running up to the pickets covering her face and asking not to be photographed as she only wanted to talk and find out what was happening. Soon the other scabs joined her and the strikers got their first chance to put their side to these women. Eventually they were persuaded to leave.

The victory over the scabs was short-lived. Docherty soon announced that he was having 'meaningful discussions' with Gordon Knight Services and in the meantime the strikers should go back to work. But the strikers insisted on staying out until their full demands were met, including the reinstatement of the three cleaners who had been made redundant.

Docherty betrayed the trust the strikers placed in him. He finally persuaded the workers that Knight's management might accept a compromise and agree to £1.65 an hour and two weeks' paid leave if they would agree to

only a single reinstatement. When Knight's rejected this plan, the strikers became demoralised and were finally forced to accept all the redundancies.

The strike is over, but there is no doubt that Knight's will try to whittle away the new conditions the cleaners secured through their action. For them, the hardest lesson has been that it was far easier to take on both the bosses and the scabs than tackle their own union leadership. If that experience is put to use next time, victory will be assured.

Sharmini Singh
Cardiff

Mutiny on the Mersey

Fifty shipyard workers at Cammell Laird in Birkenhead are still holding out against their bosses' attempt to force through redundancies. They have been occupying a gas accommodation rig and the destroyer, HMS Edinburgh, since July and have laid in a month's supply of food to sustain their blockade.

The employers won a court order to evict them, but so far the workers have thwarted every attempt of the bailiffs to enforce the injunction. The occupation has been able to ward off the state attacks only because striking miners and workers from shipyards as far away as Tyneside have come to their aid. However, there has been little solidarity from the 1600 other Cammell Laird workers currently laid off or from other Merseyside workers.

The isolation of the occupation is mainly due to the activities of the Cammell Laird union leaders. The general, municipal and boilermakers' union convenor, Billy Albertina, has been reluctant to get the rest of the labour movement involved in the occupation. He is content to organise occasional mass pickets. In mid-September, these gestures were made even more futile by an arrangement with the police for the scabs to get in through the rear gate, whilst the occupation supporters held a token picket on the two front gates.

Cammell Laird workers have had much experience of redundancies. Since 1979, 6000 have gone, cutting the workforce to 1650. The bosses' assault has been facilitated by the long tradition of sectional struggle in the shipyard. For example, only last year welders at Cammell Laird went on strike for danger money but failed to win backing from the rest of the workforce. There are no less than four unions in the yard and the workers tend to see themselves as stagers, planters or welders rather than simply workers. The bosses are aware of these divisions and play on them to the full. The Cammell Laird Joint Shop Steward's Committee spends much of its time sorting out squabbles between its various member unions and is regarded by the workforce as little more than a joke.

The Merseyside Labour leadership has concentrated its energies on campaigning to win more orders to build ships. Local Labour MP Frank Fields has drawn out the logic of this approach by refusing to back the occupation, claiming that it is damaging the yard's prospects.

RCP supporters have been

helping the occupation win wider labour movement backing, particularly in Merseyside. We have argued that it is necessary to step up the action by organising a real mass occupation, not just pickets. That means giving the rest of Cammell Laird workers a stake in the occupation. Until we can overcome the divisions in the workforce, the bosses can afford to sit back and wait for isolation to strangle the occupation.

Dario Davies
Liverpool

PCF: down and out

The traditional party of the French working class, the French Communist Party (PCF), faces the new political year in considerable disarray. Ever since it pulled out of government in July, the party hasn't known which way to turn. So far, it has disappointed expectations of a tougher line against socialist austerity. Like the Labour Party in Britain, it attributes its electoral decline to its limited appeal among skilled, white-collar employees rather than to its failure to defend the working class.

What the PCF has done is to shelve its more grandiose plans for overhauling capitalism and call tirelessly for 'an immense debate' about the future of French industry. This is designed partly to sound out the mood of rank and file workers, and partly to broaden party influence among junior managers, planners, technocrats and anyone else who might be interested in helping France meet the challenge of modernisation more effectively by 'contesting the employers' monopoly of management' (*L'Humanite*, 3 September).

The new socialist Prime Minister Laurent Fabius has so far been much more successful than the PCF leadership in bringing home to workers what the modernisation of French capitalism requires of them. Now that the PCF has left the government, the new regime no longer even pays lip-service to socialism. Even the right-wing *Le Figaro* admits that the policy of austerity is now being pursued 'with a brutality that resembles Thatcherism'. In fact, it is not necessary to look abroad to find precedents for such policies. Raymond Barre, the last Gaullist Prime Minister, recently quipped that on hearing Socialist ministers on television, 'I think I am listening to myself'. Barre and other leading right wingers have been so impressed by the new government that they are talking about a 'relaxation' between right and left, of a more 'civilised' debate.

Relaxation and civilised debate translates in France today into full companies of the notorious CRS riot police and wire cages across the entrance to the Citroen plant at Aulnay-sous-Bois. These are to prevent any of the 1950 mainly Moroccan workers who have been made redundant during the August vacation from entering the plant. The riot cages aroused the anger of the workers, but a local PCF hack tried to reason with them: 'This isn't what workers need', he pleaded, 'what workers need is an immense debate'.

While the PCF sounds out workers' support for alternative strategies for the French economy, the bosses sound out the workers to see if they are

ready to fight. The first batch of redundancies is the crucial test. If they go through, a further 80 000 are scheduled for the chop in the car industry over the next five years. Meanwhile, the communist-dominated trade union, the Confederation Generale de Travail (CGT), is furious at not being consulted. Top CGT bureaucrat Henri Krasucki complained:

'Citroen is the very example of arbitrary behaviour which inevitably leads to rejection (of the employers' plans) on the part of the workers...the employers have always refused to give precise technical justifications for the redundancies they demand'. (*L'Humanite*, 31 August)

What is clear is that the Citroen workers, who have the reputation of being the most militant section of the French working class, are confused. Their indecision cannot but highlight the need for a fighting alternative to the policies which disarm workers before the batons of the CRS.

Louis Dufoux
Paris

(This letter has been shortened)

Militant misers

As the bluster and posturing of the illegal budget campaign fades from memory, the Militant -controlled council in Liverpool is easing into the role of capitalist accountant. In three instances in recent months the council has intervened to oppose plans to improve services in the city.

In the aftermath of the 1981 riots a scheme for the building of a sports and community complex was agreed. Local residents from the St James Community Council succeeded in raising the £1m needed through the Inner-City Partnership, the Sports Council and the area health authority. By June 1984, plans had been finalised. Then the District Labour Party voted 51 to 4 against signing over the land to develop the site. Liverpool council consequently stepped in two days before the building was to begin to block the project.

The River Avon Street Sheltered Accommodation Scheme (Rassas) in Toxteth has also felt the sharp edge of the council's good housekeeping policies. Formed out of Heseltine's taskforce, Rassas created a plan to build sheltered accommodation to cater for the elderly among Toxteth's black and ethnic communities. With the government putting up 75 per cent of the required funding, the previous Liberal administration in Liverpool promised to find the rest.

Now Labour has dropped the project. The council claims that supporting Rassas is contrary to its policy of opposition to positive discrimination. This is nothing but a cynical cover for the council's refusal to provide basic services for the old people of Toxteth. In Liverpool, blacks occupy seven out of the 1143 council-managed properties for the elderly.

St Pius school in Vauxhall, closed since 1982, has become the focus of a campaign by the Vauxhall Neighbourhood Community Council to improve amenities for local residents. They are demanding that it is used as a sports and community centre. The council has turned down

their appeal and claimed that the land is needed for a few houses it wants to build. Vauxhall residents were told they have to wait for their community centre as it isn't included in council plans for the area. Not content to wait, they occupied St Pius school in order to pursue their demands. The Militant council promptly sought the help of the courts to secure their eviction from the school. Now local residents are mounting a picket at the school gates to prevent demolition contractors moving in.

Militant claims that society can be transformed by a Labour government committed to a socialist programme. But Liverpool workers are finding out that Labour in power in Liverpool means only more attacks on services.

Tony Kennedy
Liverpool

Racist attacks

Last month there were two arson attacks in the Gillington district of Bradford — both directed against the Asian community. In the first attack, an empty Asian shop was completely gutted. In the second, two Asian families in upstairs flats were saved when a firebomb failed to ignite. Bradford Workers Against Racism immediately announced that it would be stepping up its presence in the area and organising defence against further attacks.

Once WAR had announced its involvement, the local police shook off their lethargy and promised to set up a special incident room, an inquiry into the attacks and to step up their patrols in the area. Assistant Chief Constable for Community Relations Keith Hellawell revealed that Bradford police were more concerned about WAR's activities than the prospect of further attacks. He told the press that the 'police do not support the formation of vigilante patrols. Such action is neither sensible nor conducive to the public good'. Sure enough, it wasn't long before a WAR activist was arrested by the police and beaten up while making door to door enquiries about the attacks.

Bradford WAR will not be intimidated by racist thugs or the police and will continue to build support for our work in the local labour movement.

Rob Knight
Bradford

Is the law on our side?

I always make sure to read *the next step* as I find it a refreshing alternative to the muck you can see on the media. However, I was surprised to read the following remarks about sweatshops in the September issue:

'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.'

Can you explain this passage for me? It seems to say that workers are well off under Wages Councils and I know that this isn't so.

Kirsty Gordon
Camden, London

the next step replies:

The state has been introducing legislation to prevent the super-exploitation of workers for more than a century. The aim of the Factory Acts and the Trades Boards and Wages Councils is to prevent individual employers from enforcing such terrible terms and conditions on workers that their physical survival is threatened. This was a real danger in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. The state acts on behalf of all employers to prevent rogue bosses from imposing conditions that would lead to the deterioration of labour-power and also destabilise the labour market and possibly provoke social conflict.

State regulations do provide a limited protection for workers. Marx was all in favour of stricter Factory Acts — and the Wages Councils did prevent the worst excesses of the sweatshop system. However, the persistence of oppressive and dangerous factories and poverty-line wages shows that workers cannot rely on legislation. The only guarantee of decent conditions and wages is the class struggle.

The left and the Irish War

I have read the left's papers for many years and began reading *the next step* over a year ago when a friend showed me a copy.

I've always agreed with your stance that the Irish War is central to British politics. The rest of the left have chosen to ignore Ireland or, at best, concentrate on the more superficial aspects of it like plastic bullets or the media. Now the miners' strike has provided the left with a new opportunity to twist their presentation of the war in Ireland.

For years the left has said to the working class in this country, 'oppose British tactics in Ireland because it will happen to you next'. The logical conclusion of this argument must be that while those tactics are unacceptable if used against British workers, as in the case of the miners, they are okay when just used against the Irish.

The struggle of the Irish people to determine their own future is one the British working class should take up against the ruling class. Support for Irish freedom is the key to any effective fightback against the bosses' system in Britain, whether workers are facing brutal attacks from the police, cuts in housing, health and education, redundancies or any other assault.

The arguments put across by the left neither help the Irish people nor the working class in this country. They end up being just one more link in the chain that ties the working class to the British state.

Leon Owen
Leamington Spa

Meetings



Activities

Become an RCP supporter

What you give

- financial support to the party
- commitment to sell *the next step*

What you get

- membership of a supporters' group
- weekly political discussion and activities
- monthly bulletin on party news

Want to join?

RCP supporters' groups meet in

Ashton
Birmingham
Bradford
Brighton
Cardiff
Coventry
Doncaster
Edinburgh
Glasgow
Leeds
Liverpool
London
Manchester
Newcastle
Nottingham
Oldham
Portsmouth
Rotherham
Sheffield
Wakefield
Wythenshawe

Every Tuesday
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Join the RCP, make friends and influence people

New supporters' groups are being formed in a number of other areas. Phone Judy Harrison on 01-274 3951 for details or see sellers of *the next step*.

Revolutionary Communist Students

Back to school? Or starting at a new college? Join the Revolutionary Communist Society and take part in meetings, debates, miners' solidarity work, anti-imperialist activities and social events.

RCS meetings on 'what is the RCP?' are happening at over 50 colleges around the country this month. Come along to the freshers stall and sign up.

Phone 01-274 3951 for details of REVOLUTIONARY COMMUNIST SOCIETIES at colleges in your area.

TAKING CONTROL

LONDON Evening classes

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, 7³⁰pm, 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.

YORKSHIRE
What next in the miners' strike?
public meeting
speaker - Frank Richards
Friday 5 October, 7³⁰pm
Red Deer Pub
Pitt Street
Sheffield

SOUTH WALES trade union dayschool

Saturday 10 November
10am-6pm plus social

Sessions on:

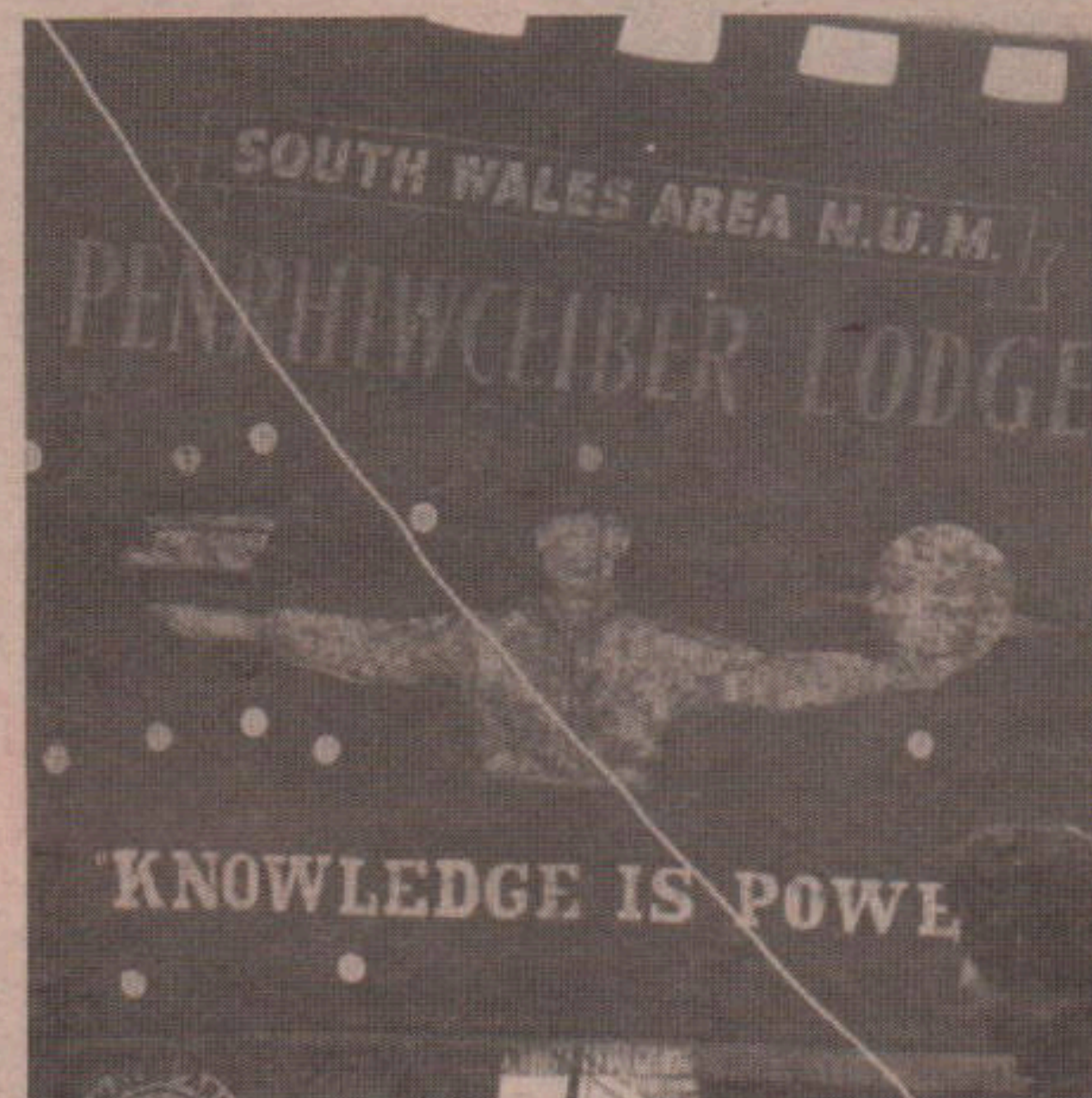
Miners' strike
Women and the unions
Steel industry

Is there a future in the valleys?

Speakers include

Mike Freeman
and
Judy Harrison

Phone 01-274 3951 for information about these events



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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

Lessons of the Irish War

Saturday 24 November, Digbeth Civic Hall, Birmingham

The war and the law in Ireland, 1984

Ten years of the Prevention of Terrorism Act –
from Birmingham to Harrods

Ireland and the miners' strike – what's the
connection?

Tickets £2 waged/£1 unwaged. Transport from all
over Britain. Phone Mick Hume on 01-274 3951, or
write to Box IFM, London WC1N 3XX



'Any right-thinking person deplores any death, but I do not deplore the death of a person who sets himself up to attack the police'. This was Democratic Unionist leader Ian Paisley's latest comment on the Royal Ulster Constabulary attack on a Belfast republican rally in August. Paisley's remarks summed up the sectarian terror that is British law and order in Northern Ireland. The law does not allow killing – except the legalised murder of Irish nationalists who oppose the occupying forces of the Crown.

Sean Downes, the Irishman shot dead in the RUC's August assault, was the latest of more than 20 nationalist victims of a two-year police/Army shoot-to-kill campaign. The selective execution policy of the shoot-to-kill gangs is the most extreme aspect of the machinery of judicial terror which Britain uses to legitimise its war against the nationalist community.

Britain presents the law as a neutral force for peace in Northern Ireland. But at every turn the legal system acts as a shield to cover up the atrocities of imperialism and its allies, and as a hammer to keep down those fighting for Irish freedom.

In the course of the republican hunger-strike, which ended three years ago this month, Loyalist police

and British troops shot dead seven nationalist 'rioters' during protests in support of the hunger-strikers. The defenders of the Queen's peace took a very different approach to protests around the recent Loyalist hunger-strike in Belfast's Crumlin Road jail.

Last month imperialist forces surrounding the jail stood by while a mob of Loyalist demonstrators hijacked a bus carrying nationalist prison visitors and beat up the occupants. The RUC made no arrests and could not see what people were complaining about; nobody was 'seriously injured, although there were some broken bones'. In Belfast, breaking Irish limbs and breaking the law are not the same thing.

Breaking the law means challenging British rule. In March, a British government report suggested that people injured in IRA attacks should sue Sinn Féin for damages. Last month the Official Unionist Party declared its intention of taking up Westminster's suggestion, endorsing the view that

Legalised murder

the national liberation struggle is a criminal conspiracy. As the recent controversy over inquests into the deaths of republicans shows, anybody who cannot swallow that outlook whole has no place in the British legal system in Ireland.

At the end of August Armagh coroner Gerry Curran resigned after finding 'certain grave irregularities' in the cases of INLA volunteers Seamus Grew and Roddy Carroll, shot dead by the RUC in December 1982. Curran could not reconcile the facts of the murder with the version accepted by a court which acquitted RUC constable John Robinson of the killing earlier this year. Official Unionist Party MP Harold McCusker condemned Curran, declaring that republicans were 'savages whose object is to destroy the state'. Shoot-to-kill squads were only giving them 'their just deserts'.

The coroner's resignation also set back the inquests into the deaths of IRA volunteers Gervais McKerr, Eugene Toman and Sean Burns, shot 100 times by the RUC in

November 1982. Police charged with the murders walked free from court last June. Lord Justice Gibson praised them for their 'courage and determination in bringing the three deceased men to justice, in this case the final court of justice'. The only justice Britain can offer the Irish people is the justice of the hangman.

The nationalist community in the Six Counties recognises that upholding the law means supporting the British state's right to frame and maim, torture and murder those who oppose it. That's why Irish freedom fighters are proud to be called law-breakers. Their heroic resistance to judicial terror has withstood everything Britain has thrown at them through 15 years of war.

During the miners' strike British workers have experienced something of the same brutality from the police and courts. If they are to defend themselves against the state offensive, miners and other British workers have much to learn from the Irish people's attitude to the law, Parliament, and the police. On 24 November in Birmingham the Irish Freedom Movement is holding a conference to discuss how the labour movement here can learn the 'Lessons of the Irish War'. We aim to unite British and Irish workers in a struggle to throw off the chains of the British bosses' law and order.