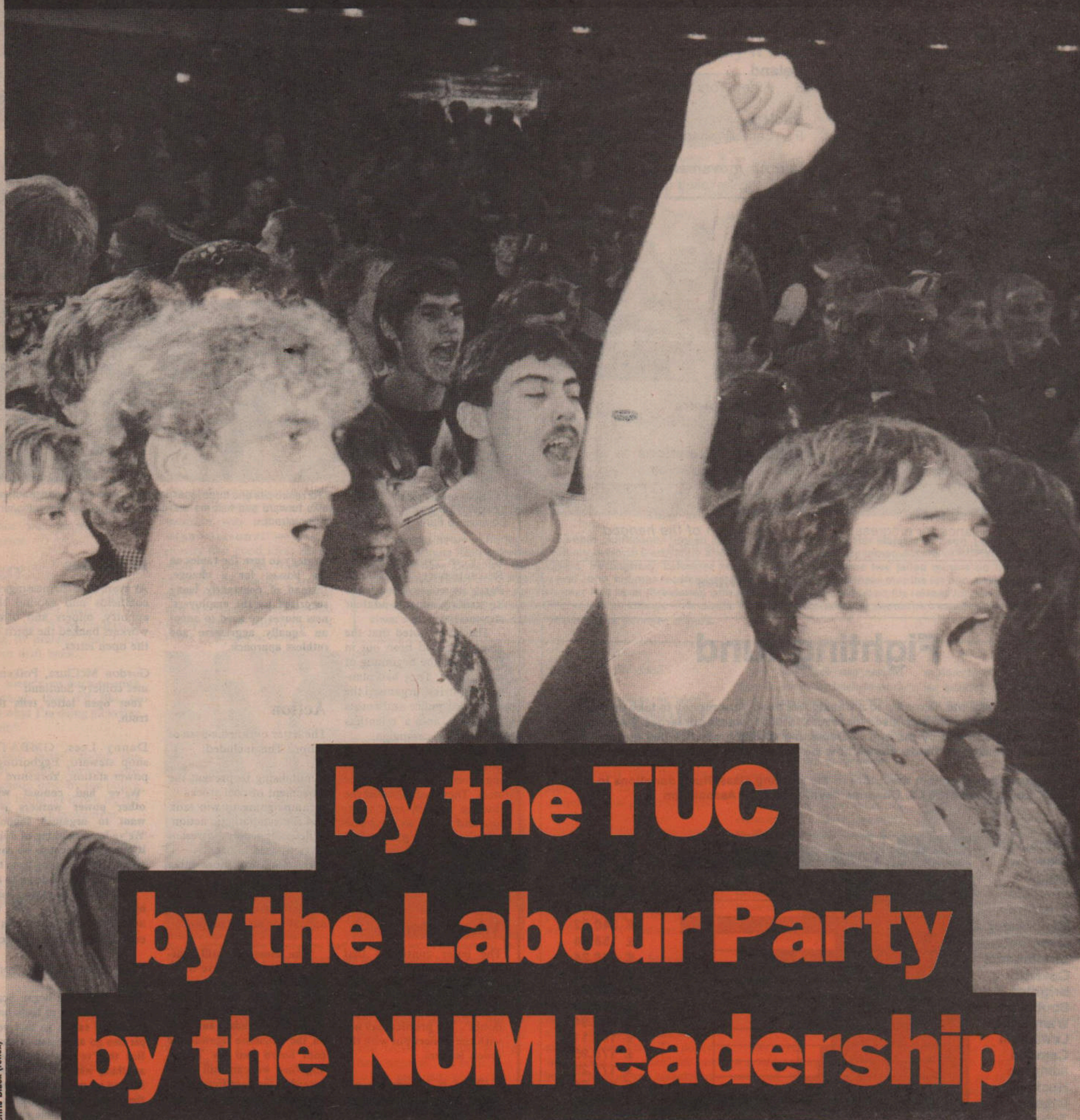


the next step

review of the Revolutionary Communist Party



The miners' battle for jobs **BETRAYED...**



by the TUC

by the Labour Party

by the NUM leadership

the next step

monthly review of the Revolutionary Communist Party
No 54 December 1984

Publisher Junius Publications Ltd, BCM JPLTD, London WC1N 3XX.
Printer Morning Litho Printers Ltd (TU), 439 North Woolwich Road,
London E16.

Subscription rates (for 12 months)
Britain and Ireland £5, Europe £8.50
Middle East and North Africa £10
America, Asia and Southern Africa £12
Australasia £13

All cheques payable to Junius Publications Ltd. Circulation 01-729 3771.
Newsdesk 01-729 3771.

Correspondence to The Editor, the next step, BCM JPLTD,
London WC1N 3XX.

ISSN 0144 350 X December 1984

NEWS

Miners' strike

- 2 Where do we go from here?
- 3 Fighting for our lives
- 4 Arthur Scargill — where's the beef?
- 5 The Libyan bogey

Imperialism

- 6 Ethiopian nightmare
- 7 South Africa in crisis

Ireland

- 8 A new Tory policy for 'Ulster'?

Racism

- 9 Labour: 'sharing out the misery'

Labour movement

- 10 Long-travelled roads

FEATURES

Editorial

- 11 The labour movement we need

The manic depressives

12 The Socialist Workers' Party started out by presenting the miners' strike as 'an extreme example of the downturn in the movement' and ended up echoing the Labour Party's plea 'they shall not starve'. We look at the shifts and turns in the SWP's approach.



India after Indira

- 16 The legacy of British rule

Wage war

- 14 Fighting for the wages we need

Labour race relations

- 18 Keeping the lid on

Reviews

- 20 Theories of Imperialism
- Labour's alliance for progress
- SAS assassins

Europe's Star Wars
Rebellion of the hanged
Two steps back

22 Letters

23 Activities

Fighting fund

We want to take the next step to a weekly. We need your money to take us there. By 11 November we had raised just over £15 000 towards our target. We need to raise nearly £10 000 by the end of December to reach our £25 000 target. The regional breakdown below shows how we got £3393 in the four weeks up to 11 November.

Make an investment in the future of the working class! Rush donations to BM RCP, London WC1N 3XX. Cheques payable to RCP Association

Edinburgh	£ 83.20
Glasgow	£ 343.26
Leeds	£ 151.55
Sheffield	£ 151.66
Bradford	£ 197.30
Manchester	£ 340.02
Liverpool	£ 158.64
Birmingham	£ 240.24
Coventry	£ 151.90
Brighton	£ 120.72
Southwark	£ 160.83
Wandsworth	£ 209.34
Lewisham	£ 161.11
Camden	£ 175.95
Islington	£ 179.25
Hackney	£ 194.66
Others	£ 373.05
Total	£3392.68

Open letter

Where do we go from here?



Fighting talk: miners from a dozen Yorkshire pits and three local power stations discussed practical proposals for action to take the strike forward and halt the drift back, at a packed Revolutionary Communist Party public meeting in Pontefract.

Early in November the Revolutionary Communist Party issued an open letter 'to striking miners and their supporters'.

The letter noted that the employers had been out in front since the beginning of the dispute. They had planned the strike, organised the combined police and courts operation and a relentless propaganda campaign.

The union leaders, on the other hand, had been leading from behind from the start. They had followed the divisive area-by-area strategy and failed to organise effective picketing. They had put their faith in empty promises from the TUC and in endless talks with the bosses.

Where now?

The letter continued that 'the determination of rank and file miners and whole mining communities to win this fight has never been in doubt'. The problem lay not with the miners but with the union leaders.

'What is lacking on our side is not guts and willpower, but a sense of direction, a

strategy to turn the tables on the bosses for a change. Instead of constantly being surprised by the employers' new moves we need to adopt an equally aggressive and ruthless approach.'

Action

The letter outlined a plan of action. This included:

- mobilising to prevent the movement of coal stocks
- campaigning to win rank and file sympathetic action
- defending every arrested or victimised miner
- rejecting any more talks around the *Plan for Coal*.

The letter concluded with an appeal for active support:

'The miners are still fighting and they still have widespread working class support. It is high time that we took the initiative out of the hands of the union leaders and went on the offensive against the coal board and the Tories. Together we can still make sure that the sacrifices of the past nine months have not been in vain.'

Responses

At more than 20 meetings in coalfields and around the country, miners and other workers backed the spirit of the open letter.

Gordon McClure, Polkemmet colliery, Scotland
'Your open letter tells the truth.'

Danny Lees, GMBATU shop steward, Eggborough power station, Yorkshire
'We've had contact with other power workers who want to organise support. We've been thinking of doing it ourselves because we can't see anything coming from the union. So it boils down to us.'

'We should be saying point blank — no way will we accept any fresh deliveries of coal from whatever source.'

Mick Adamson, Selby, Yorkshire
'Since the strike began Scargill and the rest of them have organised rallies so that people can go and listen to them. But they've never organised anything where the rank and file can go and put questions to them and give their ideas of how we can win this strike.'

Fighting for our lives

- The talks are over and the coal board and the Tories are moving in for the kill
- Halting the back-to-work drift must be the top priority for the miners

Miners from pits from Kellingley to Keresley met with workers from other industries in Sheffield on 17 November. Messages of support were received from miners in Scotland and South Wales who could not make it to the meeting.

The back-to-work movement and how to deal with it was a central topic of discussion. Fred Gogarty from South Kirkby in Yorkshire said that the attempt to get a return to work in his area had failed and that the real problem was stopping the movement of coal stocks.



Fred Gogarty: 'block the stocks'

The miners were all angry about the lack of organisation to fight back. They agreed that the best method of defence was to go on the offensive.

Angry

Ken Hancock from Grime-thorpe thought there was no point in the NUM leadership trying to pretend that there was no drift back.

'If there's no back-to-work movement, then I'd like to know what I'm doing picketing our pit.'

He was bitter about the miners being turned into 'truncheon bait' by the police — and being let down by the official labour movement.

'The TUC's a spent force and the Labour Party's not even worth discussing. All we've got left is our pride and they'll never take that away from us even if we're forced back in the end. All we can do is put a brave face on it.'

He was doubtful whether miners who had not come out picketing for the past nine months could be persuaded to come out now.

Open meetings

Frank Richards, author of the best-selling pamphlet *The miners' next step* said that he

thought that the miners needed more than to return with a brave face. If the miners were defeated it could make a whole generation very reluctant to fight again.

He emphasised that it was dangerous to be complacent about the back-to-work movement. It was crucial to have open meetings to confront back-to-work attitudes head on — even at the risk that a majority might want to return to work.

The best way to combat the waverers would be to mobilise the whole community to stop the stocks being moved. The problem was not so much organisational — many miners had good ideas about what to do, but they were isolated and poorly coordinated. A few successes would help to inspire resistance and strengthen the will to fight of those brooding at home.



Notts strikers: 'We've always had a back-to-work movement, but after what we've been through we're not going back now.'

Keith Hammond from Prince of Wales colliery in Yorkshire agreed that the best way to tackle the back-to-work drift was by holding mass meetings and going forward with plans to stop the movement of stocks. He described how local branch officials had cancelled a union

meeting because they felt they could not handle the pressure for a return to work. 'But we must have branch meetings and tackle it or they will go back anyway', he said.

He outlined plans for a mass meeting of local miners, women and other workers in the Pontefract area, 'to get it

- Preparing to stop the movement of coal stocks is also vital to keep up the pressure on the government
- The miners can still win significant concessions from the government — but only if they change the course of the dispute



In the early hours of Friday 16 November champagne flowed outside the grim gates of Her Majesty's Prison, Leicester. Twelve striking miners from Shirebrook colliery in North Derbyshire and Keresley pit in Coventry joined dozens of RCP supporters and activists from Coventry, Birmingham, Nottingham, Leicester and Hinckley to welcome two jailed miners on their release. Shirebrook miners John Fletcher and John Thomas received sentences of 28 days and three months for non-payment of a fine and breach of the peace. John Thomas had been threatened with an immediate gate arrest on his release for non-payment of a fine. Our noisy picket persuaded the screws to change their minds. 'Every imprisoned miner should be treated as prisoners of the class war and greeted like this' declared the Keresley miners.

all out into the open'.

'Anybody inside or outside the union who presents a barrier to our strike has got to be tackled.'

He reckoned that there was still scope for sympathetic action at local power stations.

Statement

The meeting concluded by adopting a short statement as a basis for carrying the campaign forward in the critical weeks up to Christmas.

'Since the talks between the coal board and the NUM broke down at the beginning of November the employers and the government have launched a new wave of attacks on the mining communities. The police occupation of the coalfields has been stepped up and assaults on miners on picket lines and in their own communities have become everyday events.

'We now face two serious threats. First, the back-to-work drift. The large majority of miners are still out but a few miners have gone back in all areas and many are wavering.

'Second, the government is planning to move the coal stocks into the power stations.

'The NUM has failed to come up with a convincing reply to the employers. Instead of going all out to halt the return to work and to make plans to stop the movement of stocks, the union has called rallies and more rallies and appealed to the churches for support.

'The miners have been out for nine months because we want to beat the bosses. Now we need miners' action and working class solidarity not rhetoric and charity.

'We need: ● mass meetings at every pit to confront the return to work mentality and to involve miners actively in taking the strike forward

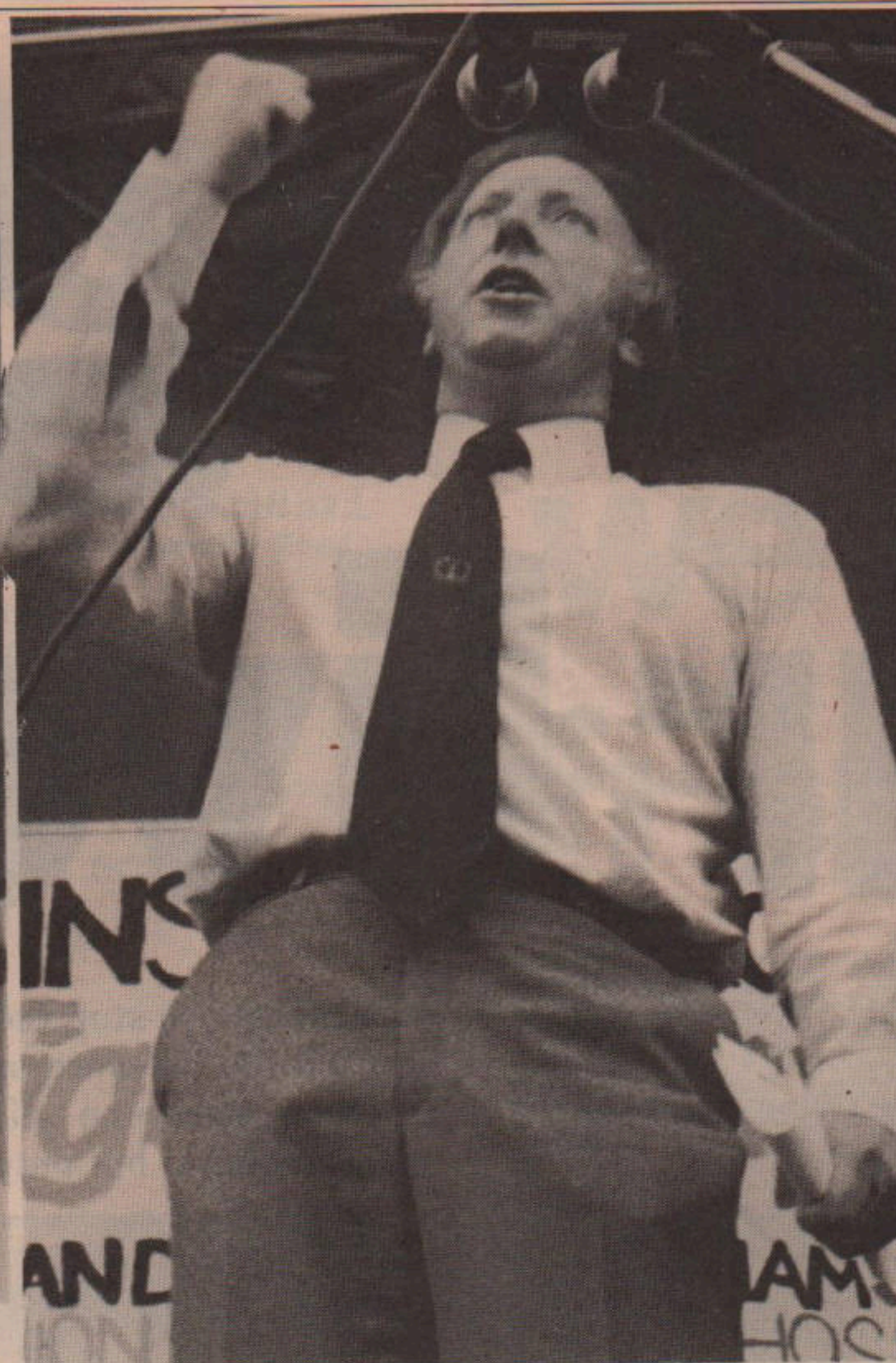
- plans in every area to mobilise working class action to stop the movement of coal into the power stations
- to ensure the defence of every arrested or victimised miner.'



Chris Adamson: 'we need action now'

Winding up, Judy Harrison emphasised that this was a programme for action, not like TUC resolutions that exist only on paper.

If you want to join the struggle to take the miners' strike forward get in touch with the RCP national office or local sellers of the next step.



Photographs by Chris Black (releft)

Where's the beef?

When the last round of talks came to an end, the coal board and the government seized the initiative and stepped up their offensive against the miners.

They unleashed a wave of police terror against picket lines and pit villages to prepare the way for the movement of coal stocks. And they redoubled their efforts to beat the miners back to work.

Rank and file miners who looked to Arthur Scargill to lead a counter-offensive were disappointed. The NUM leader called a conference in Sheffield and rallies in every coalfield and appealed to bishops and clergymen for moral support.

Scargill's failure to address the two major issues facing the miners' strike in its latest phase — the drift back to work and the movement of coal stocks — is no surprise. For nine months he has been practicing a great evasion.

The NUM leaders have buried their heads in the sand, refused to confront the problems in the strike and put their faith in promises of solidarity from the TUC, charity from the Labour Party and talks with the coal board and Acas.

● Into retreat

Scargill's first evasion started from day one of the strike and involved his own members. The NUM leadership endorsed a strategy of area-by-area action and refused to campaign for a national ballot for all-out action.

The decision by the miners' leaders to by-pass the membership was an admission of weakness. It signalled their inability to put forward a strategy capable of uniting the miners and winning majority support for the strike.

Rather than tackle the divisions in the miners' ranks, the NUM leadership simply ignored them. Scargill justified his manipulation of the union rule book and his

disregard for his members with moralistic assertions that 'nobody has the right to vote another man out of a job'.

By refusing to call a national ballot, Scargill put the miners on the defensive from the start and allowed area divisions to exercise a decisive influence on the whole course of the strike.

● Picketing nightmare

At both national and local levels the NUM has harnessed the militants and tried to narrow the scope of picketing. The bureaucracy has hindered effective hard-hitting action through conscious disorganisation and restrictions on resources and funding.

In the early months of the strike the NUM leaders moved in to scale down picketing at many pits after violent confrontations with the police. If they were not capitulating to media hysteria about picket line violence and making agreements with the police, NUM officials were engaged in behind the scenes negotiations with steel union leaders to curtail picketing at the Ravenscraig, Llanwern and Port Talbot steel plants.

This bureaucratic clamp-down on picketing rendered any action ineffective. Agreements hammered out between NUM officials, Labour councillors and the police resulted in set-piece confrontations on the picket lines and made the strikers easy prey for the police.

After demoralising miners' pickets and encouraging many strikers to stay at home,



'You are the first outside group to give us any donations and organise meetings for us with trade unions', Gail Hancock told Sheffield RCP supporters when we delivered a car-load of food to the Grimethorpe women's support group.

Two days later Gail came with us to speak to the Sheffield CPSA miners' support group about what the women had been doing:

'From the start we decided that we weren't just going to be a "kitchen sink group". We organised ourselves with women from other areas such as Royston and went to picket the NCB offices and we also go on all the rallies and demonstrations.'

Gail pointed out that the women were often much more effective than the men:

'We used to organise what we called the "Sandwich Run" which was a lunchtime patrol of the shops where the scab women used to get their lunch. We let them know what we thought of them.'

The Grimethorpe women also gave the men a few surprises:

'There are a few men who say we should be kept in the kitchens where we belong! When we first went on the picket line, the men were really surprised and concerned about us getting hurt. At one demo some Welsh miners decided to "look after us" but when my mother-in-law pushed through them and ripped a banner off some scabs and smashed it up they decided we could look after ourselves.'

The CPSA support group immediately donated £92 to the Grimethorpe women and agreed to continue raising support and money at key workplaces in Sheffield every week.

Scargill ordered a defensive retreat. When miners should have been going on the offensive against the coal board and spreading solidarity action among workers in the power stations and other industries, they were told to picket their own pits.

● Talks and more talks

While miners were fighting for their lives on the picket lines, Scargill and his negotiating team were locked in talks with the coal board.

From the beginning, Scargill insisted that he was not prepared to negotiate on miners' jobs and pit closures, yet he seized every opportunity to get around the negotiating table with MacGregor.

Rank and file miners were kept in the dark about the peace talks and were never consulted about the terms under discussion. The endless round of on/off negotiations served to confuse and demobilise the militants and prepare them for a compromise deal.

● In the lap of the gods

Scargill and the NUM leadership have put every obstacle in the way of rank and file miners going out to win solidarity action from other workers. They have insisted on going through the official channels and have put their faith in paper resolutions from the TUC and the Triple Alliance which have delivered nothing.

Every left-wing trade union bureaucrat has pledged support for the miners' cause and promised solidarity action. Yet nine months into the dispute the miners are still fighting alone.

Rank and file activists in

many industries have been prepared to take action in support of the miners. But their union leaders have backed off from campaigning for active support from the mass of workers. They have preferred show-piece gestures to hard-hitting industrial action which might lead them into confrontation with the employers and the courts.

Railway workers at the Coalville depot in Leicestershire have faced suspensions, loss of pay and the threat of closure for refusing to move coal to power stations at Didcot, Rugeley and Drakelow. Three NUR members have been victimised and sacked.

Yet their union leaders have failed to back them up or extend their action among other workers. The result is that the militants have been isolated and their solidarity action wasted.

Isolated militants who have made valiant efforts to demonstrate their support for the miners' battle for jobs have been victimised for their pains. An AUEW shop steward at Needhams' mining equipment supplies near Doncaster was sacked when he tried to organise a one day solidarity strike. His union told him that nothing could be done and suggested a tribunal.

Dock workers also faced a wall of bureaucratic inertia in their attempts to build support for the miners. While rank and file dockers came out in a spirit of solidarity with the miners, their leaders in the transport union insisted on restricting the strike to the defence of the Dock Labour Scheme. Dockers' leader John Connolly insisted that the strike was not political and had nothing to do with

the miners.

Perhaps the most striking example of the bureaucrats' attempts to block rank and file solidarity is the power industry. The September TUC conference endorsed a resolution from the General Council, calling for solidarity action with the miners from workers in the electricity supply industry. The woolly wording in the statement was intentional; the TUC never intended to hit power supplies to industry.

If this was not apparent at the TUC, the leaders of the main electricity supply union the GMBATU, made it devastatingly clear in a letter to all union branches in the power stations:

'I would stress that in applying this support it is not the intention to stop generation of electricity or supply to the consumers. It is hoped that the NCB and the NUM will resume negotiations with the intent to resolve the dispute at an early date.'

Power workers' leader David Basnett, who made resounding speeches in support of the miners at the TUC and Labour Party conferences, had nothing to offer the miners except a stab in the back.

At a local level, GMBATU officials have actively undermined rank and file attempts to build solidarity with the miners. They have balloted their members on support for the TUC guidelines in the hope that they would vote against them and made secret agreements with Central Electricity Generating Board officials to accept fuel deliveries.

At Eggborough power station in Yorkshire, union officials have gone along with management attempts to use oil as a substitute for coal — violating even the TUC's modest guidelines. Eggborough power worker Danny Lees told us how his attempts to build effective solidarity for the miners have

been frustrated:

'The union officials are coming round and saying "just accept" — it seems they've been talking with CEBG officials unbeknown to us and they've made some agreement to accept oil deliveries which they class as normal.'

'There are people at work who don't want to accept any oil supplies or fuel supplies whatsoever and our union official came down and more or less instructed them to accept these oil deliveries.'

● Soft targets

The NUM itself has made sure that effective solidarity action has not been forthcoming. Scargill may have criticised GMBATU leader David Basnett for the lack of support emanating from Congress House, but it was the NUM leader who stood cap in hand before the TUC at its September conference in the full knowledge that its paper resolutions were worse than useless.

Scargill never set out to bring British industry to a standstill. He ignored the power stations until preparations to move coal stocks were well under way and dismissed the motor industry altogether. He even strangled efforts by rank and file miners to link up with other workers in different industries. Yorkshire miners who tried to organise unofficial meetings with local power workers were told to lay off.

● Batting for the bosses

As the strike has worn on, the TUC has become even more vociferous in its condemnations of picket line violence and more influential in pushing for a compromise.

At a meeting of the TUC General Council on 26 September, the union leaders hinted that unless the NUM cooled things down on the picket lines then support for the strike might dry up:



More than 40 RCP supporters invaded Bradford council in November to protest at the council's ban on street collections for the miners' strike.

Following a lively picket outside the town hall, the demonstrators thronged the public gallery shouting slogans and holding up a 25 foot long banner demanding 'No bans on support for miners'.

After 25 minutes of disruption the council chamber was cleared and Bradford RCP organiser Rob Knight addressed the gallery:

'The Tory council has made it a crime to support the miners in Bradford, just as the Tory government has made it a crime to fight for your job. We refuse to accept these anti-working class laws. We have been collecting, we are collecting and we will continue to collect on the streets for as long as the strike continues. No state bans will stop us.'

'In discussion it was said that while every support should be given to the TUC representatives in their efforts to achieve a resumption of negotiations, both the General Council and the NUM should be aware that the apparently increasing picket line violence could deter unions from assisting the NUM.' (Minutes, 26 November)

TUC leader Norman Willis was even more explicit in his condemnations of miners' violence at an NUM rally in South Wales in mid-November.

South Wales miners drowned his speech with cries of 'Judas' and dangled a hangman's noose in front of

Willis' face in anger at nine months of TUC betrayals.

The unprecedented violent conflict between police and miners on picket lines and in pit villages has made the TUC even more anxious to negotiate a settlement of the dispute. Ever since September the TUC has been putting pressure on the NUM leaders to make concessions:

'It was also said that there would be a need, when negotiations recommenced, for the NUM to show flexibility in their approach to an acceptable settlement. Indeed, this was a matter which might in the future, need to be discussed by the General Council.' (Minutes, 26 September)

Scargill and the other NUM leaders were well aware of the terms on which the TUC offered its mediating services at the September conference; it was there to push for a compromise solution.

● Keeping faith

Scargill has kept faith with the Labour Party through nine months of back-stage manoeuvring for a settlement by energy spokesman Stan Orme and outbursts against picket line violence by Labour leader Neil Kinnock.

The party that has received solid financial, organisational and electoral support from mining communities for decades has given them next to nothing in return.

Despite its conference rhetoric affirming support for the miners' cause, the Labour Party's main role has been to push for negotiations and compromise and to make sure that politics had no part to play in the dispute.

'They shall not starve' has become the catch-phrase of the Labour-controlled miners' support committees and every left-wing activist. At a local level, the Labour Party has worked hand in hand with the NUM bureaucracy to undermine rank and file solidarity action and limit support to fundraising and food collections.

Labour councils, which could have provided unlimited assistance to the miners have done little to relieve hardship or give practical support to the strike. In early September, Ackworth miners' support group asked Wakefield Metropolitan District Council to provide free bus passes, clothing grants and help with fuel payments for families with young children. Three months later, miners' families are even more desperate for help and the council is still refusing to give it.

Many striking miners are bitter about the lack of support from the Labour

Party and disillusioned with its role in the strike. Selby miner Mick Adamson said that Labour's position was indefensible:

'The only role that the Labour Party has played is to give a bit of cash here, a bit of cash there to make it look as if they're supporting the miners. They've pushed for compromises, to go through Acas, to go through anybody whosoever for the sake of compromise.'

'Locally, it's just been cash handouts — free dinners during holidays, that sort of thing — but apart from that, nothing. They've done nothing to go out on the streets and demonstrate for the miners. They've done nothing for people threatened with electricity cut-offs, absolutely nothing.'

● Where's the beef?

Scargill puts up a good show in front of the TV cameras. His militant talk stands in marked contrast to the cringing performances of TUC boss Norman Willis and Labour Party leader Neil Kinnock. But after nine months of Scargill rhetoric rank and file miners have a right to ask — 'where are the results?'

The NUM leader has indulged the TUC and Labour leaders in their efforts to undermine the strike and his endless evasions have brought the miners to the brink of disaster.

There is still everything left to fight for in the miners' strike. For nine months rank and file miners have put their faith in Arthur Scargill, his strike strategy, his talks with the bosses and his rhetoric. The result is that they are no further forward than when the dispute began. But there is still time to change course and seize the initiative from the hands of the union leaders and wrest concessions from the bosses. Only the rank and file can ensure that the sacrifices of the past nine months have not been in vain.



Fleet Street had a field day exposing the NUM's 'shameless date with evil' (*Daily Mail*) and 'poisonous embrace' (*Daily Mirror*) with International Terrorism Inc. For the past five years the Western imperialist powers have carefully created the image of Libya's leader Colonel Gaddafi as a universal bogey.

In reality Gaddafi is the fairly typical leader of a fairly typical backward capitalist regime. Libya reaped some benefits from oil but it has been hit hard by the world recession. The regime's attempts to pursue an independent course have brought Gaddafi into confrontation with the imperialist powers.

The Libyan bogey

In response, the USA, Britain and the rest have imposed economic sanctions to impoverish Libya's people even further. They have threatened military interference and turned Gaddafi into a villain to stir up popular prejudice at home.

The NUM's fundraising trip to Libya was the perfect pretext for a campaign to link the Scargill bogey to the bogey colonel. Many miners and other workers regarded the bosses' crude propaganda ploy with contempt. Yet the response of the official labour movement and the left helped to maximise the success of the media campaign and the damage it did to the miners.

Instead of dismissing the whole Libya issue as irrelevant to the miners' strike and insisting on the miners' right to get support from wherever they choose, labour movement spokesmen fell straight into the Tory trap. They joined in

condemnations of Gaddafi and Scargill.

Neil Kinnock condemned the Libyan regime as 'vile' and told the miners that 'any offers from them would be an insult to everything the British regime stands for'. Norman Willis accused the NUM of consorting with 'international terrorism'.

When it comes to 'international terrorism' the Libyan regime has nothing to learn from the British regime which stands for imperialist barbarism in every corner of the world.

The left also capitulated to the chauvinist hysteria against Libya. Yes, it agreed Libya was vile, but the Tories also had links with Gaddafi's evil regime.

Tony Benn set the terms for the left's commentaries by revealing Tory business connections and even coal board links with Libya. *Militant* and *Socialist Worker* repeated

Benn's exposures and condemned 'Tory hypocrisy'.

But once the left had conceded that Libya was evil, then it was no help to the miners to say that the Tories also had dealings with the devil. The only way to defend the miners was to reject the whole Libyan bogey.

The left failed to challenge British chauvinism — and it ended up apologising for the NUM. According to *Socialist Worker* it was 'a very minor event — an unimportant NUM official's visit to Libya'. What a cop out!

Every time the establishment tries to rally public opinion against any threat to 'British democracy' — whether it is Gaddafi or Galtieri, the IRA or the miners — the labour leaders get down on their knees.

If the left stood squarely on the side of any threat to 'British democracy' we would be in a much stronger position.

Frank Richards

The miners' next step

Best selling
pamphlet in
the coalfields

Order from: BCM JPLTD London WC1N 3XX
50p & 20p p&p 10 or more post free



Food for thought: the Western powers plead innocent to mass starvation in Africa by blaming the Ethiopian regime's inefficient system of food distribution for the plight of its people

Ethiopian nightmare

Thanks to the programme controller at the BBC, the famine in Ethiopia has finally made the headlines.

This sudden concern with Ethiopia is not unconnected with the British establishment's desire to get the miners' strike off the television screens. But whatever the motives of the media, these should not detract from our concern with the gravity of the situation in Ethiopia.

The scale of the famine in Ethiopia is now well known. More than six million people face starvation, and as many as a million could die if food does not reach them fast. The cause of this horrific state of affairs, however, is not so clear.

The British establishment has smugly laid the blame on the Ethiopian government. Various commentators have suggested that the Ethiopian 'Marxist' (with emphasis) government has wasted resources on prestige items or used up previous supplies of food aid feeding its army.

Others have suggested that the Ethiopian government is inefficient in its distribution of food or that it just doesn't care about the plight of its people.

The message is simple: the West is innocent and if anybody is guilty it is the Ethiopian 'Marxist' regime. Yet even a cursory examination of the issue shows that nothing could be further from the truth. The responsibility for the famine lies much closer to home.

Drought epidemic

Even if the Ethiopian government was the most callous in world history, it could not be blamed for the famine. When it came to power 10 years ago, Ethiopia was not only poor, but probably the poorest country in the world.

In 1974, just before the army coup which brought the present government to power, Ethiopia had the lowest rate of calorie consumption of any country in the world. Life

expectancy at birth, 37.5 years for men and 40.6 for women, was also the lowest in the world. It had the lowest ratio of doctors per head of the population: one physician for every 75 320 people. Only six per cent of the population had access to safe water.

Famine and drought were familiar experiences. In 1974, a famine in northern Ethiopia claimed the lives of more than 100 000 people and led to the downfall of the regime of Emperor Haile Selassie.

The origins of the drought cannot be found in the policies of a single government. Indeed, the drought is not simply an Ethiopian problem. The whole of Africa is afflicted by it.

Food production in Africa is falling behind the growth of population. It is estimated that up to 150 million people in Africa are going hungry. In Mozambique alone, 100 000 people had died of starvation by last February. Zimbabwe is facing the worst drought in living memory — 25 per cent of its population is affected.

The situation is getting worse by the day. In 1983 the Sahara Desert advanced another 95 miles to the south. With three out of five Africans suffering from malnutrition, the famine in Ethiopia is only an extreme example of the general pattern.

Cause

What then is the cause of the famine? The famine has nothing to do with nature, the climate or the lack of arable

land. The World Bank has estimated that Ethiopian agriculture could support a population of 310 million — 10 times the present figure.

Land is relatively abundant. Up to 30 per cent of Ethiopia's arable area to the west and south of the central highlands is under-utilised. In the north, where the drought is causing such devastation, the land is exhausted. But it could be brought under cultivation if resources for investment were available. The example of Tigre Province is instructive.

Except for its fertile western region, Tigre has suffered from drought for the past five years. This year's drought is worse because it is the outcome of a cumulative process of soil exhaustion. The civil war being fought between the Tigre People's Liberation Front and the government does not help matters.

The drought belt in Tigre, however, is a relatively recent phenomenon. Tigre was once a fertile region — until early this century it even exported food. The region's economic decline is a result of the system of exploitation developed in the Ethiopian Empire.

Exploitation

A harsh system of taxation meant that the peasantry had to hand over a considerable portion of its surplus to the state bureaucracy in Addis Ababa. As a result, the land was deprived of essential investment and quickly became infertile.

The situation deteriorated even further in the sixties when agriculture was commercialised. Food was no longer produced to fulfil the needs of the peasantry, but for the market.

Subsistence agriculture stagnated while huge investments went into cash crop production.

Many peasants lost their land and those that remained were barely able to eke out a living. When drought and famine struck Tigre in 1972, 25 per cent of the peasantry had little or no land and 42 per cent of those with land had holdings of less than one hectare. Under these conditions it was inevitable that even the slightest modification in climatic conditions would lead to disaster.

Agricultural decline in Tigre, as in the whole of northern Ethiopia, is a consequence of the system of exploitation which diverted the surplus of the subsistence farmers to the coffers of the Ethiopian state. This left few resources for investment and the impoverishment of the land became inevitable.

In contrast to the drought belt, those parts of Ethiopia which have maintained capital investment in land have been able to continue production. Coffee production in the hills of south and west Ethiopia has increased by nine per cent during the past year. Parts of the western region have produced considerable surpluses of grain.

How independent?

All the evidence so far seems to suggest that the authoritarian Ethiopian state is to blame for the poverty and starvation that haunts the country.

The parasitic and oppressive role of the state under successive emperors cannot be denied. A reactionary regime based on the Amharic landlord class established itself by oppressing the surrounding nationalities and squeezing the maximum surplus from the peasantry. According to popular opinion, the Amharic regime

did this independently. And indeed Ethiopia never really became a colony.

In 1896 Ethiopian troops under Menelik defeated the Italian invaders in the battle of Adowa. And although Italy managed to invade Ethiopia in 1933, the country was 'liberated' by the Allies in 1941. Ethiopia retained its independence, but over the years it became part of the sphere of influence of the United States.

Washington recognised the strategic importance of Ethiopia in the Horn of Africa and established a communication base at Kagnaw in Asmara. In return, the United States endorsed Ethiopian sovereignty over Eritrea and the Ogaden. The imperialist powers fully supported the right of the Amharic aristocracy to deny the national aspirations of the people of these regions.

The Ethiopian Empire kept its formal independence, but it could not survive without foreign assistance. The conservative state bureaucracy was forced to drive millions of peasants into poverty and destitution to maintain its rule.

Subsidies

As agriculture declined only foreign subsidies could keep the country afloat. Between 1952 and 1974 more than half of all Washington's military aid to black Africa — \$270m — went to Ethiopia. In addition, the USA pumped in more than \$350m of economic aid. The importance of these subsidies becomes clear when compared to foreign investment. In 1974, total foreign investment was \$300m, of which only \$22m came from the United States.

Imperialism was quite happy to see Ethiopia fall further and further into poverty. Economic insecurity forced the Ethiopian state to become even more dependent on foreign assistance. This in turn enabled the imperialists to consolidate their interests in a region of great strategic importance.

This was how the Ethiopian Empire managed to survive. An anachronistic system of political rule depended on the most advanced imperialist power for its existence. Imperialism played the leading role in prolonging the life of the Ethiopian state. The Amharic state machinery of the fifties and sixties was very much the product of imperialist domination.

But foreign assistance could not keep the system going for ever. Haile Selassie's cavalier treatment of the famine in the northern regions of Wollo and Tigre in 1974 led to mutinies in the army. His Empire collapsed like a house of cards.

The new military regime is not the Marxist menace denounced by every Western power. But the simple desire of the Provisional Military Administrative Council (the Dergue) to modernise the country inevitably aroused the suspicion and wrath of Western imperialism.

These tensions, combined with the rise of armed conflict with the oppressed nationalities, drove the Dergue towards the Soviet Union in search of arms. Matters came to a head in April 1977 when the

Dergue responded to Washington's suspension of arms shipments by closing down the US communication base in Kagnaw. The subsidies which in the past prevented the collapse of the Ethiopian state slowly began to dry up.

Present trends

Despite the Marxist rhetoric, not much has changed in Ethiopia. The much-vaunted land reform of 1975 distributed land to a wider group of peasants, but it did nothing to change the pattern of cultivation.

There have been no significant improvements in agriculture. Nor has there been any change in the system of Amharic domination. The Dergue is just as committed to the maintenance of the Ethiopian Empire as the regime of Haile Selassie before it.

The main change has been the replacement of America by the Soviet Union as the main foreign patron of the Ethiopian state. This development aggravated imperialism and explains Western reluctance to provide Ethiopia with famine relief.

Tragically, this is happening at a time when the Ethiopian state is less able to provide relief to its starving millions than ever before. The Ethiopian system is on the verge of collapse.

Since 1974 the country has been in a permanent state of civil war. The Dergue has been forced to carry out military operations on several fronts. It faces a major challenge from armed forces in Eritrea and Tigre. Defence and security account for up to 46 per cent of annual expenditure, which was \$598m in 1983/84. Virtually all Ethiopia's export earnings are spent on weapons. There is precious little left for famine relief.

Barbarism

There is no end in sight for the civil war. And there is no end in sight for the drought. The political fragmentation and economic chaos that stalk the country are the price the people of Ethiopia must pay for a system kept artificially alive by imperialism.

Ethiopia's \$800m debt to Western banks means that imperialism continues to exact its price in human lives. Famine relief can offer the Ethiopian masses some temporary respite, but in itself can do nothing to end their nightmare. Relief keeps people alive until next year's famine. But Ethiopia needs a major programme of investment in agriculture to counteract the effects of the drought. In a world system dominated by imperialism there are no prospects for the transfer of resources on such a scale.

The misery that afflicts the people of Ethiopia and other parts of Africa underlines the two alternatives facing humanity: socialism or barbarism. The needless suffering and death of millions towards the end of the twentieth century is a powerful argument for destroying the imperialist system before it destroys us all.

Frank Richards

Kentucky Fried Chicken



Running riot: reforms can't quell black resistance

The crisis in South Africa

The reckoning to come

For two days in early November the industrial heartland of South Africa came to a standstill when black trade unions and student organisations refused to go to work.

Two weeks earlier, a 7000-strong police and army force invaded the trouble-torn Vaal townships of Sharpeville and Boipatong. They had already been to Sebokeng, where 250 000 blacks were searched and daubed with fluorescent red paint, and 354 arrested.

The eruption of South Africa's black urban areas represents a death blow to President PW Botha's carefully nurtured strategy of creating a black middle class as a buffer against the rising strength of the black working class.

The two-day stay-away was the fourth, the biggest and the most effective action to take place this year. Unlike the riots which shook the townships of Sharpeville and Boipatong on 3 September, the work boycott in November involved black workers as well as students. They made seven demands:

- the withdrawal of the army and police from the townships
- the resignation of community councillors
- no rent and busfare increases
- the release of detainees and political prisoners
- the reinstatement of all dismissed workers
- the withdrawal of 'unfair' GST (General Sales Tax) and other taxes
- democratically-elected Student Representative Councils at black schools and the abolition of educational age restrictions.

Targets

Government buildings, banks and particularly black councillors have been the main targets of the unrest. The first casualty of the boycott was a Barclays Bank in the Soweto suburb of Dube Village. It was razed to the ground at 4am on Monday 4 November. By the next morning a slogan had been scrawled across the

walls — 'Next time we kill'.

On 3 September in Sharpeville, black Deputy Mayor Sam Dlamini was hacked to death when he opened fire on students demonstrating outside his fortified residence. They were protesting against the council's decision to increase rents in the township by R5.90. In townships like Evaton, black councillors have received similar treatment.

Leading black businessmen have also been singled out for special treatment. Katlehong business tycoon Malachia 'Lucky' Mogorosi was gunned down on Saturday 10 November outside his shop. The police have labelled these selective killings as the work of criminals. But Mogorosi's body was left riddled with bullets while his shop was left untouched.

Throughout the past six months, barely a day has passed without demonstrations against rent increases and the discriminatory Bantu education system, which spends eight times more per head on white education than on blacks. South Africa's 10 million urban blacks have directed their wrath at the police and 'systems' blacks — the black councillors and businessmen who have run the townships ever since the introduction of the Black Local Authorities Act in 1982.

Strategy

This Act was central to the ruling class strategy of creating a black urban middle class which could be entrusted with the administration of townships, the collection of

revenue and even control over Pass Laws.

Twelve months of urban unrest have revealed the limitations of this strategy. Far from creating stability and containing black revolt, the urban black middle class has become the target of violence against the apartheid regime and created further instability.

In Soweto, where the vast majority of the 1.5 million black residents live in poverty, the city council's recent decision to award the retiring mayor, ET Tshabalala, an 11 232 square mile 'plot' of land on which to retire from 'civic' office has only fuelled black anger.

Urban councillors do not rule by popular consent. In the recent elections, the government tried to divide workers by restricting the right to vote to those who had limited rights to live and work in the white areas. Those classified as migrants — 'temporary sojourners' — had no franchise. This ploy backfired and the election turnout was pathetic.

On 13 September, six leading members of the United Democratic Front sought sanctuary in the British Consulate in Pretoria to avoid indefinite imprisonment under South Africa's notorious Internal Security Act.

The UDF was formed in August 1983 to oppose the introduction of a new constitution which was to exclude the black majority from participation in elections (see above).

Approximately 600 black organisations are affiliated to the UDF, which has organised peaceful demonstrations and meetings to galvanise opposi-

Lekoa Town Council received one of the highest percentage turnouts in the country — only 15 per cent of officially-recognised voters bothered to turn up. A council decision to raise rents in September resulted in widespread rioting and the death of four councillors.

Blacks in Lekoa are still refusing to pay the increase and the council collects rent payments from the backs of army and police trucks.

While black urban development has delivered nothing to the South African masses, the killings of councillors has got results. Black councillors have refused to impose rent increases for fear of reprisals. As the leader of Tsakane Community Council put it in early November after suspending indefinitely the proposed rent increases in the East Rand township, 'our lives are at stake' (*Rand Daily Mail*).

Discredited

South Africa's black urban areas are in a state of near collapse. But the problems confronting the ruling class are not confined to the townships. The other side of Botha's strategy — the development of independent black homelands and the establishment of a 'tri-cameral' white, Indian and 'coloured' Parliament — is equally discredited.

The introduction of the new constitution in September was part of the government's plan to co-opt 'coloured' and Indian middle class politicians as junior partners in the running of the apartheid regime.

Formally, the constitution allows these communities the same claims upon state services as whites. They are also expected to perform the same duties — military service being the most important. They have little say on national matters, however, and in reality, only partial jurisdiction over their 'community affairs'.

Not surprisingly, the election turnout was paltry. Only 60 per cent of eligible 'coloured' voters registered, and of these, only 32 per cent actually voted. While more Indians registered to vote (82 per cent), only 20 per cent actually voted.

The spectacle of Assembly members being elected with no more than 118 votes, only underlined the isolation of

self-appointed black representatives like Allan Hendrickse, whose 'coloured' Labour Party took 76 of the 80 'coloured' seats. Hendrickse claims that he is 'fighting apartheid from the inside'. This hollow justification for participation in the new Parliament does not fool anybody.

Groomed

President Botha commented that he was pleased with the outcome, although 'coloured' and Indian leaders still had to 'groom their people for the use of their democratic rights' (*Africa*, October 1984). In fact, the 'coloured' and Indian communities registered their anger at their lack of democratic rights — by refusing to vote.

The government made it clear from the start that it would introduce the constitution regardless of the outcome of the elections. But the elections served only to galvanise national opposition to the regime.

Civil rights organisations such as the United Democratic Front, which co-ordinated the boycott, student organisations and trade unions all united to condemn Apartheid's new sham democracy.

The invasion of Sebokeng and other black townships by the army is a measure of the regime's failure to 'groom' South African blacks to accept their oppression. Operation Palmiet, as the invasion was called, gave the lie to the government's claims that it has ushered in a new era of reforms. South Africa might have a new constitution, but apartheid terror lives on.

Crisis

The November boycott, the riots and the state clampdown on black trade unions mark a new stage in the class struggle in South Africa.

The apartheid regime was able to invade Sebokeng with 7000 troops, but it has yet to deal with the black working class. The trade union movement is a national movement, with representation in all of the country's major industrial centres, and more recently, in the gold and coal mines. This year has seen the biggest strike wave since the Second World War.

The fall in the price of gold, rising inflation and the dramatic depreciation of the

rand, have all contributed to the deepening recession in South Africa. All bourgeois commentators agree that things are going to get worse.

Unemployment has rocketed in the last few months. The once dynamic motor industry in the Eastern Cape has cut back its workforce, and every firm without exception is now working a three day week.

Thousands of black workers have been laid off and shunted back to their 'homelands'. Thousands are streaming back into the urban areas to escape the poverty of these uneconomic dust bowls. The government has tightened the purse strings and slashed spending on housing, education and services. At the same time, it has tried to decentralise local government, putting the onus on its newly elected stooges to raise their own revenues to run the townships.

Workers' resistance to these attacks on their living standards has increased. Last month's announcement by the Soweto bus company Putco of a 12.5 per cent fare increase resulted in a boycott campaign. Even the Soweto City Council took heed of earlier warnings and voted against the increase.

Chains

The recession has removed the room for manoeuvre that the apartheid regime enjoyed in the late seventies and early eighties. The accelerating recession and unprecedented scale of opposition to its rule has left the Botha government with its back to the wall.

Only six months ago things looked very different. Although strikes were breaking out everywhere, they were being safely channelled through the courts. The regime had successfully bludgeoned its neighbours into signing 'peace' treaties — the Nkomati and Lusaka agreements — and Botha enjoyed international acclaim when he visited Europe.

Today, black militancy is stronger and more difficult to contain than ever before. And there has been no real progress to end the wars in Angola and Mozambique.

Operation Palmiet is only the beginning of the Botha regime's attempt to overcome the crisis and keep the South African masses in chains. The black working class has already demonstrated its determination to throw them off.

Charles Longford

Lessons of the Durban Six

On 13 September, six leading members of the United Democratic Front sought sanctuary in the British Consulate in Pretoria to avoid indefinite imprisonment under South Africa's notorious Internal Security Act.

The UDF was formed in August 1983 to oppose the introduction of a new constitution which was to exclude the black majority from participation in elections (see above).

Approximately 600 black organisations are affiliated to the UDF, which has organised peaceful demonstrations and meetings to galvanise opposi-

tion to the new constitution.

The six leaders who sought refuge at the British Consulate had already been held in custody for more than two weeks during the elections. On their release, the Botha government issued another order for their detention.

The six made it clear that they were not seeking political asylum. They merely demanded that the British government put pressure on the apartheid regime to negotiate with the UDF.

Thatcher did not kick the Durban Six out of the Consulate, but did everything to make life as difficult as

possible for them in the hope that they would leave. The Six were denied toilet facilities, mattresses, telephones and visits from relatives. Only after their relatives started a hunger-strike, did the British allow visits to take place. Thatcher refused to meet a UDF representative when he flew to London.

Thatcher justified meeting Botha in London on the grounds that she wanted to persuade him to make reforms in South Africa. But her government's treatment of the Durban Six indicates that British imperialism fully supports the oppression and

detention without trial of South Africa's anti-apartheid campaigners.

The Durban Six's decision to seek sanctuary in the Consulate to evade the South African security police was fully justified. But appealing to the British government to play a progressive role in South Africa can never be justified. Yet this has been the defining feature of the Anti Apartheid Movement in Britain for decades.

The only way to build real support for the black masses is to take sides against British imperialism which has invested millions in their oppression.

After Brighton

A new Tory policy for 'Ulster'?

After the Brighton bomb, Margaret Thatcher rightly asserted that the IRA attack on the Tory Party conference would be 'the new backdrop to everything' discussed at November's Anglo-Irish summit.

But the impact of the bombing on Thatcher's London talks with Irish premier Garret FitzGerald was very different from similar events in the past.

When the IRA assassinated Lord Mountbatten in 1979, Tory ministers used the occasion to cold shoulder the Dublin government and emphasise Britain's hostility to all things Irish.

In the wake of Brighton, however, Whitehall officials went out of their way to assure anybody who would listen that the bombing would not affect their close relations with their Dublin counterparts. Instead, the British government presented the IRA attack as justification for closer cooperation with the regime in the Republic, and for sitting down with FitzGerald to lay the basis for a warmer Anglo-Irish friendship.

The change in British attitudes towards the South reflects Westminster's concern about the instability currently unsettling the whole of Ireland. This new departure in Britain's public relations with the Republic has been prompted by the growing threat to the Twenty-six Counties state.

The impact of the world recession in Ireland has struck a mighty blow at the foundations of establishment power in the Republic and increased the potential for the tensions within the war-zone of Northern Ireland to explode over the Border.

Crumbling

Record unemployment and soaring inflation indicate that the Twenty-six Counties, like every West European country, is suffering the consequences of the international capitalist crisis. But the Irish Republic has additional problems which are more often found in the Third World. Its per capita foreign debt now stands at twice the level of infamous debtors such as Mexico and Brazil. And its economy is crumbling as vital foreign investors pull out in search of more lucrative bases.

The recession has destroyed the Republic's pretensions about being an independent, industrialised democracy on the British model. It has revealed the Twenty-six Counties as a backward 'banana republic' without the benefits of bananas, dominated by British imperialism.

The Republic's weak economic base has encouraged state attacks on the working class. The Fine Gael/Labour Party coalition government's latest National Plan mixes utopian ideas of industrial growth with the harsh reality of swingeing cuts in public sector services and jobs.

Wracked

As the Irish economy sinks closer to the misery of the Third World, so political and social affairs in the Twenty-

six Counties take on the volatile character of a Latin American or African dictatorship. Today, the Twenty-six Counties is wracked by political scandals, industrial strife, 'crime waves' and 'drug epidemics'.

Public respect for the traditional forces of stability in the South, the church and state, is at an all-time low. The establishment has been forced to conduct open debates on previously unmentionable issues such as divorce and contraception.

The gardai (police) have come under fierce attack for their corruption and brutality. In Dublin's ghettos, everybody from oppressed workers to grasping slum landlords has taken to organising vigilante groups to protect their interests.

The deep-rooted crisis has undermined the Dublin government's ability to insulate itself from the impact of the war in the North. The struggle of the nationalist community in the Six Counties against the institutions of imperialist domination could act as a catalyst for anti-government unrest in the South.

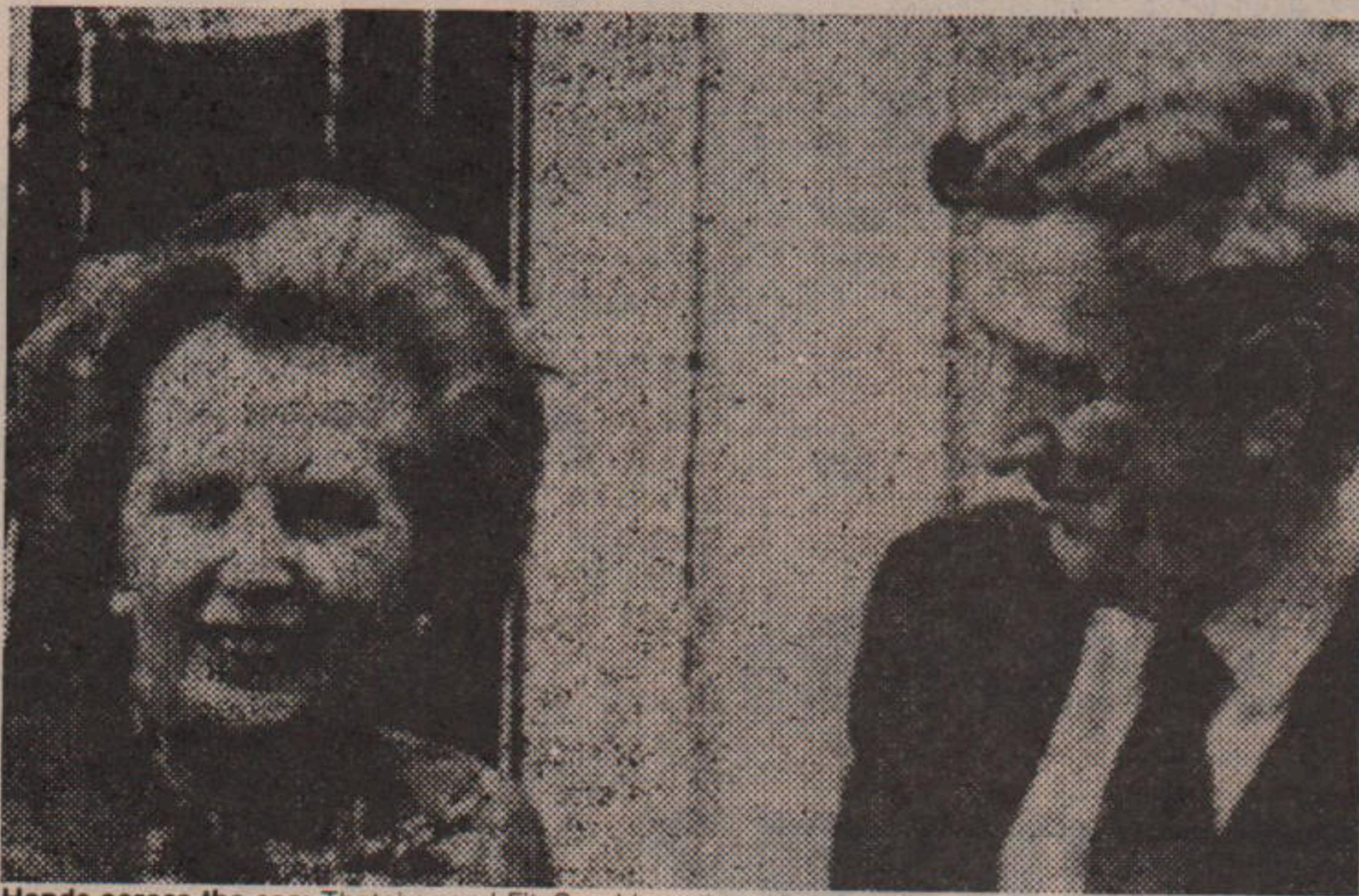
Rising support for the republican struggle against British rule in Northern Ireland has been matched by declining respect for 'constitutional nationalism', the political tradition through which the Irish establishment has sought to reconcile the Irish people to British domination. If the mood of the Northern nationalists spreads South, the fragile fabric of Twenty-six Counties society could be blown apart almost overnight. The Dublin establishment has long been concerned about the 'alienation' of the nationalist community from the Six Counties state and the dangers it poses to the Republic.

Ireland's rulers have lobbied Britain to launch a political initiative which could refine the excesses of British repression in the North, give Dublin a voice in Northern Ireland affairs, and restore some faith in constitutional nationalism. This was the theme of FitzGerald's preparation for the November summit.

Impressed

A new report, *Britain's undefended frontier: a policy for Ulster*, indicates that the problem of nationalist 'alienation' has even impressed itself on the Loyalists' allies on the right wing of the British Tory party.

The report, published by the Institute for European Defence and Strategic Studies, purports to be the work of 'an independent study group'. In reality, its authors are about as independent as the British



Hands across the sea: Thatcher and FitzGerald continue their 'special relationship' outside No 10.

paratroop regiment.

Written by top Tory adviser TE Utley in collusion with leading Conservative lights Sir Patrick Macrory, Sir John Biggs-Davison, Nicholas Budgen MP and Peter Lloyd MP, *A policy for Ulster* provides a useful insight into hardline establishment thinking on the Irish War today.

The report recognises the problem of increased nationalist hostility to the institutions of Crown rule in the North, and the dangers this poses to the government in the South. It proposes a series of measures to improve cooperation between Westminster and Dublin in stabilising Ireland:

- A joint Anglo-Irish security commission, including members of both governments, to coordinate the campaign against the IRA. A military sub-committee made up of top British and Irish police and army officers would meet frequently.
- A full-time secretariat for the Anglo-Irish Inter Governmental Council, drawn from Dublin and Whitehall civil services.
- A parliamentary tier to the Council.
- Anglo-Irish summits to discuss Northern Ireland at fixed intervals.

The ideas for more direct consultation with the Republic over Northern affairs contained in *A policy for Ulster* represent a radical departure from the established approach of Tory statesmen. Like the softly, softly reaction to Brighton, they indicate how seriously Britain takes the threat of the Irish War going South.

Containment

For 15 years, Britain has managed to keep control of Ireland by limiting the armed struggle to the Six Counties. The containment of the war within the borders of Northern Ireland is the sole guarantee that London can maintain its direct rule in Belfast and indirect influence over Dublin.

If the fight for Irish freedom were to cross the

remorseless clarity that if the attempt to restore order in Ulster fails the result will be not the unification of Ireland but a bloody civil war, spreading across the Border.'

The aim of *A policy for Ulster*, and of the Anglo-Irish summit, is to put a fresh diplomatic veneer on the process of bringing the Republic closer to Britain's heel.

Myth

The Tories' ideas for new political structures to restore the credibility of constitutional nationalism in Ireland indicate how desperate Britain is to keep the war out of the Republic. The only thing which worries Westminster more is keeping opposition to its Irish War out of Britain.

The British labour movement has long accepted the establishment myth that the Twenty-six Counties is an independent nation. The British miners' union recently tried to avoid the sequestration of its funds by shipping them across the Irish Sea, in the mistaken belief that its cash would be outside the jurisdiction of the British state.

In the crisis conditions of the eighties, the illusion of Irish independence is becoming increasingly difficult to sustain. The time is now ripe for anti-imperialists to expose the lie that Irish freedom was achieved 60 years ago, and win British workers to collaborate with the Irish people's struggle against the imperialists in Westminster and their lackeys in Dublin.

Mick Hume

Border and fire the aspirations of the Southern working class, the days of British rule in Ireland would be numbered. The proposals put forward by Tory gurus such as Utley and Biggs-Davison for new London-Dublin arrangements seek to keep the lid on the war by shoring up the Irish establishment's reputation as spokesman for the nationalist cause.

The new Tory approach is significant. But it does nothing to alter the establishment's commitment to maintaining Britain's unchallenged sovereignty in Northern Ireland. Far from stepping back from Westminster's Direct Rule in the Six Counties, the Tories are seeking to extend Direct Rule into the South by drawing Dublin further into the British war effort.

The Tories aim is not to offer a political alternative to

the war, but to establish a safety device in the South which can hold down the national liberation struggle at an acceptable level. The report's proposal for a joint security commission is the only one with any teeth. It promotes cross-Border collaboration against the republican movement as the only alternative to a dangerous escalation of British repression which could provoke a nationalist backlash throughout Ireland:

'It should be made clear to the Dublin government that the degree of force which must be used in the attempt to restore order in Ulster will be in inverse proportion to the degree of effective cooperation on security which can be achieved between the two governments. We believe that it should be impressed upon Dublin with



40p & 20p p&p. 10 or more post free

Order from: BCM JPLTD London WC1N 3XX

The pamphlet on the Brighton bomb and the miners' strike that the faces in high places are muttering about.

'This is the first stage towards revolution. It is in terribly bad taste.' Councillor David Smith, Brighton Tory group spokesman

'Sharing out the misery'

'We have accepted our responsibility and are trying to ensure that racial discrimination no longer takes place...we will be dealing with it and tackling it...we're trying to find a way of ensuring that the misery is shared out fairly and equally.' (Hackney councillor John Bloom, *West Indian World*, 10 October)

A racist backlash is gathering pace in East London. In Tower Hamlets a group called Fairplay is organising to prevent local Bengalis entering council accommodation. To the north, in Hackney, the letters page of the local *Gazette* has been inundated with a stream of racist correspondence. The left-wing Greater London Council and local Labour councillors blame white workers for the growth of racism in the area. In reality, it is Labour's failure to provide decent housing, jobs and services for all workers that has fuelled the backlash. By pursuing a positive discrimination policy in favour of blacks while offering only more misery to everybody, the Labour Party has fostered the racial divisions that lie behind the backlash.

An old story

Racist violence is nothing new in Tower Hamlets. In 1982 the GLC commissioned an inquiry into racial harassment on housing estates. Tower Hamlets was singled out as the worst affected borough.

In November 1983, however, the GLC moved in to stamp it out. It set up a special quango, the Race and Housing Action Team (RHAT) to combat racial harassment and develop equal opportunity in housing.

Both the GLC and the local council had operated a racist housing allocations policy for years. In 1982 the Spitalfields Housing and Planning Rights Service produced a damning survey of the GLC's record on housing local Bengalis. The report showed that of the 10 newest estates in the borough, less than one per cent of the flats available had been allocated to Bengalis, who make up 30 per cent of the population.

Image

This apartheid housing policy did not square with the new anti-racist image which the GLC was seeking to cultivate. RHAT was formed to put things right. Its brief is to monitor new allocations and

transfers and tackle racist attacks on the estates.

Yet one year on there has been no progress. Indeed, things have got even worse. An interim report by SHAPRS revealed that only seven per cent of 1000 new offers had gone to Bengalis by May 1984. A survey of 16 estates showed that only one per cent of new properties had been occupied by Bengalis.

Racist violence has not abated. In October, RHAT reported 245 cases of racial harassment. More than 40 estates in Tower Hamlets had become hotbeds of racist activity, and on at least six, hostile reception committees had been formed to intimidate prospective Bengali tenants.

In May, six Asian families were allotted homes in Beaumont Square in Stepney Green. They faced immediate verbal and physical threats.

Montmorres estate has become a no-go area for Bengalis. On at least four occasions when Asian families arrived to view properties they were met by groups of hostile whites, shouting racial abuse. Pigs trotters were hung from flat doors and racist graffiti covered the walls inside and outside. All four families refused the new accommodation.

Blame

The GLC has been unable to stop the mounting racist campaign because its own policies are to blame for the backlash. Labour has never provided workers in East London with the housing they need. Instead it has told them to make do with what little there is.

And for decades Labour politicians have accommodated to local racists who have claimed the better council accommodation as their birthright. It was inevitable that when the GLC began to make loud noises about giving local Asians a better deal the racists would go on the offensive.

East London workers are fighting each other to get a share of the limited housing stock available. Rather than

identify Labour's lousy housing provision as the problem, some local racists have turned to vent their frustrations on the Bengali community.

The GLC's current policies have exacerbated the problem. It has produced volumes of reports on housing policy. Allocations are meant to be based on need and racially monitored. RHAT also monitors racist attacks through a network of estate officers, community organisations, welfare workers, police and housing officials. But the GLC's newest quango has failed to challenge the racists.

Warned

Bengalis who are under attack have been warned of the dangers of moving to a 'high risk' estate:

'The GLC does not ask any tenant who feels unable to cope with the situation to either continue living in a flat where they are being subject to racial harassment or to move into a flat where they would be subject to racial harassment.'

Radical apologists

Militant supporter 'John Bloom caused a storm when he boasted of Hackney council's commitment to 'sharing out the misery' equally among black and white workers at a recent conference on racism and housing in Hackney.

The conference was organised to clear the good name of the left-wing Labour council a year after it had been found guilty by the Commission for Racial Equality of practicing discrimination against black tenants.

To restore the council's anti-racist credentials, Bloom announced a three-point programme to combat discrimination:

- allocations would be racially monitored
- housing staff would be sent on an anti-racist training programme
- a sum of money would be set aside for out of court

compensation settlements for black tenants who experience discrimination.

Bloom's plan was not well received by any section of the audience. Black tenants got no guarantee that the council would fight discrimination. And white tenants who condemned the council for its failure to provide decent housing for everybody were accused of being racist by the platform speakers.

Labour's policies are divisive. Because it accepts the constraints of working within the capitalist system, the Labour Party goes along with cuts in housing provision and other services.

Weeks after its conference, Hackney council displayed its anti-working class character when it physically evicted tenants from Woodberry Down estate. They had occupied their area housing office in protest at the lack of repairs and decent services.

All that Labour can offer the working class is an equal share in misery. Cuts in housing, jobs and services force workers to fight over what's left of a shrinking cake and encourage racial divisions.

Because it is not prepared to fight for the facilities that all workers need, Labour's pledge to eliminate racism remains nothing but rhetoric. Its token gestures do nothing to challenge racial discrimination and can only foster resentment among white workers. Black workers in Hackney suffer discrimination in every sphere of social life. But racism in employment or housing cannot be fought by redistributing what remains of a shrinking cake.

Hackney workers must reject Labour's divisive policies and wage a real struggle against racism by fighting for decent housing for everybody.



Chris Black (relax)

Slumming it: Labour landlords dole out dereliction and despair

(Code of practice on racial harassment)

In other words, the GLC has nothing to offer Asian tenants who live in constant fear of racist attacks.

On Teviot Street estate RHAT and the local police monitoring group, the Community Alliance for Police Accountability — another GLC-funded quango

— could only dispense sympathy. Visits to the local police got them nowhere. CAPA mounted a campaign to get six Asian families transferred off the estate. This succeeded and Teviot Street has become another no-go area for Bengalis.

Twenty five Asian families on Lincoln estate have faced a constant barrage of racist violence for the past two

years. RHAT has been monitoring the attacks for the last 12 months. It has organised liaison networks between the tenants, the police and local housing officers. The attacks have not stopped. RHAT has completed seven transfers and the rest are in the pipeline. Not surprisingly, all 25 families want out.

RHAT has fostered even deeper divisions by threatening to evict white tenants found guilty of intimidation. It plans to institutionalise this procedure by setting up a special legal branch and pursuing prosecutions under the race relations legislation and the Housing Act.

Onus

In practice, the GLC has already backed down on its fair allocations pledge. The onus is on Asian tenants to defend themselves or move out. The GLC's failure to confront the racists head on has demobilised resistance and encouraged the racists to step up their intimidatory tactics.

The GLC blames white workers for the spread of racism on the estates. But Labour is the real cause for reaction in East London. Its failure to provide all workers with the housing they need and decades of pandering to the racists have created the backlash that is gathering force today. It will not go away until the local labour movement takes a stand against the racists and starts fighting for decent housing for all.

Fran Eden

Down and out at Cammell Laird and Metal Box

Long-travelled roads

On Tuesday 23 October, the last of the 37 jailed workers from the Cammell Laird shipyard in Birkenhead stepped out of Walton Jail. They knew that like thousands of other Cammell Laird workers before them, they were on the cobbles.

On Friday 12 October, a mass meeting of the 340 workers at packaging giant Metal Box UK's Clapton site in East London voted to accept the closure of the plant with the loss of all jobs.

Why were a minority of workers at Cammell Laird left to put up a valiant fight in defence of their jobs alone? And why did workers at Metal Box accept redundancy with the prospect of never finding another job, rather than fight to stop the closure?

Blame

'They were bribed' said Richard Lee, secretary of the unofficial National Combined Shop Stewards' Committee, the 'Combine', at Metal Box. Lee blamed the high redundancy money offered by the company — more than three times the statutory requirement — for the workers' unwillingness to fight for their jobs.

Union bureaucrats at Cammell Laird also blamed the workers for their reluctance to come out in defence of jobs. They cast the leader of the back-to-work movement at Laird's, Harry Euers, as the villain of the piece.

Neither of these explanations hold water. It is true that in the end, workers at Metal Box made a choice and took redundancy money rather than a stand in defence of jobs. But in reality, their decision was already made for them. Their final veto on a fightback was conditioned by their bitter experience of the local labour movement's failure to fight redundancies in the past.

The bureaucrats' attempts to pin the blame for the Cammell Laird debacle on back-to-work campaigner Harry Euers and the passive majority of the workforce are equally dishonest. Euers is a bosses' man of long standing, but despite media and company backing he could only mobilise a small minority of workers to support his open scabbing. Most Cammell Laird workers wanted nothing to do with him, but nor were they inspired to emulate the militants' tactic of occupying against redundancies.

Slow death

The defeat at Cammell Laird and the closure of Metal Box were both the end results of a long process. This involved the steady attrition of jobs and working conditions on the one hand, and the unions' failure to advance a realistic strategy for uniting the workforce in defence of jobs on the other.

Metal Box and Cammell Laird have both been devastated during the recession. In 1980, 'the year of the big squeeze', Metal Box's share of the UK two-piece container market slumped and the company launched a radical restructuring programme. Since

then, it has closed more than 20 of its 60 UK factories and shed 12 000 jobs, more than a third of its workforce.

Cammell Laird has suffered along with other shipyards from the impact of the recession on merchant shipping. The labour force has been reduced by more than a third since the nationalised British Shipbuilders was formed in 1977. The yard's workforce has halved this year, with 1650 redundancies, half of them compulsory.

Order books

Union leaders at both Metal Box and Cammell Laird have taken the bosses' problems to heart and accepted that their ability to defend their members depends on keeping the employers in business.

Unions at Metal Box commissioned detailed reports by economists arguing that the company could solve all its problems if only it would extend the range of its products and diversify. When Metal Box closed its Bromborough plant on Merseyside in January 1984, the Combine's only contribution was to try to organise an extraordinary shareholders' meeting where it hoped local council and trade union pension fund investors would persuade the company to change its plans.

As things went from bad to worse at Cammell Laird from the late seventies onwards, the unions became increasingly preoccupied with helping management fill its order books. In the months that followed the announcement of 2000 redundancies at Birkenhead in August 1979, the unions were working closely with the employers to secure a £18m order from Norway, instead of taking independent action to safeguard jobs.

Without a fight

Workers at Metal Box in Clapton had every reason to be cynical about their unions' capacity to save their jobs. For years they had watched as factories in the same area closed down around them. Workers had been willing to fight, but their unions' strategies only led them down a dead end.

Nearby toymakers Lesney's Matchbox was the first to go in 1982 with the loss of 2000 jobs. The unions put their faith in the local Labour council in Hackney and the GLC, which promised national and local government grants to help the company. Lesney's turned them down.

At Staffa engineering, just around the corner from Metal Box, the 350-strong workforce occupied in defence of their



Solidarity: Cammell Laird workers got more support from striking miners than their own leaders

jobs on 29 September 1981. The main union at the plant, the AUEW, refused to back the occupation. Isolated and demoralised, the workers filed out of the factory three weeks later after 300 police stormed in and removed their only bargaining counter against the employers — £2m worth of machinery. The factory closed a year later.

Last year the unions at Metal Box accepted more than 90 voluntary redundancies. Their failure to make any preparations for a fightback fed the insecurity of the workforce and engendered a fatalistic acceptance that the factory was doomed.

Rumours of closure hung over the plant from early 1983. By June this year the company's plans were obvious. The appointment of Dennis 'the undertaker' Dempson who had already closed four Metal Box sites was a clear signal. In mid-June shop stewards discovered managers burning copies of the company's annual report to its employees which showed that the Clapton site did not figure in Metal Box's plans for 1985. But still the unions did not move. The Combine did not meet to discuss the closure threat until 13 October — two months after it was announced and a day after the workforce voted to accept the company's redundancy terms.

Militants at the factory became more and more isolated and workers more and more demoralised. By the time the official announcement of the closure came on 10 August the workers were already resigned to redundancy. The 12 October mass meeting was merely the end of the long road they had travelled from 1980.

Down the river

Workers at Cammell Laird went through a similar experience to those at Metal Box. The astonishing thing is that they had any fight left. But they did. In May 1983 the 2800 remaining workers at the shipyard voted by a substantial majority to occupy against any job losses and against the pay freeze imposed over the

previous year. British Shipbuilders was demanding 9000 more redundancies — 1400 were earmarked for Cammell Laird. What happened between May 1983 and summer 1984 to undermine workers' determination to fight for their jobs?

First, the union leaders prevaricated and set no date for the occupation. Second, they issued idle strike threats which were never realised and which demoralised workers' resistance to both job losses and changes in working practices.

Management set a deadline of 15 December 1983 for acceptance of new working practices. With a mandate to take action, the Confederation of Shipbuilding and Engineering unions, the 'Confed', called for an all-out strike from 6 January.

The deliberate delay was a guarantee that the union lead-

ers had no intention of letting the strike go ahead. In any case, they had already come within an inch of making concessions to management. As team leader Jim Murray admitted, 'we are the first to recognise that change is necessary'.

The Confed unions proceeded to 'consult' their members until they had demoralised them sufficiently to get a vote against strike action. It was against this background that a group of workers occupied the HMS Edinburgh and the gas accommodation rig in early July.

The staggers were already on 90-day redundancy notices, with no prospect of a job when they ran out. Occupation leader Billy Albertina spoke for 800 other workers who were losing their jobs:

'You see, I accept that if the yard closes I'll never work again

— ever — and neither will my brothers. So we decided to fight...it was the only way.'

They put up a brave fight, but right up to the end they still had to contend with the inertia of their union leaders.

In a situation which demanded a concerted political campaign to convince the rank and file to support the occupation, local union officials spent their time locked in talks with management. The Confed was engaged in a public relations exercise, trying to win new orders for the yard at the Ministry of Defence, and Militant-controlled Liverpool City Council was doing its best to pretend that nothing was happening.

Having made no attempt to spread the action, the bureaucrats sat back and watched the defeat unfold. The occupiers became more and more isolated, until they were finally forced out and imprisoned in October. A few days after their release they were given an up-market version of a food parcel by the Labour council by way of a civic reception and that was that.

Final play-out

The story of the workers at Metal Box and the Walton 37 is grim. Thousands of other jobless workers have their own horror stories to tell. But although they have left many workers embittered, these experiences should not be a cause for resignation or despair. The events at Cammell Laird and Metal Box stand as an epitaph for the old institutions of the labour movement and a confirmation of the urgent need to build new ones.

Alan Harding & John Johnson

Sour grapes

One hundred delegates walked out of the Militant-dominated CPSA Broad Left national conference on Saturday 3 November. The split provoked heated debate among the rival Broad Left groupings in the civil service union. But it only increased the cynicism of rank and file CPSA members who have come to expect nothing but factional manoeuvring from their left-wing leadership.

The stage-managed walk-out came after complaints from Communist Party and Labour Party members in the Labour Group that Militant was intent on taking complete control of the Broad Left and was too 'intolerant' of other left-wing groups.

About 300 delegates ignored the walkout and stayed behind to denounce the splitters. Militant denied that it was trying to take over the group and said it regretted the split. The Socialist Workers' Party, which joined the Broad Left as part of its turn to the 'united front' in September, after

years of denouncing it as a rotten bloc, made a series of appeals for unity.

The split is more a reflection of the factional manoeuvrings of the various left groupings in the Broad Left than any fundamental difference of political approach. The aim of every faction is to get itself into positions of influence within the union machine. The Labour Group is piqued that it is losing out to Militant in its former bastion.

Set up in 1976 by Communist and Labour Party members, the CPSA Broad Left has been taken over by Militant in recent years. A new layer of left-wing bureaucrats is now fully incorporated into the union machine.

The left first took control of the CPSA executive in 1982 under the leadership of Militant supporter Kevin Roddy. It also made great strides on the DHSS and Department of Employment section executives. After presiding over stagnating pay and selling out important strikes in Oxford

and Birmingham, the left was ousted by Alistair Graham and the right in 1983. At this year's national conference the left regained control of the executive, though Graham remains at the head of the union.

The Broad Left may have won a cosy niche for the left's aspiring bureaucrats, but it has brought no gains for the rank and file. This year's Broad Left dominated executive has done next to nothing to get a pay campaign off the ground or give solid support to its members on strike for nearly six months at the Newcastle and Washington computer centres. While the left indulges its petty squabbles, striking workers are still waiting for decisive action to help them win.

Workers in the CPSA need to challenge the new breed of bureaucrats on the left just as much as those on the right and start building a real rank and file movement independent of the union machine.

Paul Foster

the next step

The labour movement we need

The events of the past 12 months show that we cannot afford to put off any longer the task of building a new labour movement. Backed all the way by the Tory government, the courts and the police, the employers have launched a series of open attacks on the working class. The pathetic responses of the leaders of the labour movement — the TUC and the Labour Party — underline the urgency of creating real alternatives. We need effective trade union organisations and a political party that can stand up and fight for workers' interests — and we need them urgently. 'Britain's trade unions have been put in their place at last' claimed *The Sunday Times* exultantly last month. The British establishment was already anticipating success in its showdown with the miners:

'When the miners — supposedly the most powerful of all unions — are seen not to have prevailed over Mrs Thatcher's government, the benefit will not only be hers, but that of British democracy itself.' (18 November)

The victory celebrations may be premature but the objective is clear. The British ruling class is engaged in class warfare on a scale unprecedented for more than half a century. The combative tone of even more respectable establishment newspapers reflects a shift towards a more coercive strategy.

For decades the British state has dealt with the working class through intermediaries. This approach has conferred status and authority on the leaders of trade unions and the Labour Party who have been consulted by the government and entertained in negotiations with employers. The Tories have moved to put an end to these indirect methods of dealing with the working class. Instead of going through the usual union channels, the bosses went straight to the workers over the heads of the union officials.

In recent months the Tories have widened the scope of their new approach. In the miners' strike they scorned appeals for talks with union leaders and the traditional late night negotiated solution. Instead the bosses launched a calculated propaganda appeal to every miner. At the same time, they have mobilised the full forces of the police and the courts to try to smash the strike by terror and intimidation. At Austin Rover, management has used the full force of the Tories' latest anti-union laws against the unions.

The Tories' hardline approach has thrown the leaders of the old labour movement into a panic. They have responded to the bosses' offensive in two ways — by trying to talk them out of it, and by simply giving in.

For nine months the leaders of the TUC and the Labour Party have begged the government to negotiate a settlement with the miners. In the House of Commons, Neil Kinnock has repeatedly implored Thatcher to invite Scargill and MacGregor around to No 10 for beer and sandwiches. But Thatcher and MacGregor are not interested in talks — they are too busy making plans to shift coal stocks and preparing for the final round of battle. While the TUC frantically tries to work out terms for new negotiations, the coal board has made it clear that it is only interested in Scargill's unconditional surrender.

The TGWU, the main union in the motor industry, has attempted to pursue a similar line in the Austin Rover dispute. Chief TGWU negotiator Grenville Hawley

commented that 'quite frankly, BL have had a hell of a lot of support from national union leaders in the past' and complained about 'this departure from normal negotiations'. But quite frankly, as far as BL management is concerned, 'normal negotiations' are a thing of the past, like Grenville Hawley.

At Austin Rover the TGWU leaders reckoned that they could get away with making a gesture of defiance to the courts to satisfy rank and file pressure. They thought that the employers would then offer a slightly improved wage offer rather than embark on full-scale legal action. The union negotiators could then seize this face-saving compromise and deliver a return to work. In the old days these tactics might have worked — but not in 1984. The employers refused to play ball, stuck to their original offer and went back to the courts.

The alternative option, and it is one with a growing number of adherents in the TUC, is to abandon all resistance to the bosses and simply hope they won't deal too harshly with their former loyal servants. This has been the substance of the TUC's advice to the miners. At first only the TUC President Jack Eccles was prepared to come out in public and tell the miners that they should pack in their strike and accept MacGregor's pit closure programme. But in private this abject surrender position was already the consensus of the General Council in September (see page 4).

At Austin Rover the electricians' union and the engineers capitulated at the first court hearing. The EETPU followed up this sell-out by applying for government money to fund union ballots, a move that signalled its full endorsement of the Tories' legal restrictions on internal union affairs. The white collar union Astms immediately proposed to the TUC that other unions follow the same course and give up even token resistance to anti-union laws. The EETPU's application to join the bosses in the CBI shows that the union leaders will go to any lengths to save their own skins.

The leaders of the old labour movement cannot adapt their methods or their machinery to the conditions of the eighties. They can only plead with the bosses to return to the old ways. At the same time they take whatever desperate measures they consider necessary to hold together organisations that emerged and flourished in a different epoch. The old labour movement is no longer of any use to the British ruling class. But neither is it any use to the working class. At a time when miners are being kicked and truncheoned by police from one end of the country to the other, the only concern of Norman Willis and Neil Kinnock is how far they should go in condemning the violence of workers who fight back. The labour leaders' commitment to ingratiating themselves with an establishment that no longer needs their services destines them to humiliation and irrelevance.

The demise of the labour bureaucracy leads many observers to exaggerate the strength of the establishment and to underestimate the potential of the working class. Behind its complacent face the British ruling class is in a mess. Economic forecasters predict a new wave of recession in 1985 and the outlook for British manufacturing remains bleak. The Tories may have got the upper hand over the miners, but their success has been bought at a high cost. This cost is more political than financial. To get the edge over the miners the bosses have been

obliged to put the authority of their system on the line.

As the strike has dragged on way beyond their expectations, the Tories have had to play their strongest propaganda cards. To intimidate and isolate the miners, the bosses and their media claimed that the strike was an attack on law and order and British democracy and equated Scargill with Argentina's Galtieri, Libya's Gaddafi and the IRA. The capitulations of the official labour movement on these issues have been a big help to the Tories. Yet a growing minority of miners and other workers have rejected the government's propaganda ploys. The result has been a partial collapse of the most powerful force for stability in bourgeois society — the consent of the working class to the authority of the state. The breakdown of consensus is most apparent in the barricades, petrol bombs and boarded up police stations in the pit villages. But it extends more widely in society as an ominous threat to the regime in Thatcher's Britain.

The decline of popular consent for the institutions of British democracy and the growing volatility of class conflict are central concerns of establishment critics of the Thatcher administration. Peter Walker, the leader of the Tory wets has warned the Prime Minister about creating political turmoil through mass unemployment and harsh austerity measures. The Church of England has achieved a new significance in British politics as the self-appointed guardian of the crumbling consensus. The new-found authority of figures like the Bishop of Durham is entirely a result of the ineffectual performance of Her Majesty's official opposition in the Labour Party.

The new establishment offensive has had a contradictory effect on the working class. On the one hand, it has produced a degree of disorientation and demoralisation among workers. The push-over success of employers in recent confrontations at the Cammell Laird shipyard and Metal Box (see opposite) are illustrations of this process. On the other hand, the government's strategy of raising the stakes in industrial conflicts has provoked fierce resistance among sections of the working class. This response is particularly evident among the miners. Yet resistance is by no means confined to the miners. Civil servants in the North East, nursery nurses in Bolton, council workers in St Helens, Sheffield and Camden, hospital workers at Barking, Hammersmith and Cambridge, have all taken prolonged and determined action in defence of their rights and living standards.

For the Labour Party, the miners' strike has been nothing but an embarrassment. For the Revolutionary Communist Party, however, the radicalising effect of the dispute on a significant minority of workers creates an unprecedented opportunity. The intensifying class struggle in Britain makes the creation of new rank and file union organisations and a new working class party a realistic prospect for the first time in years. To realise this potential is the immediate task of the RCP.

The RCP aims to build on the disrespect for law and order and its enforcers that has grown through the miners' strike. In their response to the Tory offensive, workers generally withdraw their consent for state authority in a way that is partial and incomplete. Miners in many areas blame the violence on outside police forces or special riot squads. Their first demands are often for

the return of local police and for traditional policing methods. The left's calls for 'police accountability' echo and reinforce this view. The RCP on the other hand seeks to show miners that police brutality results from their function as agents of the capitalist state. We aim to turn workers' anger in a broad anti-state direction, rather than restrict it within a narrow anti-police perspective. This means a struggle to redirect workers' militancy from the targets they first identify into a wider anti-capitalist response.

The issues the ruling class has introduced into the miners' strike to strengthen its position — Argentina, Libya, Ireland — provide a perfect opportunity for us to turn the tables. Our aim is to win workers' support for every challenge to 'British democracy' whether it comes from abroad or from the miners as 'the enemy within'. This too demands a struggle against the chauvinist prejudices on all these issues that have been fostered by the labour bureaucracy and continue to influence most militant workers.

In their bitterness at the way they have been betrayed by the old labour movement, militant miners tend to single out limited targets for their wrath — targets like Norman Willis or Neil Kinnock. The RCP has argued with militants that their anger should also be directed against their own left-wing union leadership and against the left wing of the Labour Party.

Arthur Scargill and his disastrous *Plan for Coal* strategy have helped to make the miners' strike divided, ineffective and isolated. The miners should also condemn Tony Benn, and not only because in the seventies he was responsible for forcing through the area productivity deals that have done so much damage to the miners' unity. Benn and his colleagues have spoken on many miners' platforms in the current dispute, only to confirm the Scargill strategy and to endorse Kinnock's and Orme's attempts to sell out the strike. Challenging and redirecting militancy is vital to channel workers' spontaneous revulsion against particular aspects of the system into a movement that can really take their struggle forward.

In the early stages of the miners' strike the RCP was often accused of being pessimistic because we stood aside from the euphoria of the Scargill rallies and pointed out the serious problems that had to be tackled to make the strike effective. Now the RCP is accused of being over optimistic when we argue with left wingers who have given up on the miners' strike that it is still possible to win significant concessions by changing tack and going all-out to rally our forces. The truth is that our accurate assessment and clear perspectives for beginning to rebuild a new labour movement have enabled us to pursue a consistent pro-working class line throughout the dispute.

The miners' strike and all the trade union setbacks of 1984 have shown that the labour movement cannot carry on in the old way. The RCP has begun to show a new way forward to defend the working class and build a movement that can get rid of the capitalist system for good. To achieve our objectives we can no longer continue in the same way either. The miners' strike has shown us that to make our intervention in the class struggle more effective we need the flexibility and immediacy of a weekly paper. We aim to launch *the next step* as a weekly as early as possible in 1985.

The miners' strike and the Socialist Work

'It is a manic depressive strike', *Socialist Worker* editor Chris Harman told SWP members assembled at the party's Skegness school back in April. 'You feel defeatist one day, over the moon the next, defeatist again the next' (*Socialist Review*, May 1984). Instead of offering alternative political leadership to the miners, the SWP provides a morbid caricature of the changing moods of the militants.

DURING THE COURSE of the miners' strike the Socialist Workers' Party has pursued a series of shifts in its policy towards the dispute. These have culminated in a turn towards full cooperation with the Labour Party-sponsored miners' support committees. In an open letter to the editorial boards of *Tribune*, *Militant* and the *Labour Herald*, *Socialist Worker* editor Chris Harman proposed 'a united campaign' by the SWP and the Labour Party in support of the miners (20 October). With this objective the SWP has suspended its calls to extend mass picketing and dropped its earlier criticisms of the conduct of the strike by the NUM leadership. It has even instructed its supporters in the unions to link up with Labour's Broad Left organisations which the SWP has long denounced as opportunist electoral caucuses. A look at a number of key moments in the dispute reveals how the SWP began by trying to echo the responses of militant miners and ended up adapting to the outlook of the union leadership.

The ballot

The immediate prelude to the miners' strike was a five-month long overtime ban. This was called by the NUM leadership in response to miners' anger at the employers' derisory wage offer at the end of 1983. The NUM leaders chose this form of token action, rather than calling a strike, because it avoided the need to consult the membership in a ballot. An editorial in the SWP's monthly journal *Socialist Review* in February, only one month before the strike began, rightly described the NUM leadership's strategy as 'a classic bureaucratic manoeuvre'.

'The NUM leadership chose a form of industrial action which enabled them to by-pass the need for a ballot of the membership and thus the need for a serious campaign.'

'No doubt the overtime ban decision was and is completely constitutional', continued the editorial, 'but from the point of view of serious class warfare such a course of action is a classic of bureaucratic stupidity'.

Socialist Review lambasted Arthur Scargill and his colleagues for not attempting to mobilise the miners and for launching a form of action that was divisive and ineffective. It condemned Scargill for 'boxing clever' and for sustaining 'the rhetoric of opposition to MacGregor, the Tories and all their works' when 'in reality' there had been 'a shift to the right' in his approach.

It is worth quoting at length the SWP's fully justified criticisms of the NUM bureaucracy in February, because once the strike began these particular criticisms were never heard again. Yet the onset of the dispute proper made them more appropriate than ever. When MacGregor provoked the strike the NUM leadership followed the same line of approach as it had through the overtime ban. It chose a form of action — strikes on an area-by-area basis — that enabled the executive to by-pass the need for a ballot of the membership and a serious campaign to win it.

The area-by-area strategy was no doubt correct according to the NUM constitution. But it was a bureaucratic manoeuvre even more divisive and disastrous in its consequences than the overtime ban. This procedure avoided challenging the moderate members and dodged the crucial struggle to win their support for the strike. The result was that the strike was deprived of legitimacy in the eyes of many miners and even more workers in other industries.

In the first six weeks of the dispute the Revolutionary Communist Party called for a national ballot and, more importantly, for a serious campaign to win it. But the SWP now abandoned its earlier support for a ballot. Over the next few weeks the SWP's publications repeated all the arguments brought out by miners against holding a ballot. 'The result might well be a defeat for the militants and an even more divided union', wrote SWP theoretician Alex Callinicos. But the result of not having a ballot was to isolate and undermine the militants — and it is difficult to imagine how the NUM could be any more divided than it has

become through the area-by-area policy.

'No man has the right to vote another man out of a job' insisted *Socialist Worker*, repeating another familiar objection to the ballot. But the NUM's failure to hold a ballot allowed the Notts miners to make the national strike ineffective, hence giving them a veto on jobs in other areas. 'Ballots are a weapon of the boss class, pickets a weapon of the working class' declared *Socialist Worker* with rhetorical flourish. The SWP substituted calls for militant activity for the measures necessary to win workers' political commitment to industrial action. When attempts to picket out the Notts miners failed the only way to get them out was through a determined nationwide campaign — alongside continued picketing — to mobilise majority support for the strike and to marginalise an anti-strike minority. Yet *Socialist Worker* simply chanted vacuously that mass picketing was the answer to all the problems of the strike.

The SWP tried to discredit the Revolutionary Communist Party's call for a campaign to win a national mandate for all-out national strike action by associating this demand with calls for a ballot from Kinnock, MacGregor and Thatcher. But this smear could not disguise the fact that the SWP had quite rightly supported a similar position over the NUM's overtime ban. Nor could the SWP explain what had happened between February and March to justify its dramatic change of line. The truth was that the SWP simply followed militants' instinctive response to the problem of moderate resistance to the strike, which was to say 'let's go it alone'. But by encouraging this response the SWP endorsed a tactic that prevented the militants from pulling the majority behind them. It also restricted the initiatives of the activists to their base in the militant areas and prevented them from linking up on a national scale. In effect it ensured that the NUM executive remained firmly in control of a divided and fragmented rank and file.

Picketing

The call for more mass picketing was the SWP's most distinctive contribution in the early months of the strike. Effective picketing was obviously a necessity for the miners to make the strike bite against the employers. Yet from the beginning it was also obvious that there were problems in making picketing effective. Picketing involved only a small minority of miners and they were poorly organised and coordinated against a carefully planned police offensive. Rank and file initiatives to improve picketing ran into bureaucratic obstacles put up by NUM officials. Attempts to win sympathetic strike action at steel plants and power stations were undermined by deals among officials of the various unions involved.

The origin of the practical problems of picketing lay in the NUM's whole strategy for the dispute. For the NUM leadership pickets were a stage army to be deployed for the purposes of putting pressure on the coal board and the government to make concessions in negotiations. Their objective was to persuade the bosses to adopt a different policy for running the industry — the 1974 *Plan for Coal* — rather than the new plans put forward by MacGregor. The NUM leaders, including Arthur Scargill, did not want to mobilise a real army of pickets to go out and halt British industry. Their emphasis was always on talks to negotiate concessions, not on organising action to win victory.

The course of negotiations in the miners' strike has proved that talking not backed by hard-hitting action makes no impression on the bosses. It has also shown that the struggle for effective picketing was in the first instance a struggle for a different strategy for the dispute. To be effective, picketing needed to be based on a strategy that directed rank and file energies into an all-out fight against the coal board and the Tories instead of holding back in the hope that they would see reason and give in at the negotiating table. The SWP however took a different view.

The SWP's explanation of the weakness of the miners' picketing emerged most clearly after

the battles outside the Orgreave coking plant near Sheffield at the end of May. For the SWP the problem was not the national leadership and policy of the NUM but its area leaders. 'Scargill has been trying with substantial determination to stop the delivery of coke from Orgreave to Scunthorpe' declared *Socialist Review*. In a major article in *Socialist Worker*, 'The battle for Orgreave and how it was lost', Alex Callinicos laid the blame at the feet of the local leadership.

'It was thrown away by the leaders of the Yorkshire miners who sabotaged Arthur Scargill's calls for a mass picket to close Orgreave'.

In other articles the SWP repeatedly criticised the three main left area leaders — Jack Taylor (Yorkshire), Mick McGahey (Scotland) and Emyln Williams (South Wales). They were blamed for refusing to release money for picketing, for curbing unofficial action, and for making deals to allow coal to be used at steel plants. Far from criticising the national leadership, the SWP identified Scargill as a committed militant whose 'practice can be extremely good on occasions'. The problem was that Scargill's militancy was constrained by more moderate area leaders on the NUM executive and in the coalfields. *Socialist Worker* now called on Scargill to appeal directly to the rank and file 'over the heads' of the area leaders and the NUM's bureaucratic machinery.

The SWP's notion of Scargill as a prisoner of the NUM machinery corresponded to the impressions of many rank and file miners. In every area the local leaders bore the brunt of militants' frustrations over the restrictions on picketing. Because he was more aloof from the day-to-day organisation of picketing and put over an intransigent line at rallies and on television, Scargill escaped the wrath of the rank and file. Indeed he was confirmed as their hero. The SWP also fell for this impression. But it did not correspond to reality. Scargill and the Scargill strategy — the *Plan for Coal* — were in full control of the miners' strike from day one.

The SWP's criticism of Scargill for not appealing directly to militants only strengthened miners' faith in his commitment to the rank and file. But Scargill is fully committed to the union bureaucracy. Orgreave was a superb piece of bureaucratic stage management. Scargill went down to the picket line, got himself arrested and knocked over. He allowed Jack Taylor to curb the numbers of pickets to prevent a serious outbreak of disorder and left him to face the wrath of the militants. But the naive Callinicos could only congratulate Arthur for directing the action before he was carried off and regret that he did not return.

The SWP's upside down assessment of the problem of the NUM bureaucracy sometimes bordered on the absurd. Early in June party leader Tony Cliff denounced area leaders in Scotland and Wales for their Scottish and Welsh chauvinism in making local deals to keep threatened steel plants working during the

THE MANIC DEPRESSIVE



Cheer-leader for Arthur Scargill: the Socialist Worker

The c

At every stage in the miners' strike the SWP has reflected the mood of the militants. This approach follows the SWP's guiding principle of 'generalising the struggle'. The SWP assumes that class consciousness develops through the experience of class struggle, narrowly interpreted as trade union activity. The role of the party is to encourage militancy and to coordinate action so that increased consciousness is spread from the more active to the less active workers. The problem is that this approach 'generalises' consciousness at its existing level and ensures that the outlook of the strongest force in the working class movement — the labour bureaucracy — prevails.

The SWP entered the strike with a pessimistic assessment of its prospects. 'The miners' strike is an extreme example of what we in the SWP have called the downturn in the movement', wrote Tony Cliff in April. Cliff bemoaned the effect of mass unemployment and past setbacks in strengthening sectionalism in the working class. He counselled that the SWP could do

ers' Party

MINING LIVES



Party marches with the militants behind the union leaders.

ownturn disease

no more than try to draw isolated militants towards the SWP. A melancholy Chris Harman brooded at the time that 'our intervention may not make any real difference to the outcome of the strike', proving that psychological disturbance can indeed yield flashes of profound insight.

Six months later the SWP leaders returned from their summer holidays to find to their surprise that the miners were still on strike. They also noticed the radicalisation caused by the strike — and were particularly impressed by its impact on the TUC and Labour Party conference. Was the downturn over? Well no — but there was 'an upturn in the downturn'. 'The strike has produced a new level of generalisation within the class' proclaimed Harman, now entering a manic phase of his fluctuating mental state. The SWP now raised its sights to 'mobilising the militant minority' and, mistaking the Labour Party's miners' support committees for radicalised workers, chased off to get a piece of the action.

The common theme running through the

strike. But the SWP never once criticised Scargill for the British chauvinism that permeates every line of the *Plan for Coal* and figured in every speech made by the NUM leader during the strike. The NUM's commitment to the British coal industry underlies the collaborationist approach towards management that the NUM has pursued under Scargill as under his predecessors.

Back in February, *Socialist Review* criticised Scargill for pursuing 'a common approach with management', but this problem was ignored once the strike began. Yet the NUM leaders' commitment to negotiating an alternative management policy for the British coal industry remained the central political problem of the dispute. It was this commitment which led to the paralysis of picketing. By singling out Scargill's lieutenants for censure, the SWP echoed the views of many militants. But by leaving the commander in chief and his *Plan for Coal* unchallenged the SWP effectively endorsed the disastrous strategy of the NUM bureaucracy.

Back to the pits

By the close of the summer the coal board and the Tories were beginning to promote a back-to-work movement and the miners were pushed on to the defensive. In these circumstances it was vital to rally forces and go all out to intensify picketing and pressure for sympathetic action at power stations and other industrial locations. The only way to stop the drift back was to push forward, make up for

wasted time and put some real pressure on the Tories. Again the SWP took a different view.

At a discussion with 'SWP miners from 15 pits' in early September, Callinicos identified 'a new phase in the strike'. The old calls for mass pickets at steel plants and power stations were now abandoned. 'To talk about picketing steel in this situation is simply abstract' he asserted.

'The miners must picket their own pits to stop the scabbing. That's the key to the present phase of the strike.'

In common with its previous tactical shifts, the SWP's proposals amounted to a mere description of what the miners were already saying and doing.

The immediate response of militants to the media-sponsored back-to-work drive was to return to their own pits to stop any scabs from going back. But in fact this instinctive reaction played into the Tories' hands. They used a small number of scabs to tie the miners down in the coalfields and take the pressure off other sectors of industry. In the Kent coalfield for example a handful of scabs succeeded in forcing the withdrawal of Kent pickets from the whole south-eastern area. A series of violent confrontations at the pits suited the Tories. Conflicts between strikers and scabs could be fairly easily contained and made good news stories for the bosses. They showed up divisions in the miners' ranks without posing any threat to power supplies to industry.

The move back to the pits also suited the union leaders. As the TUC and Labour Party conference drew near, the NUM leadership put increasing emphasis on winning official labour movement backing for the miners. The labour leaders in turn emphasised their concern to step up the pressure on the miners and the employers to accept some negotiated settlement. In these circumstances Scargill did not want squads of pickets going around the country taking independent initiatives. Such actions could only lead to more confrontations with the police or take sympathetic strike action out of the control of the union leaders.

When rank and file miners threatened to converge on Brighton for the TUC to demand real support, Scargill called them off. Instead he appealed to all miners to turn out to picket their own pits on the day of the TUC debate. This took the heat off the TUC leaders — and helped to demobilise and demoralise the militants. Meanwhile the TUC passed its empty resolutions of support for the miners, Scargill was cheered to the echo and every influential TUC leader made clear that their only concern in backing the strike was to press for more talks and an early return to work. *Socialist Worker* dutifully put its seal of approval on the cynical manoeuvres of the bureaucracy. 'TUC votes to back the miners' was its banner front-page headline at the end of the TUC conference week.

'They shall not starve'

Over the past three months the coal board and the Tories have steadily built up the pressure on the miners and every tactic pursued by the NUM leadership has come to nothing. At the same time, the core of strikers has remained solid and the intensity of the conflict and the wider political issues it has raised have had a radicalising effect among miners and among other workers who support their cause.

This situation called for a determined attempt to rally miners against the government and to build on the widespread backing for the miners among workers. It also demanded a forceful counter-attack to the Tories' ideological barrage and the official labour movement's capitulation to it, particularly on the issues of violence and law and order. The SWP turned in the opposite direction to form a 'united front' with the Labour Party in the miners' support committees.

Miners' support committees were set up by local Labour Party and trade union officials in most cities from late April onwards, when the strike was already well into its second month. The committees began life at the same time that the Labour Party leadership launched the first of its long series of attempts to drag the miners into accepting a negotiated settlement. Many Labour Party activists devoted their energies to the support committees as a contribution to helping the miners to win. However, the committees played a crucial role in allowing the Labour leadership to act as a mediator between the miners and the coal board. The support committees gave Neil Kinnock and Stan Orme the links with rank and file miners and their militant supporters which enabled them to offer sell-out talks to the bosses.

As the talks continued through the summer and autumn, the activities of the support committees were organised on a wider scale. The preoccupations of the Labour leadership dictated the activities of the support committees. The committees always discouraged attempts to spread solidarity action at a local level, concentrating on collections of money and food. As the political pressure on the miners increased and the embarrassment of the Labour leaders intensified, pressure to depoliticise solidarity work grew. The emphasis became less on winning working class solidarity with the miners' battle against the Tory government and more on winning the sympathy of the middle classes for the sufferings of the mining communities. Instead of 'victory to the miners', the new slogan was 'they shall not starve'.

For the first six months of the strike the SWP stood aloof from the support committees. It upheld militant mass picketing as the alternative to the support committees' bureaucratic moderation. Yet when the SWP threw its full resources into the committees from the end of October it fully endorsed their narrow apolitical approach. In Pontefract, miners who proposed more picketing of the local power station were shocked to hear SWP members insisting that they should confine their efforts to food collections. In Brighton, SWP members backed a Labour Party ban on the selling of left-wing newspapers on miners' collections on the grounds that it might 'put people off'. In dozens of student support committees the SWP lined up with Labour Party supporters to keep the scope of solidarity within the limits of the student union constitution and went along with criticisms of miners' violence. In Cardiff a woman RCP supporter who took the initiative of confiscating funds being collected for scabs by the Tories and giving the money directly to striking miners was condemned by the SWP for 'individual terrorism'.

United front

The SWP's open letter to Labour Party organisations sums up its 'united front' approach:

'Of course, there are many matters on which we disagree. We don't believe that these disagreements should be swept under the carpet. We are in favour of friendly and open political debate on the left. But there is one issue on which we do agree — support for the miners and distrust of the Labour and trade union right wing.'

The SWP's retreat to the miners' support committees reflects the defensive reaction of miners to the loss of momentum in the strike. Its criticism of the right wing of the official labour movement echoes the resentment of many miners at the vacillations of Neil Kinnock and Norman Willis and the other TUC leaders. But the miners have not been on strike for nine months simply so that they can survive the winter in soup kitchens. They have been fighting to save jobs. The problems they have come up against in this fight arise not only from the right, but also from Scargill and the left in the TUC and the Labour Party. Indeed the leadership and strategy that have guided the strike are largely the responsibility of the left. Scargill is the unchallenged leader of the miners — and the big unions that are led by the Broad Left or have influential Broad Left factions were in a powerful position to help the miners. The price of the SWP's united front with the Labour Party is that it holds its peace about the betrayals of the left.

The SWP says it has its disagreements with the Labour Party — but these concern the leadership's wider parliamentary and electoral strategy. They have no consequence for the SWP's work with the Labour Party in the miners' strike, so they are never heard in the support committees — not in Parliament — that the Labour Party's politics are most damaging to the miners' cause. It is in the support committees that the Labour Party's cringing moderation has the effect of throwing away the strongest card the miners still hold — the political solidarity of a minority of workers who are ready to back all the way their fight against the police, the courts and the Tories. Yet it is at this critical point that the SWP's capitulation to the Labour Party is most complete. By going along with the Labour Party's drive to depoliticise solidarity work in the hope of appealing to liberals, vicars and other well meaning people at a time when the miners desperately need real working class solidarity, the SWP is signalling not only its opportunism but also its irrelevance to the pressing needs of the working class.

Mike Freeman



Pat Hughes

Wage war

'At a time when West Germany's costs have shown no increase and when Japan's and America's costs have actually fallen the warning could not be clearer. If we want to earn our way in the world we must stop paying ourselves more than we can afford.'

(Employment minister Tom King, 19 September)

The employers and the government will stop at nothing to get their system out of the mess that it's in. They are determined to hold down the wages of the core of the working class and to drive the low paid even further into misery and despair. Recent strikes by workers at Austin Rover and other car plants and a rash of wage disputes in both the public and private sectors show that workers are prepared to fight back. What they lack is a strategy to win. Joe Hall looks at the employers' strategy, the union retreat and how we can fight for the wages we need.

FOR FIVE YEARS the Tories have ruthlessly pursued their objective of reviving British capitalism at the expense of the working class. The government's propaganda campaign against wage rises has been a key component of its drive to force workers to accept declining living standards. The consistent message from the Tories is that wage rises cause inflation and unemployment and that the trade unions must face up to the economic realities confronting British industry. The government has pursued its objective in three ways: by exhortation of the need for lower pay settlements, by a refusal to accommodate 'excessive' wage increases and by attacks on the low paid and youth.

Government propaganda about workers 'pricing themselves out of jobs' belies the reality of the steady degradation of workers' wages and working conditions:

- real wages have stagnated over the past 10 years and for most workers continue to fall below what they need to lead a decent life
- workers have paid a high price — in mass redundancies, increased productivity and changes in work practices — to maintain wage levels
- a growing army of low-paid and young workers are being pushed below the poverty line, as a result of the recession and government policy.

Stagnation

In the last 10 years of deepening recession most wage earners have managed, more or less, to preserve their living standards. Although there have been minor fluctuations up and down, workers' spending power in 1984 is not much different from what it was in 1974. However, the general picture of stable working class earnings conceals some important changes. The recession has had a varied impact on different sections of the economy. Some workers have managed to improve real earnings, others have lost out badly. The overall picture also conceals the fact that some four million workers have been deprived of the chance to earn a wage at all.

Average weekly earnings in July were around £154 for a full-time male manual worker, before deductions of tax and national insurance (Labour Research Department, *Fact service*, September). Most workers' incomes fall within a fairly narrow band around this average, which is only marginally above a basic subsistence level.

Only a few jobs in manufacturing (notably in the oil and printing industries) pay better than £200 a week. On the other hand, a large number of workers in public services and in the clothing and textiles industries for example earn wages of less than £100 a week. Women manual workers receive slightly more than £94 a week on average, just over 60 per cent of men's earnings — a percentage which has changed little since the introduction of the Equal Pay Act in 1970.

Both employers and government have accepted that their objective of cutting the wages of the entire working class cannot be achieved at one stroke. To impose wage cuts across the board would run the risk of provoking widespread unrest and mass resistance. Instead, the Tories have embarked on a step by step approach, to prepare the way for a more systematic onslaught as the recession deepens.

Paying the price

Having accepted that in the early stages of the recession the wages of the majority of workers will be more or less maintained, the employers have exacted concessions on redundancy and productivity in return. In both public and private sectors employers insist on linking pay rises to improvements in output or efficiency. Self-financing productivity deals, through which workers pay for wage rises in job losses and more intensive working conditions are the model for the eighties.

In chemicals for example, Mobil achieved a two-phased wage settlement for 1984. A 4.5 per cent wage increase in May was followed in September by a 9.5 per cent flexibility payment which removed demarcation lines for skilled workers. In May, manual workers at the British Oxygen Company accepted their third successive two-year deal, giving them an extra seven per cent on basic rates. These deals have been pushed through alongside a drop in the company's manual workforce from 2600 in 1982 to 1900 in August 1984. Over the same period 10 000 jobs have been lost at ICI in return for wage rises of between five and eight per cent.

At Cummins' Engines, employers have taken the 'last steps towards a revolutionary new company strategy on manning, productivity and pay'. The prime objective of this autumn's pay negotiations is to cut costs by 30 per cent by 1987. The employers' strategy is designed to bring about a complete transformation of existing work

practices and attitudes on the shopfloor. They have offered a single unified pay structure for all unionised employees and a basic pay rise of from 20 to 24 per cent. The September issue of the *Incomes Data Services Report* spelt out the employers' intentions:

'Eliminate historical areas of job demarcation, reduce or eliminate areas of pay and conditions differentials and thereby encourage multi supportive individual, group, plant-wide effort; and support the principle of few people doing more highly skilled work and broader jobs for improved rewards.'

The price of a job

The Tories have also set about cutting the wages of the growing army of marginal and low-paid workers. The government has blamed high pay settlements for increasing unemployment and tried to justify its onslaught on the low paid by claiming that reducing low wages even further will create jobs by encouraging employers to take on workers at lower wages. The logic of the Tory argument is that capitalist prosperity and full employment could be restored if all workers were prepared to accept starvation wages and sweatshop conditions.

The government has given an aggressive lead in the attack on the wages of the lowest paid of British workers, particularly women and youth. The Tory attack includes:

- the abolition in 1981 of the Fair Wages Resolution, which for almost a century guaranteed the going union rates for workers on contract to local or national government bodies
- threatening to abolish the 26 Wages Councils which fix wages for more than 2.5 million workers, mainly in the retailing, clothing and catering trades
- encouraging the contracting out of services in central and local government and the health service to wage-cutting private companies
- using the Youth Training and Young Workers' Schemes to drive down wage rates for young people.

The government has chosen the public sector as the first front in the battle over wages, keeping wage rises within strict cash limits. Public sector service workers, who remain among the lowest paid in the country, have been used as exhortatory examples to other workers in both the public and private sectors. Treasury minister Barney Hayhoe recently praised workers in local government and the health service where 'a new mood of realism has been successfully established'. Health service ancillary workers settled for a £3.14 increase in basic weekly rates this year, to join local government and university manual workers at the bottom of the pay scale.

Young workers have been used as the cutting edge of the Tories' campaign to

'price workers back into jobs'. Thatcher and her government have made it clear that young workers should be grateful to have a job at any price:

'We're just beginning to succeed a little bit with the young, partly through the Alan Walters (Young Workers) Scheme which has helped to price a number of young people into jobs and partly through the training schemes. I'd rather see a young person priced into a job, with low pay at first, and then you've got a chance.'

Young workers face a future in permanent transition from a government training scheme to a temporary low-paid job to the dole queue.

Union retreat

The unions have put up very little resistance to the employers' offensive on wages. At its low-pay conference in July the TUC virtually gave up its low-pay campaign. The unions hold out little hope of the government ever introducing a statutory minimum wage. The emphasis was on vague reforms in the collective bargaining machinery to improve the lot of the low paid — with the proviso that the higher paid should not seek to emulate large percentage increases demanded for those on the poverty line. The TUC's campaign against low pay typifies everything that is wrong about the unions' approach to the wages question. First, the TUC promotes a low pay target — of about £104 or around the official poverty line definition for a family — as a basis for wage claims, rather than fighting for what workers need. Second, the TUC campaign looks to the government which has been leading the attack on the low paid to pass legislation to protect them.

In the past, union negotiators often justified wage claims by pointing to the employers' booming sales and profits. When markets slumped and profits declined the unions were in no position to resist management demands that wage rises should be restrained. The autumn pay negotiations in the motor industry and in local government only underlined the disastrous consequences of the unions' approach for rank and file workers.

Long hot autumn

'We have delivered, you have not' has been the cry of every trade union bureaucrat during the current round of pay negotiations in the motor industry. Disputes over wages broke out in all the major car firms in October and November, signalling workers' discontent after five years of declining living standards, mass redundancies and punitive productivity deals.

After years of cutbacks, slumping production and towering losses, the car industry has hauled itself back on its feet on the backs of thousands of car workers. Productivity has increased enormously over

the past few years. Output at Jaguar, sold to the private sector in July, has risen during the past four years from 1.4 vehicles per worker per year to more than 3.5. Ford talks of 30 per cent increases in productivity at Halewood. Car workers, who were once famed for their militancy have become much more reluctant to come out on strike. In 1979, 6.7 days per employee were lost in the industry through disputes; in 1983, the figure had fallen dramatically to 1.8 days. During this period, workers have been forced to accept not only sizeable redundancy programmes but annual pay increases well below the rise in the cost of living, often through two year settlements. According to figures given by Ford to its unions, the number of workers has dropped by 24 per cent at Ford over the last five years, by 48 per cent at BL, by 39 per cent at Vauxhall, and by 77 per cent at Talbot. Ford has not had an industrial dispute over the annual pay agreement for five years. More often than not, pay awards have been linked to complex changes in exploitative bonus schemes. Austin Rover's Cowley director recently gave a flavour of the scale of the assault on his workforce:

'One of the biggest changes over the last decade has been in the number of people employed. In 1974 there were 22 000 people on the payroll at Cowley. Today we face the challenge of achieving the levels of output of that time with 9000 fewer people. In 1980 we were producing 2700 cars per week with 8500 operators; this year we will achieve 6500 cars per week with about the same number. The difference is an improvement of 140 per cent. At Cowley there has been an improvement in productivity from 16.5 cars per man in 1977 to 19 in 1982 and the figure is now approaching 30 cars per man.'

Union negotiators have proudly held up these achievements to justify their moderate wage claims. TGWU convenor for the Cowley body plant Alec Morton resorted to pleading with the bosses for a fair exchange:

'Over the years we have given more and more effort as productivity has gone up and now we feel it is time that the company gave us something back.'

Management has responded to union claims by pointing out that improvements already achieved were necessary retrospectively and reflected in existing wage levels. They have insisted that pay rises in

excess of the norm must be tied to future productivity increases:

● Jaguar's offer of a 21 per cent rise over the next two years was accepted by the unions after a slight improvement. While sounding more generous than offers in other car plants, the deal involves a seven per cent annual rise and the rest is made of consolidation of bonus schemes, rather than new money.

● Vauxhall's complex 12-month deal provides for a six per cent rise in the £116 a week basic pay for a track worker plus consolidation of a £2 a week incentive bonus. Under a package to restructure pay grades and introduce greater flexibility in work practices, however, most employees will obtain an extra £3 a week now and another £3 from May.

● Ford's four per cent opening offer in response to the unions' 14 per cent claim was the lowest in this year's motor industry pay round.

● Austin Rover offered its 28 000 manual workers a 9.4 per cent pay rise over the next two years, less than a quarter of the £22 a week demanded by the unions. Cowley assembly workers who submitted a £50 a week demand were treated with short shrift by union officials.

The Nalگو way

Nalگو is by far the largest union covering local government white-collar workers. Its pay campaign, which began towards the end of 1983, provides a striking example of the disastrous consequences of union strategy for the rank and file.

The Nalگو leadership decided to draft and submit a claim well in advance of the July settlement date to guarantee the best results before the winter. In particular, the Nalگو leaders promised concerted action over low pay. The key proposals included:

- a commitment to increase the minimum adult rate to a level above the TUC's low-pay threshold of £98
- a seven per cent minimum rise with more for the low paid
- improvements in holiday leave and reduced working time.

After perfunctory consultations with Nalگو branches the claim was submitted to the employers in February, five months before the settlement date. The Nalگو

leaders did nothing to consult their members and did nothing to win support for the claim. At national level Nalگو bureaucrats entered into a series of regular and fruitless negotiating meetings with the employers on the National Joint Council. Negotiations dragged on into July before the employers made their first offer of 4.5 per cent with no reference to restructuring. The employers' recommended method of paying the increase would have left the low paid with a puny half per cent on top of the 4.5 per cent offer.

A Nalگو group meeting discussed the offer in August and decided to draw up plans for selective action. This cynical move was made in the knowledge that no preparatory work had been done to build support for action of any kind. When a ballot of the membership returned a resounding no vote to taking any kind of action in support of the claim, the Nalگو bureaucrats returned to the negotiating table in September admitting defeat. The result was a decision by the union leaders to take the claim to arbitration. When several branches objected and demanded strike action, the bureaucrats declared that the ballot had shown that the members had no stomach for action.

The Nalگو pay claim took one year to pass from its preparation to arbitration. The July settlement date has long since passed and half a million local government workers cannot expect the results of arbitration until January 1985. The pathetic wage rise that arbitration will undoubtedly award will not be in their pay packets until February. The low paid can expect no change in their poverty line income.

Taking control

The experience of workers in the motor industry and in local government will be familiar to workers everywhere in the public and private sectors. Workers who are ready and willing to take action in defence of their living standards face a well organised bloc of employers and government. Thousands of workers at Austin Rover showed their contempt for the bosses' pathetic offer by walking out and voting for strike action. The employers invoked the Tories' new Trade Union Act and demanded a secret ballot in an attempt to divide the workforce and undermine the strike. Rather than confront the employers' law and campaign for mass defiance of the courts, the EETPU and the AUEW gave in immediately and the TGWU prevaricated. Lacking a coherent lead

against a determined management, the strike rapidly crumbled. We need a different approach:

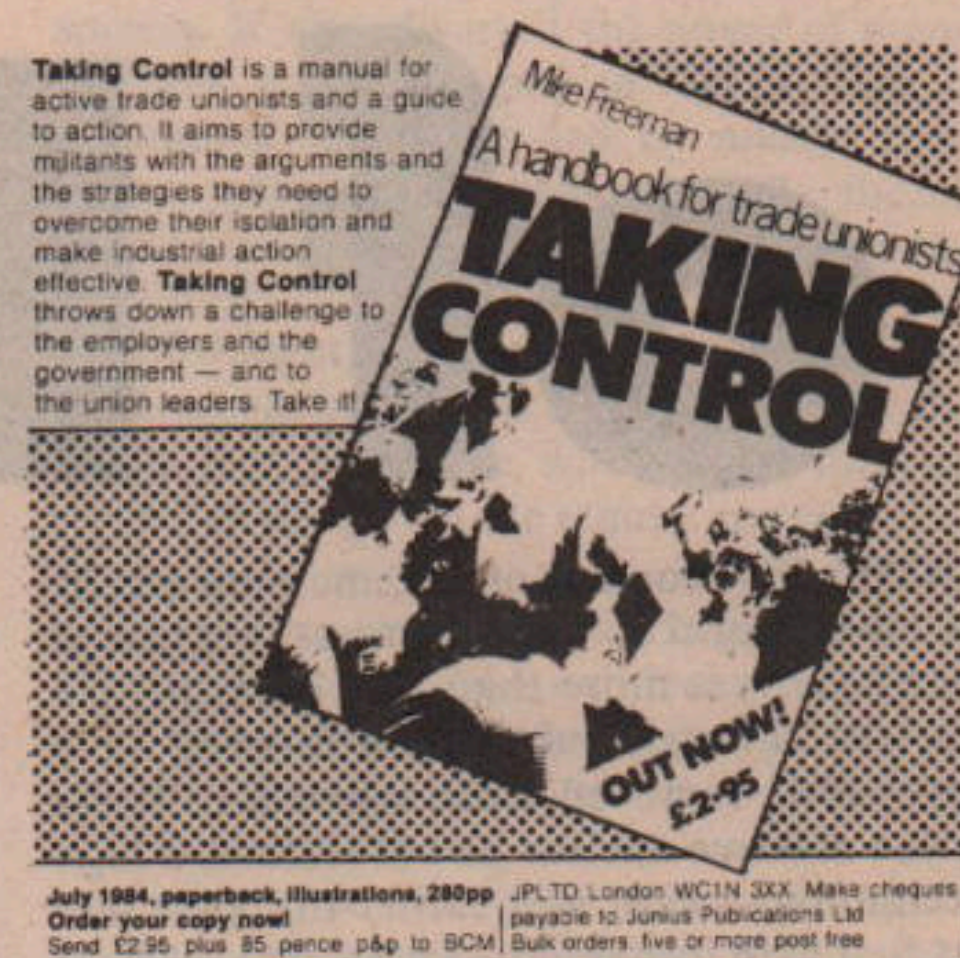
● Workers in the motor industry need a national wage campaign to guarantee effective united action. Divisions among workers in different companies, different plants and different unions play into the bosses' hands. We need a coordinated national wage claim based on what we need for a decent living — ignoring the bosses' profit levels and market performance.

● Workers in local government should follow a similar approach. We should make sure that negotiations are opened up to the rank and file at every stage.

● Workers should stick to pay agreements for as long as wage levels maintain living standards. When wages start to fall behind they should immediately resubmit a claim, irrespective of whether this fits in with the bosses' timetable for talks.

● Workers should insist that what they need from wage negotiations is higher wages. They should reject any attempt to force them to accept job losses and more intensive work as a condition for wage rises.

● Union representatives should be withdrawn from all permanent bargaining machinery at both national and workplace levels. Workers can achieve nothing through such committees that they cannot win by a fight.



Expenditure per week	
mortgage	18.—
electricity	7.50
rates	8.50
water rates	1.20
food	50.—
phone	5.—
car (maintenance)	12.—
tax + insurance	4.—
TV license	1.20
entertainment	5.—
total	112.40

LONGBRIDGE														
PAYMENTS					PAYMENTS					DEDUCTIONS				
ITEM	T/N	UNITS	VALUE	CR	ITEM	T/N	UNITS	VALUE	CR	ITEM	VALUE	CR	BALANCE	L/H
BONUS	T	37.00	21.14							TAX	27.00		774.00	
BASIC	T	37.30	112.12							NI RED	6.80		201.81	
										NI STD	3.06		88.74	
										PENSION	4.40		131.09	
										CHARITY	0.03			
										UNION	0.64			
										M.P.B.F.D	0.13			
										B.H.S.F.	0.25		0.25	
										ASASC	0.10		0.10	
GROSS PAY														
133.26					DEDUCTIONS					NETT PAY				
					42.41					90.85				
										LAST LOAN				
										THIS LOAN				
										RECEIVED				
										0.20				
										0.35				
										91.00				
INTEREST RATES ON AVC INCREASES TO 14 PER CENT ON NOVEMBER 1. ANYONE WISHING TO JOIN THE SCHEME SHOULD CONTACT THE PLANT PENSIONS ADMINISTRATOR.														

Income £91, expenditure £112.40:
headline wages for Terry, his wife and two kids

The wages we need

Terry is married with two teenage kids and works at BL's Austin Rover plant at Longbridge in the West Midlands. He spoke to Pat Hughes about his job, his union and his wages.

Like most shopfloor workers at Longbridge, the first thing Terry knew about the wage claim was when a steward handed him a slip saying the union was going for a £22 a week rise, an hour off the working week and improvements in the sick and lay-off schemes:

'In my section things were really bad. I know that other shops and the night shift did have some meeting or other, but where I work there was never any discussion or anything about what the claim should be. Let's put it

this way, whether it's a question of coal being used inside the plant or the pay claim, you can rely on management or the *Evening Mail* for information more than you can on the union.'

The response of many Longbridge workers to the £22 claim was one of cynicism:

'To tell you the truth they laughed when they saw the claim — £22, you won't get £2. Some of them, even the stewards, think that even if we were out on strike for two or three weeks Jack Adams (Longbridge convenor) would say that the company hasn't got any more money and therefore we might as well go back.'

Despite their lack of confidence in the unions' ability to win the claim, however, thousands of Longbridge workers were prepared to take strike action:

'The blokes were and still are really angry at the so-called bonus scheme and what management was saying about being paid while you're off sick or laid off. Management was getting people's backs up by provoking action which resulted in lay-offs and no money. Management has conceded quite a bit on the sick and lay-off schemes since the strike. Originally, the qualifying period for sick pay was to be 10 years, then they came down to five years, now three. But it still means that if you've worked less than two years you can't go sick. On the pay

offer itself, of the £5 they're offering us, £3 is ours in the bonus anyway, so they're really offering £2 a week.'

Terry criticised the union for its failure to make the strike official whatever the legal position. Nobody was receiving strike pay and some workers were confused about the nature of the strike. While management sent out letter after letter and a stream of circulars to the workforce, the unions did very little to counter the employers' arguments and build support for the strike:

'To me strike pay is only fag money, but the last time we were out all I got was £6 for a three-week strike 12 months later. I've just got some money off the DHSS for the last dispute when I was laid off — and that was six months ago. Fortunately, my wife works so I can stick it out. But what if I was a single bloke? What annoys me is that every week, even when you're laid off or on strike, you have to pay your union dues. The union wants you to come out and yet it won't pay out despite having millions in the bank.'

All we've got from the union is two circulars. This week while we've been on strike there's been two meetings of senior stewards and union officials from all the BL plants at Coventry. After both meetings the only way we found out what was going on was from either the radio or the *Evening Mail*. I think that smaller meetings should be organised during the week to explain what's happening at Cowley, why the strike hasn't been made official, what to do next, with a mass meeting if necessary. The worst thing that's happened to the unions is that they've been taken off the shopfloor and put in a big office and now it's all a secret.'



The assassination of Indian Prime Minister Indira Gandhi at the end of October pitched India into a turmoil of inter-communal strife. It has focused world attention on a vast and populous country where imperialist domination continues to frustrate social progress 37 years after India became formally independent of British rule.

India after Indira

The legacy of British rule

INDIA IS A country of extreme contrasts. It is the world's tenth largest industrial producer, yet more than half of its people survive through subsistence farming at a level little removed from starvation. India has a massive nuclear power station, a high technology sector and earlier this year sent its first man into space on a Soviet rocket. It is the world's fourth largest military power (after the USA, the Soviet Union and China), with more than one million men under arms and a vast armoury of conventional and nuclear weapons. India is also a country where violent conflict among devotees of ancient religions is a central feature of modern political life.

The Gandhi assassination was a result of conflict between India's 14 million Sikhs and the majority Hindu community. It sparked off a wave of pogroms against Sikhs that left 2000 dead and, in New Delhi alone, destroyed property worth \$20m. Over the past year there have been widespread outbreaks of inter-communal strife, largely between the Hindus who make up 80 per cent of the population and the 12 per cent Muslim minority. India has also been troubled by conflicts among Hindu castes, by tensions with the Tamil minority in the south and by risings in Kashmir and the far eastern provinces of Assam, Nagaland and Tripura.

The tendencies towards the fragmentation of India and growing conflicts among its peoples result from the subordination of the country to the imperialist world order. India's economic development has long been retarded by an obsolete social system. This system was originally imposed by the British and it has been sustained since independence by the new British-sponsored ruling class.

After the Raj

Modern India is a creation of British imperialism. Today's administration, Parliament, education system, police and armed forces retain all the essential features of the system established by Britain. The conflicts among ethnic and religious groups, the caste system and other social distinctions — in their modern form — are a direct legacy of British rule. The final pattern of British rule was established in the aftermath of the 1857 Indian Mutiny, when Britain took on full responsibility for protecting the



Sikh protest last June: Indira Gandhi first stirred up Sikh militants and then suppressed them, putting her own life and the stability of India in danger

interests of British traders.

The uprising of Indian soldiers recruited to the British army — 'sepoys' — was prompted by aristocratic elements hoping to restore their former status by ejecting the British. However, the rising won the support of thousands of peasants in northern India, both Hindu and Muslim. It was brutally suppressed by the British authorities, who subsequently sought to recruit the rebellious princes and maharajahs to act as agents of the imperial crown. A contemporary eyewitness commented on the danger to Britain of unity and cooperation among different sections of the oppressed:

'Among the many lessons the Indian mutiny conveys to the historian, none is of greater importance than the warning that it is possible to have a revolution in which Brahmins and Sudras, Hindus and Mahomedans, could be united against us, and that it is not safe to suppose that the peace and stability of our dominions, in any great measure, depends on the continent being inhabited by different

religious systems for they mutually understand and respect and take part in each other's modes and ways and doings.' (Quoted in Asghar Ali Engineer, *Communal riots in post-independence India*, Sangham Books 1984)

The lesson of the Indian mutiny for the British was clear — 'the peace and stability of our dominions' depended on promoting conflict among minorities who appeared likely to unite against the occupiers.

Once the mutiny was suppressed the British set about stirring up divisions. At first they singled out the Muslims for repression but later they switched course and extended special favours to them. Electoral reforms introduced in 1909 were designed to put Muslims into an advantageous position over the Hindus in the phoney parliamentary bodies set up by the British. To become a voter a Muslim was required to have a taxable income of 3000 rupees a year — Hindus were obliged to have 300 000 to become eligible for a vote.

The aim behind the establishment of separate Muslim and Hindu electoral rolls was to win the allegiance of the Muslim middle class to the British authorities so that it could act as a counterweight to the predominantly Hindu anti-colonial movement. Despite these devices the majority of Muslims, particularly in the North West Frontier Province and Kashmir, continued to oppose British rule. The authorities had to resort to encouraging the formation of a separate state for Muslims — Pakistan — to get any support at all from the Muslim community.

In a similar way the British cultivated sections of the Sikh community by fostering the notion of the Sikhs as a special 'warrior race' and enlisting them in large numbers in the army. Sikhs still form one quarter of the officer corps of the Indian army. The British also encouraged the Hindu caste system, which particularly discriminated against a large body of 'untouchables'. They promoted regional rivalries, preferentially appointing Bengalis to administrative positions

throughout the Indian Civil Service.

Britain was prepared to sacrifice India's healthy economic development for the reassurance of a stable social order. In the countryside the British sponsored the emergence of a class of 'zamindars', landlords and money-lenders, who acted as local agents of the imperialist regime. The zamindars helped to contain the peasant masses and to curb the pretensions of the embryonic Indian bourgeoisie. The result was an agricultural sector dominated by small holdings and backward techniques in which innovation was discouraged. In agriculture the British imposed a variety of land settlements in different regions with the sole purpose of creaming off the maximum revenue possible. As a result, after 1881 'agricultural production was reported as virtually constant, and the industrial structure of the economy as practically stationary, during a half century when India's population rose by nearly one hundred million' (Daniel and Alice Thorner, *'Land and labour in India'*, Bombay 1962, p77). Agricultural backwardness has remained a central barrier to economic development.

Retarded development

The British exerted a decisive influence over the Indian independence movement which took over running the country in 1947. The Congress Party which is today India's natural party of government began as a British creation in 1885. The only major change introduced by Congress in the first few years of independence was to replace the corrupt landlords who had acted as agents of British rule in the countryside with functionaries loyal to the Congress Party. The growth of Indian industry was constrained by shortages of finance and industrial wage-labour as well as by British commercial policies.

Although 1984 has been a good year for Indian farmers, the general stagnation of agriculture remains a key problem of the economy. The record output of foodgrains this year is the product of good monsoon rains. Almost the entire growth in foodgrains output in the last 13 years has been in wheat and rice. Today 98 per cent of wheat and 65 per cent of rice procured by government agencies comes from the three northern states of Punjab, Haryana and Uttar Pradesh. Throughout the rest of the country the extension of irrigation and fertiliser use proceeds at a snail's pace for lack of money.

Foreign 'agro-business' has proved as incapable as the Indian bourgeoisie of breaking through the archaic village social structure of money-lending and trading. It has fast been losing interest in developing and monitoring the new high-yielding seed varieties which have been the cornerstone of the 'Green Revolution' in the Punjab. Land holdings continue to become more and more fragmented and their output goes to support a massive and growing army of landless and workless peasants. The government estimates that just to maintain foodgrain consumption at present levels would require a 50 per cent growth in output over the next 15 years.

Despite British restrictions on industrial development a few Indian capitalists were able to benefit from commercial concessions sufficiently so that by independence in 1947 Indian capital was larger than British capital in India. After independence the new rulers were confronted with a tiny domestic market constrained by the acute poverty and economic backwardness the British had left behind. There were few opportunities for profitable private investment and India's capitalists came to rely heavily on state support. Production came to be dominated by nationalised public sector concerns — coal, iron and steel, power — and by the Tata and Birla family empires. Despite heavy government subsidies, the primitive level of infrastructure ensured permanent bottlenecks at ports, rail heads and on the roads.

After the Second World War the imperialist powers were preoccupied with rebuilding their domestic economies and had little interest in investing in Indian industry or agriculture. India had to turn to the Soviet Union for the loans and technology to construct basic industries and infrastructure. This stimulated private industry at first, but after an initial spurt the rate of private corporate investment

dropped by a third in the decade 1966-75. The Soviet Union is still India's main trading partner, providing three quarters of the country's military equipment. But in terms of investment and economic influence it is steadily being pushed to the sidelines by Western powers.

The West muscles in

In the last 10 years the government has sought to open up the economy to foreign investment and imports of products for Indian industry. Gandhi's suspension of formal democracy under her 1975-77 Emergency — warmly greeted by the British Labour Party at the time — was designed to crush working class and rural opposition. It allowed the government to dismantle the industrial and trade controls set up at independence to protect domestic industry. This process was consolidated in November 1981 with the concession of a \$5.8 billion loan facility over three years by the International Monetary Fund. The conditions of the loan required an acceleration of the process of subordinating the Indian economy to world trade and finance. The influx of foreign — notably German, American and Japanese — capital has given India one of the fastest growth rates in the Third World in recent years.

In recent months the Indian economy has received accolades from the financial press. But India is still no Brazil. By far the largest portion of last year's 5.4 per cent industrial growth was in oil production. In a recent report the World Bank noted 'the disappointing performance of industry, the continuing shortfalls in electric power

generation, the need to regain and sustain momentum in exports and the need to manage the economy so as to avoid a resurgence of inflation while generating adequate resources for development' (*Financial Times*, 11 June 1984). Indian industry may be able to export to the Soviet Union but in the West it still retains a reputation for very low productivity and poor quality.

The government's failure to utilise the whole of the IMF loan reflects the slow growth of the economy. It is worried about its ability to service the huge debts it has been running up in recent years and knows that in future it will be able to rely less on loans from the IMF and World Bank as the United States reduces their role in world finance. It knows that to sustain the inflow of foreign investment on which it has staked its future it must keep its credit rating high to attract syndicated loans from the commercial banks. The Indian bourgeoisie cannot overcome the stagnation of agriculture because that would require challenging the power of the landowners with whom it is closely aligned. India's rulers have therefore been driven to offer themselves as junior partners of imperialist capital. The limits to their survival are therefore given more clearly than ever before by the fortunes of a shrinking world market.

Frankenstein's monster

The recession has provoked deep-seated tensions in India which threaten the stability and integrity of the whole country. The regions of Kashmir and Nagaland have been in a continual state of emergency. Today, half the states in India are acutely affected.

'The largest democracy in the world'

The British political establishment was united in its tributes to Indira Gandhi. Her assassination was, said Margaret Thatcher, 'an attack on democracy itself'. Neil Kinnock voiced his grief over the death of a 'fellow democrat'. Radical journalist Tariq Ali reported that Gandhi had been 'relaxed, witty and frank' when he interviewed her earlier this year. He joined in the establishment chorus that India was 'the only stable democracy in the Third World, resting on an economic base which is not exclusively dependent on the IMF and the West'.

In reality, democracy in India has a highly restricted and formal character. It has the formal trappings of an independent state with a parliamentary system and regular elections. A recent biographer of Nehru admitted it had most merit as a device for simply holding the country together:

'The establishment of such a democratic system in a vast and crowded country with so many fissiparous pulls was not only a stupendous achievement in itself; it was perhaps the only way of holding India together.' (Sarvepalli Gopal, *Jawaharlal Nehru, volume III*)

Democracy in India always comes second to the requirements of stabilising the imperialist order. The central government in Delhi has intervened no less than 47 times since 1947 to suppress a locally elected state government. In 1975, the government suspended all democratic procedures for a two-year period of military dictatorship. In 1984 alone, Gandhi intervened on three occasions to stifle state governments in Kashmir, Sikkim and Andhra Pradesh.

The Indian working class has never experienced the fruits of Indian democracy. Because of the restricted scope of industrialisation, the working class still forms only 10 per cent of the population. The influx of landless labourers into the cities is a constant source of instability for the regime. Militant struggles are endemic in India's

workshops and factories. But despite the significant increase in the social weight of the working class, political fragmentation allowed Gandhi to crush it. In March, the police burnt alive 300 striking dockers from Paradip in the state of Orissa.

Power vacuum

The anti-democratic and barbaric features of India are entirely the responsibility of imperialism, in particular British imperialism. And this responsibility is not merely a historical one. The continuing backwardness of Indian society and the violent conflicts among its people are a direct result of the subordination of India to the imperialist order. Gandhi's assassination and the associated instability are likely to encourage more direct imperialist intervention in the subcontinent. The journal of American finance, *Business Week*, warned that 'a power vacuum in India could give the US big headaches' (12 November). The USA wants to sustain a stable and loyal regime in Delhi. Last year the US Agency for International Development informed the US Congress that 'US interest in India is in its position as the economic and political force in South Asia'. It recommended that 'India can play a major role in determining the effectiveness of US policies in the region'. But US policies in South Asia, as in South America and South Africa, mean less democracy and more poverty and repression for the masses of India and the surrounding countries.

The 'world's largest democracy' is a sham disguising a backward and repressive regime propped up by the Western powers. Their interference can only make matters worse. The fight for democratic rights in India requires a struggle against imperialism in Asia and by workers in the West, especially in Britain which bears such a burden of responsibility for the unending suffering of India.

Even Andhra Pradesh which loyally supported Congress through the seventies was shaken by riots earlier this year after Indira Gandhi attempted to oust the elected provincial government of NT Rama Rao, an Indian film star. Each regional section of the Indian ruling class is becoming more and more convinced that it can do better left on its own, rather than tied to the inert Delhi bureaucracy. The Gandhi regime's heavy-handed attempts to deal with regional frictions only made the problems worse.

The most immediate source of instability — and the one that led to the Gandhi assassination — is the Sikh community. This may appear surprising because the Sikhs are one of the most prosperous sections of Indian society. Their regional base in the Punjab is one of India's few successful agricultural areas, producing one quarter of India's grain. The Indian President is a Sikh and Sikhs continue to play a prominent role in the armed forces. Yet the very success of the Sikhs has brought them into conflict with the Indian establishment. At the same time, rapid development in the Punjab, which has enriched a few but impoverished many more, has exacerbated social tensions in the region.

The movement for an independent Sikh state began as an expression of frustration among middle class Sikhs at the way they felt their region was being held back by the backwardness of the rest of India. The demand for a separate Sikh state — Khalistan — was reactionary because it aimed to secure a privileged position for the Sikhs at the expense of other sections of society. It also diverted the anger of many landless and unemployed Sikhs into a communal movement led by middle class Sikhs, rather than challenging the Indian ruling class as a whole. Indeed this was the advantage of the movement for the Sikh establishment. However, it was the Congress government's attempts to outmanoeuvre the Sikhs that made the whole issue into an explosive danger to the regime and a mortal threat to its leader.

Congress manoeuvres against the dominant Sikh party, Akali Dal, were aimed at undermining their powerful position. Just as the British resorted to stirring up communal strife to obliterate any opposition, so Congress has once again revived the same stratagem. From 1978 Gandhi promoted the activities of the more extreme Sikh leader Sant Jarnail Singh Bhindranwale and other fundamentalist groups in an effort to discredit and weaken the moderate independence movement. But the strategy misfired badly. Bhindranwale's militant Sikhism drew away support from Akali Dal and succeeded only in pushing it in a more separatist direction.

After his occupation of the Golden Temple in the holy city of Amritsar, Bhindranwale put himself at the head of a popular rising which became a serious threat to the Congress government. In the end, Gandhi had no alternative but to send in the regular army to crush the Sikh uprising. This decisive measure last June left around three thousand Sikhs dead, including Bhindranwale, and inflamed Sikh passions around the world. It also sealed the fate of Indira Gandhi.

Bulwark

Gandhi's death has left behind a country in turmoil, dominated by a ruling party which has become little more than a vehicle for the Nehru family dynasty. As he approaches the elections called for the end of December, Rajiv Gandhi has a number of factors in his favour. First, the imperialist powers want to maintain a united India as a bulwark of capitalist relations in Asia. They will support the Delhi regime against tendencies towards disintegration. Second, the Indian ruling class can still take advantage of the administrative and military machine left behind by Britain. So long as the predominantly Hindu ruling class can manipulate regional, communal and caste divisions unchallenged by a nationally organised movement of workers and peasants it is likely to remain intact.

Given the weakness of the opposition and the sympathetic reaction to the murder of his mother, Rajiv Gandhi may well win the election. But the Indian ruling class will never be able to overcome the barriers to the development of Indian society in the interest of all its people. That task remains to be tackled by the working class.

Andy Clarkson & Gareth Evans

Labour race relations

Keeping the lid on

Once upon a time every Tory politician and a good number of Labour right wingers would have had no qualms about playing the racist card. Speeches warning of the dire consequences of unrestricted immigration and the threat from black criminal elements in our midst used to be the order of the day. Today, such tirades are largely the preserve of the extreme right. During the 1983 General Election campaign, for the first time in recent memory, the Tory leadership decided to keep the racist card in the pack. *Naseem Patel* looks at what's changed.

BRITAIN IS NO LESS racist than it was a decade ago. If anything, racial oppression is more deep-rooted than ever before. The government's own agencies have admitted as much:

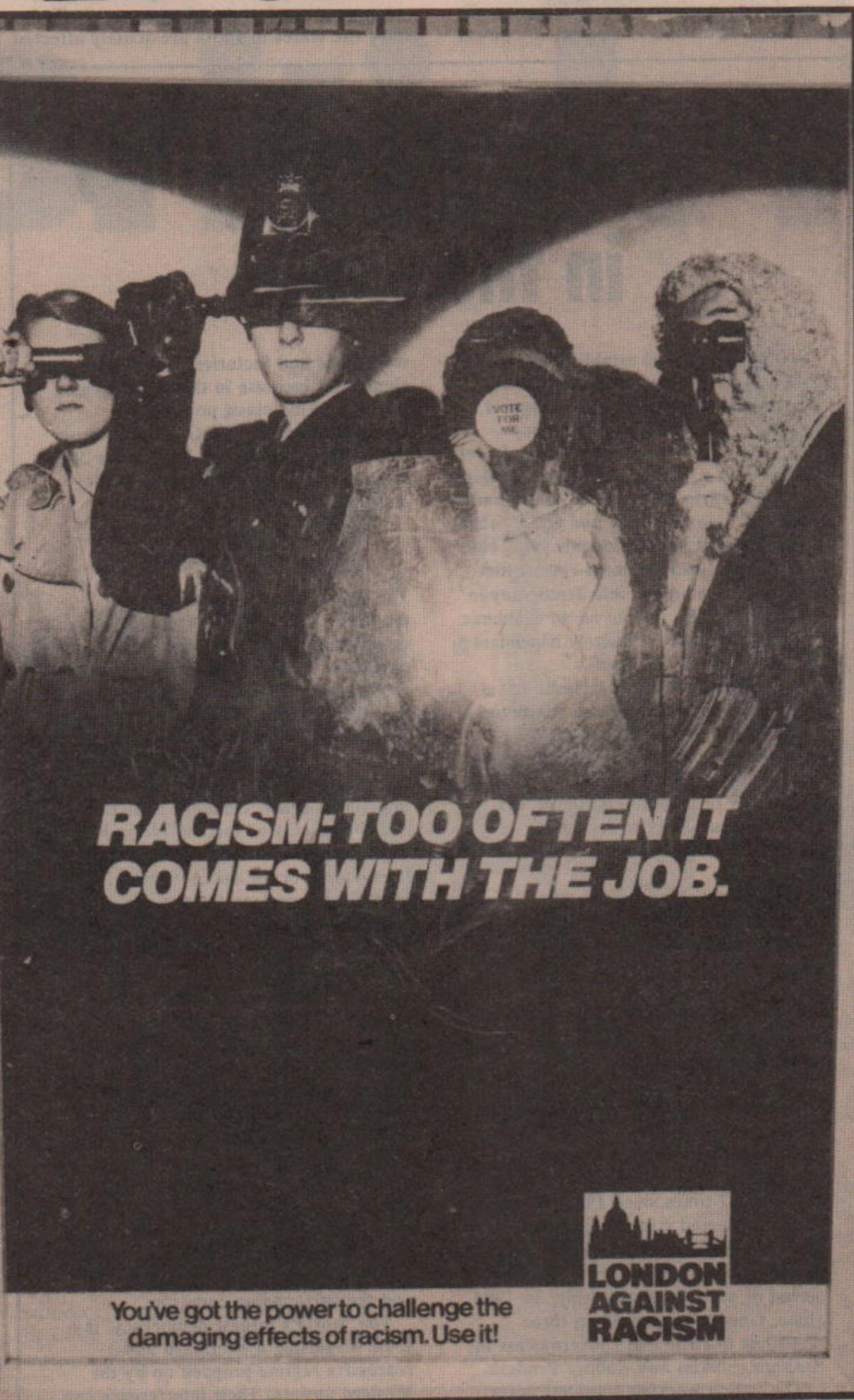
'The level of racial discrimination in Britain remains high. Its manifestations range from outright physical attack, which in some parts of our cities remains depressingly prevalent, to systematic discrimination in areas of employment, housing and services.' (Commission for Racial Equality, Annual Report 1984)

A score of reports published this year provide conclusive evidence of systematic discrimination against blacks in every walk of life. This is reflected even in relatively newly established institutions such as the Youth Training Scheme, which has been accused of limiting training opportunities for black youth. Thus the decline of racism as a political issue does not correspond to the continuing strength of racism as a social force. Racism's low profile on the political agenda in recent years is rather a calculated response to the 1981 inner-city riots.

The gravy train

The British establishment is fighting hard to cope with the overall problems of social and economic instability thrown up by the recession. It can do without further street revolts by angry black youth. This was one of the main conclusions drawn by the government after the 1981 uprisings. The scale of the unrest revealed that the British state lacked any institutions capable of containing black resistance. The community and race relations quangos lacked credibility and proved irrelevant to the situation. The handful of black careerists employed by these bodies were too unrepresentative of their communities to play an effective role. In the aftermath of the riots the function of institutions such as the CRE was increasingly called into question. Government ministers declared that they were not getting value for money. To reverse this state of affairs the government set about establishing what it euphemistically calls 'meaningful channels of communication'. Lord Scarman was sent on assignment to Brixton to undertake a cosmetic inquiry into the disturbances. Environment secretary Michael Heseltine was despatched to Liverpool on a similar mission.

Unfortunately for the guardians of social stability, the Tories were not well placed to carry out this exercise. As the party of law and order and racism, the Tories lacked both the credibility and the flexibility to integrate a section of the black community into the institutions of the British state. But fortunately for the British establishment this problem was quickly resolved by Her Majesty's loyal opposition, the Labour Party. Registered black voters remained remarkably loyal to Labour in the 1979 and 1983 General Elections. To keep things this



The GLC's anti-racism: money for pious adverts — and to buy off black revolt

way Labour embarked on a strategy to create a whole new race relations industry — one that could respond to the exigencies of the post-riot period. Presenting itself as the natural mediator between alienated blacks

and society, the Labour Party hoped to repair its battered electoral prospects by ensuring that black voters remained part of its electoral constituency.

Although Whitehall was happy to

contribute to the cost of Labour's containment exercise, local government became the main arena for establishing the new race relations network. The most ambitious experiment took off in London, where the Greater London Council assumed responsibility for implementing the new strategy and restoring Labour's tarnished image on race.

The GLC spearheaded a two-pronged approach. It passed equal opportunities policies to deal with its own 'in-house' racism. And it extended its range of contacts outside County Hall through lavishing funds and grants on hundreds of voluntary groups and community organisations. This is how the GLC staked its claim to be London's leading anti-racist fighter. It is not. The GLC's signal achievement has been to create a framework through which black protest can be institutionalised. Ken Livingstone and his left-wing colleagues at County Hall have presided over the most extensive containment programme since that initiated in the USA after the race riots of the sixties:

'All committees of the council have now developed policies and programmes to assist black and other ethnic minorities to get a fairer share of resources, access to facilities to become more involved in helping to shape policies and programmes and to benefit from employment and training opportunities as offered by the council.' (GLC report, September 1984)

One GLC quango — the Ethnic Minorities Unit — has developed far-reaching monthly consultation and information programmes with 1500 black and ethnic groups. Its grants programme funded 247 anti-racist projects by black and other self-help organisations between 1983 and 1984. The unit has dispensed more than £2.3m in grants this year. Other GLC committees have joined in the funding bonanza. By the end of the financial year April 1984, the council had approved a total of 2477 grants to a plethora of voluntary and community organisations. The bill was £40.6m. The GLC gives special consideration to 'sensitive' areas with large black populations such as Tower Hamlets (£1.86m) and Hackney (£1.8m).

On top of these millions, other GLC committees have spent substantial portions of their grants building the radical race relations industry. The women's committee (budget £8m), the arts and recreation committee (budget £10m) and the Greater London Enterprise Board (GLEB) all provide finance for black projects and campaigns. GLEB has so far allocated £1m to black businesses and co-ops. The GLC police committee spent £400 000 on 10 local groups monitoring police harassment and racist attacks in 1982-83.

Most of the money goes on wages. Salaries of from £12 000 to £21 000 are not unusual. From the point of view of the establishment, this is a small price to pay for maintaining a dialogue with a section of the black community. Such salaries are the hallmark of machine politics — they are a form of patronage and co-optation. As the American experience has proved, race relations is good business. The corruption resulting from this largesse is inevitable. The Lambeth Police Monitoring Group collapsed in 1983 after the discovery of financial irregularities. Its counterpart in Islington, Police Accountability for Community Enlightenment, has just been wound up following the embezzlement of £20 000.

GLC patronage is topped up by other

Labour-controlled councils. Even Tory boroughs have not been slow to contribute to what they see as a good cause. In 1984 Tory-run Brent and Ealing councils handed out more than £2m each. Croydon dispensed £550 992 and Waltham Forest £929 509. A bipartisan spirit pervades London's race relations circuit.

Co-optation

Before GLC race relations supremo Herman Ouseley departed for his new £28 000 a year post as assistant chief executive for Lambeth council he boasted that 'relations have been established with all communities'. He was referring to the GLC's success in building an extensive network of contacts among black activists everywhere in London. In the past, black activists and anti-racists managed to retain a degree of independence. Only the 'Uncle Toms' and careerists took up posts in the race relations industry. All this has changed. The GLC has assimilated all the old radicals — from the Newham Monitoring Project's Unmesh Desai to the founder of the Institute of Race Relations, Sivanandan. The involvement of more radical activists has given a left-wing gloss to the GLC's anti-racist efforts. To strengthen this image, the council has sponsored anti-deportation conferences and meetings on police harassment. Left-wing councils such as Islington and Hackney have gone one stage further and initiated campaigns against local deportations.

Left-wing local government patronage has led to the domestication of many anti-racists. Institute of Race Relations director Sivanandan personifies the success of Labour's strategy. Only a few years ago he wrote approvingly of the Black People's Alliance, an organisation active in the sixties, and its refusal to accommodate to the establishment:

'The BPA was uncompromising from the outset. It excluded from membership immigrant organisations that had compromised with government policy or fallen prey to government hand-outs (Labour's Urban Aid Programme was beginning to percolate through to blacks) or looked to the Labour Party for redress.' (A Sivanandan, 'From resistance to rebellion', *Race and Class*, autumn 1981/winter 1982)

Two years and millions of pounds later, Sivanandan called for a rethink:

'We must not overlook the one positive thing that Thatcher has done — which is to throw up the contradictions within the Labour Party and move sections of it closer to us. The left wing...has been left with the ethnic baby; it does not know in which direction to turn, and I think it is up to us to point them in the right direction. Don't let's be purists and stand outside, for we can't fight the system bare-handed. We don't have the tools, brothers and sisters; we've got to get the tools from the system itself and hope that in the process five out of ten of us don't become corrupt.' (A Sivanandan, 'Challenging racism', *Race and Class*, autumn 1983)

While Sivanandan lives in hope on a £60 000 grant from the GLC (topped up to £80 000 by Islington council) the British state has achieved a major coup. It has co-opted a more radical and therefore a more credible section of the black community into its ranks. Thus police were able to bring in radical black community spokesmen to defuse a potentially explosive situation on Brixton's front line in October. Quango activists have replaced police Instant Response Units to keep the peace in Britain's inner cities. The radical race relations lobby has been instrumental in smothering black anger and demobilising spontaneous protest. Nowhere is this more striking than in East London.

Neutralised

There is now only one independent anti-racist movement in East London. With the exception of Workers Against Racism, every campaign is on the payroll of the GLC or the local council. But the bond that ties these organisations to the GLC is not merely financial — it is also political. It is this political affinity to left Labourism which has neutralised anti-racist activity in East London.

Racial violence and oppression have a

long history in East London, particularly in the boroughs of Tower Hamlets, Newham and Hackney. Up to 1981 there was also a tradition of anti-racist campaigning. In 1976 thousands of Bengalis converged on Downing Street in a march protesting against racist attacks. Large and vocal protests met the deaths of Altab Ali in 1978 and Akhtar Ali Baig in 1980. On 17 July 1978, up to 19 000 Bengali workers in East London came out on strike in protest at racist attacks and murders. Local Asian youth formed defence organisations to counter racist violence and police indifference.

The birth of organisations such as the Newham Monitoring Project and the Community Alliance for Police Accountability coincided with a change in the patterns of resistance. Newham Monitoring Project got off the ground in 1980, following the murder of Akhtar Ali Baig. It received its first grant from the GLC police committee in 1982. It now has at least three full-time workers. Its brief is to campaign for police accountability:

'As a police monitoring group we believe that the present concessions to accountability such as liaison committees are meaningless and are a purely cosmetic exercise and thus we campaign for a police accountability to you, the ratepayer of the borough.' (Newham Monitoring Project, Annual Report 1983)

The Newham group spent the whole of 1982 and 1983 trying to persuade West Ham police station to prosecute those responsible for attacking a local Asian mini-cab driver. Luke Fordjour lost the sight of his left eye in a racial attack in Forest Gate in January 1982. Nobody has yet been charged and Newham Monitoring Project has come to the conclusion that 'there is a whole force of institutionalised police racism against black people in Newham'. Most black people in East London haven't needed to spend two years pleading with the local constabulary to reach this conclusion.

Newham Monitoring Project devotes its energies to encouraging the victims of racist attacks and police harassment to take civil action. During the past 12 months the group has initiated two civil actions against the police — one has been successful. There is nothing wrong in principle with this sort of case work. But it has little to do with fighting racism. Monitoring racist attacks and police harassment is not the same thing as fighting them. The project claims that it does more, and cites the Newham 7 and Newham 8 campaigns as proof. In both cases local Asian youth were framed and criminalised for resisting attacks by racists and the police. The Newham group helped mobilise support for protest demonstrations and secured acquittals for four of the Newham 8. It also helped to defuse the anger of black youth through its insipid campaign for police accountability:

'Identifying disconcerting police practices lends weight to the campaign for police accountability and local democratic control over policing in Newham.' (Unmesh Desai in *Policing London*, November 1982)

The Newham Monitoring Project sustains illusions in the possibility of a more accountable police force. But even its own Annual Report was forced to admit that 'the community through its long and bitter experience of 30 years of racist policing has no confidence left whatsoever in the police'. Attempts to democratise the police can only serve to neutralise the anger of the oppressed.

By incorporating groups such as the Newham Monitoring Project, the race relations industry has become more flexible and effective in smoothing over black unrest. The campaign around the death of Colin Roach in Hackney in 1983 provides a good example. When 21 year old Colin Roach was found dead, shot through the head inside the entrance to Stoke Newington police station in early January 1983, the local black community laid siege to the police station. The angry demonstrations that followed were a response not only to Colin Roach's death, but also to the long history of racial oppression in Hackney.

The spontaneous eruption of black anger forced the Labour council to respond. Labour realised that unless it did something fast things could well get out of hand. The council proceeded to pass an emergency resolution demanding a public inquiry into Colin Roach's death. Left-wing councillor and police committee chair Brynley Heaven wrote to the GLC requesting an initial grant of £1500 for the Roach Family Support Committee. Labour councillors made up the chorus of voices demanding an inquiry into policing in Hackney and offered facilities at the town hall for the inquest. And in a gesture designed to placate black militancy, the council voted to withhold payment of the police precept of £4m. It soon backed down at the first threat of legal action. But the gesture served its purpose of containing black resistance. Radical activists like Brynley Heaven worked overtime neutralising the unrest. Instead of providing a focus for organising resistance to the police, the various campaigns were derailed by Labour and used to promote its longstanding aim of making the police accountable to the community. The British establishment was well pleased with the results:

'Without the organised channel for protest that the GLC-financed support group provided, it could well have broken out in far worse public disorder than actually occurred.' (*The Economist*, 2 July 1983)

The energies of activists involved in the Colin Roach campaign are now expended in the council chambers of Hackney Town Hall

and in the police committee support unit, monitoring police practice in the borough. And the police continue to do violence to the black community.

At peace with the police

Integration has transformed many former activists' attitudes towards the police. Even the more radical elements can see some potential for non-racist policing. Brynley Heaven even had a kind word for the hated Special Patrol Group in February this year:

'The SPG have taken on a new role for the better...apparently they are going out in uniform and direct foot patrols.' (*Hackney Gazette*, 10 February)

Things have gone even further in neighbouring Islington. Smarting with indignation at the unilateral decision of the local police force to introduce a 'Neighbourhood Watch' spy scheme to combat crime, the council launched its own version — 'Crimewatch' — in December last year. Now the two are to merge. 'Our two schemes are compatible' avowed Commander Newing of Scotland Yard, 'we are aiming for the same objective — I don't see any difficulties'. Labour's radical policing alternatives are perfectly in tune with police strategy.

The Tower Hamlets-based Community Alliance for Police Accountability is a model representative of the establishment's post-riot strategy. Formed after a brutal police raid on a local party, CAPA was in business by July 1981 with a grant from the GLC police committee. It now has five full-time workers and will be funded to the tune of £146 000 by June 1986. A recent GLC report pin-pointed CAPA's role. It acts as a buffer between the brutalised Bengali victims of racist violence, the police and the local state:

'Broadly speaking, the indirect measures available to the council where racial harassment is alleged include giving support and guidance, funding bodies who may give assistance to a tenant.'

CAPA is concerned to emphasise that it is not anti-police:

'We are not an anti-police group; what we are working for is a good police force, responsive to the needs of the community it exists to serve, and we hope one day to be able to record that we have fulfilled our function.' (CAPA, Annual Report 1983)

CAPA certainly fulfilled its function in the Colin Roach campaign, directing anti-police sentiments into its spurious campaign for police accountability.

CAPA has now joined with other East London groups monitoring racist attacks and the police to form the umbrella organisation ELCARAPH. This group has been patrolling local estates in an effort to persuade the police to take over. It has demanded real negotiations with the police and promoted Bethnal Green community copper, constable Goldborne, as the model police officer. Every London borough has its ELCARAPH equivalent. In Greenwich, the Labour council turned an action committee against racist attacks into another arm of the local authority:

'Greenwich council has taken the idea of consultation a stage further than the ad hoc arrangements usually made. It has designated Greenwich Action Committee Against Racist Attacks (GACARA) as the representative body for organisations in the borough on this issue. It has agreed to a number of GACARA's proposals for dealing with the problem including joint consultation.'

Thatcher's little helpers

The anti-racist movement is a thing of the past in London. The GLC and other left-wing Labour councils have sucked it dry. For every instance of police harassment, racial violence and state oppression, they have provided a committee or an adviser or a community project through which protest can be safely channelled and black anger immediately dissipated. The British establishment has achieved a remarkable feat in containing black unrest at a time of intensifying racial oppression. It has the Labour Party to thank.



Out soon from Junius!
A handbook for anti-racists
 Order your copy now. Write to
 BCM JPLTD, London WC1N 3XX

Theories of imperialism

Norman Etherington, *Theories of imperialism: war, conquest and capital*, Croom Helm 1984, pp296, hbk £16.95

Roger Fletcher, *Revisionism and empire: socialist imperialism in Germany 1897-1914*, George Allen & Unwin 1984, pp223, hbk £18

THESE ARE NOT just two books on theories of imperialism — they are two books that ought to be read. In different ways, both suffer from a subjective analytical framework, but unlike the many texts on this subject they cover new ground.

The weakness of Etherington and Fletcher is their common reluctance to locate the theories they discuss in their proper social context. This leads to a one-sided presentation of the problem, in which the subject matter is examined in abstraction from the social forces that gave rise to it. This is less of a problem with Etherington since his main object is to show the failure of modern specialists to understand the content of the early theories of imperialism. Fletcher's approach, on the other hand, constitutes a real obstacle to assimilating his interesting material. Let's take Fletcher first.

Social imperialism

Revisionism and empire deals with the views of the social-imperialist wing of the German Social Democratic Party (SPD) in the decade leading up to the outbreak of the First World War. The strength of revisionism within the SPD is well known. But Fletcher shows that behind the famous revisionist figures such as Bernstein stood influential publicists who openly admitted their rejection of Marxism. Journalists and authors like Schippel, Hilderbrand, Leuthner and Calwer did not merely revise Marx. They were fervent German chauvinists and self-conscious pro-imperialists. Nor were they just a handful of isolated figures. Through their influential newspaper, the *Sozialistische Monatshefte*, they exerted a powerful influence on the leadership of the working class and strengthened the position of the right-wing leadership of the German labour movement.

The *Sozialistische Monatshefte* didn't just echo the mild social-chauvinist policies that characterised the social-democratic parties of the Second International. Its policies were explicitly pro-imperialist and nationalistic. This influential circle was fully behind German expansionism and its ideas, translated into British terms, were more suited to the Tories than the Labour Party.

Fletcher's presentation of social-imperialist policies is limited by its failure to explain where these ideas came from and why they gained credence among sections of the German working class. Fletcher's lack of social analysis leads him to suggest that workers became susceptible to these ideas because they corresponded to social reality. This is an unsatisfactory procedure. It takes the end result of a process — a chauvinist working class — as its starting point. The process by which the working class arrived at this position is not explained. Fletcher can therefore argue that workers were spontaneously drawn towards these ideas:

'This is not a case of workers being betrayed or misled by opportunistic leaders so much as a matter of autonomous working class radicalism seeking, and to some extent finding, an outlet for its grievances in an avenue that was compatible with social reality as it appeared to the ordinary shopfloor worker.'

Fletcher does not make it clear why social imperialism should be compatible with working class radicalism. This is not surprising, since chauvinism only acquired a proletarian form through the mediation of the German labour bureaucracy. This explains why the more explicit bourgeois forms of chauvinism had such little resonance in the working class.

In fact, the role of middle class intellectuals and their influence in the working class is well documented by Fletcher in his discussion of the *Sozialistische Monatshefte*. Most of the journalists and intellectual figures around the newspaper were middle class publicists who sought to win the labour movement to their ideas. The British reader will find many similarities between the role of the Fabians and the German social imperialists. Although Fletcher does not elaborate on their motives, it is clear that the social imperialists saw the labour movement as a suitable vehicle for advancing their careers. More broadly, they considered the labour movement a useful instrument in rationalising Wilhelmine Germany. It is interesting to note that the *Monatshefte* was secretly financed by bourgeois sources. The main financial backing came from Dr Leo Arons, who was closely connected to Bismarck's financial adviser.

Reading between the lines, what is striking is the degree to which the German labour movement was ideologically influenced by the bourgeoisie.

Fletcher's book is a good aid to understanding the subsequent demise of the SPD and the prevalence of social imperialism.

Instinct vs theory

Etherington's book is primarily concerned with the conflicting interpretations of theories of imperialism. He provides a convincing argument against the academic criticisms of the theory. Etherington shows that most writings on the subject wrongly presented imperialism as the motive force behind empire building in the nineteenth century and equated it with colonialism. Having defined imperialism in this way academic critics could proceed to take it apart and show its irrelevance in explaining the 'scramble for Africa' for example.

Etherington correctly argues that imperialism cannot be reduced to colonialism. It must be seen as a theory that explains the development of capitalism on a global scale once the over-accumulation of capital becomes a problem. Since most established scholars saw the theory as subversive, they reacted to it with a vengeance. In a brilliant chapter, 'The patriots fight back', Etherington explains how intellectuals around the colonial office not only redefined what imperialism was, but also influenced the terms of future discussion. Most left-wing theorists also fell into the trap and ended up discussing imperialism as something synonymous with colonialism.

Etherington provides useful insights into the subject. He argues that it was nineteenth century capitalists who first started talking about the necessity for imperialism. An article entitled 'The struggle for existence' published in June 1898 in the Boston financial journal *Investor* noted that imperialism was not a policy option but a necessity for the capitalist class:

'If the capital at present in employment throughout the civilised world is to be kept at work, an enlarged field for its product must be discovered.'

Etherington's discovery of these early pro-imperialist statements by businessmen proves that the ruling class has an acute sense of its own interests. Unfortunately, Etherington confuses the bourgeoisie's subjective response to its problems with the theory of imperialism itself. According to Etherington, the roots of the theory can be found in the statements of nineteenth century businessmen:

'The first full-blown theory that a "plethora" of capital made this sort of imperialism a necessity was developed by American capitalists in the course of the year 1898, but the rudiments of that theory can be found in capitalist literature of the same period in Britain and on the continent of Europe. On both sides of the Atlantic the idea was commonly expressed that unless imperialism was adapted as a deliberate policy, there might be irresistible pressure for fundamental changes in the economic system.'

This recognition — the result of subjective experience — of the need for imperialist policies is not the same thing as a theory. It is a subjective response based on an instinct for survival, which could form the starting point for generalisations, but not for a theory. In reality, the necessity for imperialism was theorised a long time before 1898. As early as 1805 the British economist William Playfair anticipated the development of imperialism. In his book, *Inquiry into permanent causes of the decline and fall of powerful and wealthy nations*, he wrote about the superabundance of capital as an inevitability and the tendency of every industrial country to become a creditor or investor nation:

'If there is not sufficient means of employing capital within a nation or country...there are plenty of opportunities furnished by poorer nations.'

Playfair was not alone. In 1819, Sismonde de Sismondi clearly argued the necessity for capital exports in his *Nouveaux principes d'économie*. And in 1843, Victor Considerant emphasised the inevitable tendency for free trade to be transformed into monopolistic competition. In Marx's writings the necessity for an imperialist phase is logically derived from an analysis of capital accumulation.

In all these instances theory anticipates future development. These writings have a different status from the conjunctural analysis of nineteenth century capitalists. It is unfortunate that Etherington did not take his study further. Through an analysis of the work of the real pioneers of the theory of imperialism Etherington could have provided us with many more useful insights.

Before imperialism became a reality, the capitalist class could openly advocate imperialist

policies. But once imperialism was in full swing and its devastating consequences became clear, ruling class ideologues were forced to deny its existence. They launched a major campaign to discredit the term and were remarkably successful. Even left-wing intellectuals succumbed to this pressure. Today, a significant section of the British left believes that imperialism no longer exists, or at least that Britain is no longer imperialist. The task of *the next step* is to combat these prejudices. The material contained in Etherington's book provides some useful ammunition to aid us in this task.

Frank Richards

Alliance for progress?



James Curran ed, *The future of the left*, Polity Press/New Socialist 1984, pp332, pbk £4.95, hbk £16.50

Robert Harris, *The making of Neil Kinnock*, Faber and Faber 1984, pp256, pbk £4.95 hbk £9.95

GM Drower, *Neil Kinnock: the path to leadership*, Weidenfeld and Nicholson 1984, pp162, pbk £5.95

LABOUR'S ELECTORAL catastrophe in June 1983 still overshadows the party. Under the editorship of James Curran, the *New Socialist* has provided a forum for debating the way forward for the Labour Party. Much of the discussion in the *New Socialist*, which is republished in *The future of the left*, is a response to the thesis propounded by Professor Eric Hobsbawm in *Marxism Today*, the Communist Party's rival journal in the academic socialist market. Hobsbawm explains Labour's inexorable decline as a result of the changing structure of the working class. He counsels a shift to the centre and even a coalition with the SDP/Liberal Alliance as the only way to beat the Tories.

The theme of alliances — Labour's need to rethink its old ones and to establish new ones — recurs throughout the book. Some contributors, notably Cambridge Fellow Gareth Stedman Jones, echo Hobsbawm's view that restoring Labour's links with the middle classes should be the party's top priority. Tony Benn and most others emphasise the need for the Labour Party to establish alliances with a variable list of autonomous movements including women, blacks, gays, independent socialists, peace campaigners and ecologists. A strategy of alliances presumes two things. The party proposing the alliance must have something to offer and the proposed partner must have something to give in return.

The Labour Party's position in British politics rests on its claim to represent the working class. This is what the Labour Party must bring into any alliance with other social forces. Before a working class party can offer an alliance it must be able to guarantee its working class base. But the problem that was so forcefully revealed in June 1983 is that Labour does not have a secure base of working class support. Yet in the *New Socialist* debate about alliances the fact that the Labour Party has lost the confidence and support of millions of working class people is not even considered a problem.

Curran himself provides a striking illustration of this point. In his introduction to the book he outlines the Hobsbawm thesis that Labour can only revive by moving to the centre. He then claims that 'this book provides alternative interpretations of the seismic changes that have transformed British politics, and alternative prescriptions for responding to them'. Yet he concludes his own contribution with the following sentence:

'There is nothing in the programme outlined in this essay which is automatically unacceptable to the broad centre of public opinion which Labour must appeal to, if it is to form a majority government.'

The convoluted structure of Curran's sentence reflects the apologetic and defensive tone of academic left-wing writing. Its content reveals that the left shares the preoccupations of the right about appealing to 'the broad centre of public opinion'.

When *The future of the left* comes to consider specific policies — which is not very often and always in a vague and obscure way — its remoteness from the working class becomes apparent. Indeed some of the contributors recommend explicitly anti-working class policies. Professor Raymond Williams disguises a proposal for an incomes policy in typically opaque prose, but the content is the same as in Roy Hattersley's plain pro-capitalist speaking. Journalist Anna Coote repeats her familiar demand for a feminist incomes policy. This aims to redistribute pay within the working class, instead of fighting the bosses for higher pay for everybody. Sussex Fellow Mary Kaldor calls for the reintroduction of conscription and for more military installations in Britain as part of 'a credible non-nuclear defence policy'.

Where next?

Of the movements which figure in the list given in every speech or article by Tony Benn only the anti-nuclear and ecology movements have any independent existence. Both movements reflect a revulsion at the more offensive aspects of life in capitalist society. Both loosely involve large numbers of people in a low level of activity. The aim of most of their supporters is to register a passive individual protest — not to change the world. These movements represent a widespread state of mind, but they are not social forces capable of changing anything. Indeed many of their leading figures — professors, priests and media personalities — have a substantial stake in the existing system. Labour may attempt to link up with these movements, but they can only weaken the party even more and take it further away from the working class.

What about the movements of women, gays and anti-racists and the ranks of 'non-affiliated' socialists? These movements only survive on the strength of grants from left-wing Labour councils and other state agencies. There would be little point in the Labour Party forming alliances with these elements, since they are often merely the same people in a different guise. The most cynical chapter in *The future of the left* is the one in which GLC functionary Hilary Wainwright and her co-thinkers present the activities of radical Labour councils as 'initiatives from which a socialist vision is already being fashioned'. These councils provide fat salaries for middle class activists and grants for their pet projects. Yet for the low-paid workers on the town hall payrolls and for the working class consumers of council services, things have gone steadily from bad to worse. Labour councils blame the Tories — and impose the cuts and rate rises themselves.

Labour lightweights

As both Neil Kinnock's biographers freely admit, the new Labour Party leader is no intellectual. He even failed his driving test 'three or four times'. However, his two articles in *The future of the left* are as profound as any others in the collection. One is a wordy piece on democracy, freedom and equality of the sort Roy Hattersley probably used to write for his school magazine. The other is a pragmatic readjustment of Labour Party policy on Europe to bring it into line with the SDP/Liberal Alliance.

The Labour Party's problem is not so much that its leader lacks genius, but that its self-appointed intellectuals are so thick. Professors Hall and Williams are fond of emphasising the need for 'fundamental research' and political education, but are themselves incapable of doing more than recycling the same old platitudes and tired dogmas. It is no wonder that the Socialist Society they launched a couple of years ago at a gathering of thousands to guide the intellectual recovery collapsed after only a few months.

Neil Kinnock was born into a family of South Wales miners that suffered its full share of the hardships of working class life before the war. But all that remains of Kinnock's proletarian origins is his accent. His early political activity was around campaigns against Apartheid, nuclear weapons, Vietnam and Chile. Yet his loyalty to British imperialism has always overwhelmed his moralistic internationalism. When the Tories sent the task force to recapture the Malvinas from Argentina he gave his approval, saying Thatcher's action was 'necessary and unavoidable'.

The war in Ireland has raged since Kinnock first became an MP, but neither of his biographers mention a single comment on the issue by the Labour leader. He can now be relied upon to condemn the IRA when called upon, but it is by no means clear that he knows where Ireland is. In the seventies Kinnock occasionally spoke out in defence of the unions in Parliament. But since he became leader he has distanced himself from militant action, notably by the miners, in the vain hope of winning wider respectability.

Kinnock personifies the plight of the modern Labour Party. Unlike Gaitskill and Wilson, or even Callaghan and Foot, Kinnock cannot convincingly present himself as a political heavyweight, a man of experience and learning whom anybody could imagine running the country. At the same time, he has no real roots in

the unions. What Labour leader this century would have risked losing a key conference vote by not having the TGWU bloc vote securely sewn up beforehand, as Kinnock did over reselection at Blackpool this year? Kinnock's problem is that the more he tries to play the statesman, the more he draws the Labour Party away from the party's crumbling working class base. But without that base the Labour Party is nothing.

There is little to choose between these biographies. Both tell the same rather bland story, including many of the same anecdotes. Harris's account is more journalistic and sympathetic, Drower's is more detailed and sharper in tone. But neither tackles any of the wider political issues behind Kinnock's rise to power.

Mike Freeman

AsSASsins



John Strawson, *A history of the SAS regiment*, Secker & Warburg 1984, pp292, hbk £12.95

THE SPECIAL Air Service Regiment burst into the headlines when the siege at the Iranian embassy in Princes Gate, London in May 1980 was terminated by an SAS assault. The media made instant heroes of this elite British army unit, which had practiced for five days on a life-size model of the building before it attacked. Major General John Strawson frankly admits that the 'anti-terrorists' of the SAS are terrorists themselves:

'Sabotage, intimidation, demolition, the striking of uncertainty and terror into their enemies' hearts...in fact they behaved in the same sort of way as those whom in the last decade or so we have come to call "terrorists".'

Strawson believes that the SAS has yet to develop its full potential. The merit of this authorised history is that Strawson tries to get behind the media myths to present a relatively honest assessment of the origins and role of this army regiment.

The SAS grew out of the confrontation between German and British imperialism in the sands of the Sahara Desert in 1941. It was the only active front at the time and Britain was on the defensive against Rommel's Panzers. The advent of parachuting allowed Colonel David Stirling to open up another front behind the German lines. Small teams of SAS soldiers inaugurated raids on airfields and ammunition dumps. But once the Allies commenced their major offensives in 1943, the SAS was forced out of the limelight.

After the war, Britain was once again on the defensive. This time it was struggling to ensure control over the transfer of political power in its colonies. In Malaya, Oman and Borneo the SAS was drafted in to deal with the nationalist guerrillas. The SAS had four functions in these campaigns: it operated as an intelligence cell for surveillance purposes; as an information team for propaganda purposes; as a medical and veterinary corp; and finally, it organised counter-gangs among demoralised guerrillas. The SAS usually left 'hits' to regular troops, unless the enemy was small in number in which case the heroic SAS could finish it off alone. The use to which the SAS was put in the colonies underlines the importance given to cultivating a pro-British section of the indigenous population. Hence the stress on language ability in SAS training.

In Aden and Ireland, SAS methods have failed. By 1967 the British had given up trying to keep a grip on the Arabian Peninsula at the entrance to the Red Sea. In Ireland, the SAS still makes its presence felt but Strawson cites operational reasons as an excuse for not discussing its role. He blames meddling politicians for the setbacks in both countries, but it is clear that the SAS failed because it could not buy its support from among the people. Strawson acknowledges that in Ireland 'there is no such thing as winning total control of Ulster's population, and therefore no such thing as defeating the IRA'.

Although the SAS is always presented as unique, its methods are not new. They have always played a part in the arsenal of any army worth its salt. Strawson's book is interesting because it tells us more about the priorities set by the establishment than the proclivities of the SAS assassins. What was meant to be a vindication of the SAS turns out to be an exposure of the weakness of British imperialism. Strawson shows

how a single sabotage squad from the African theatre in the Second World War has increasingly come to represent the only solution — terror — to the multiplying problems which confront the British ruling class.

Andy Clarkson

Europe's Star Wars

Bhupendra Jasani & Christopher Lee, *Countdown to space war*, Taylor & Francis 1984, pp104, pbk £4.95

Stockholm International Peace Research Institute, *World armaments and disarmament yearbook*, Taylor & Francis 1984, pp700, hbk £28

International Institute for Strategic Studies, *Strategic survey 1983-1984*, IISS 1984, pp140, pbk £5.50

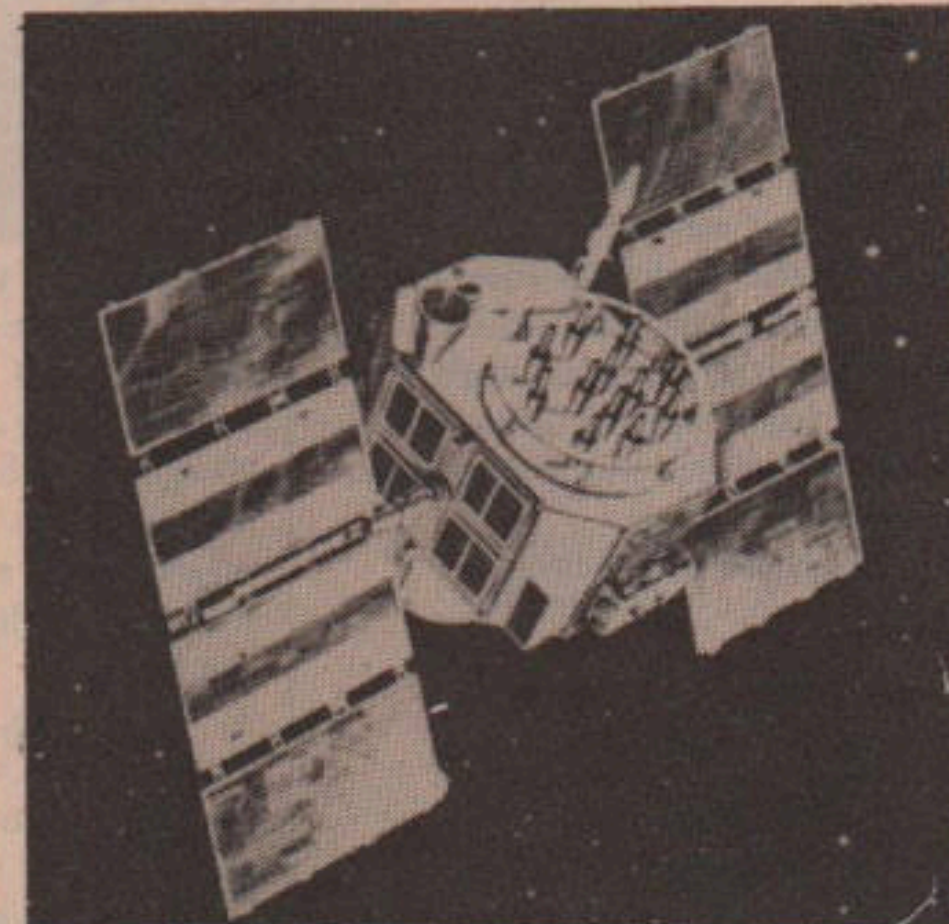
Geoffrey Pardoe, *The future for space technology*, Frances Pinter 1984, pp206, hbk £14.95

AUEW TASS, *Space - the future*, Policy paper 1984, pp24, pbk free

TWO DAYS AFTER Reagan's re-election the US space shuttle *Discovery* blasted off from Florida to rescue two wayward satellites and put two more in orbit. Meanwhile, deposed Malvinas War foreign secretary and Tory wet Francis Pym launched a lengthy attack on Reagan's plans for Ballistic Missile Defence. This is 'Star Wars' at its most fantastic — satellites able to kill Soviet nuclear missiles with the aid of laser beams. These books and the AUEW policy statement help put the space shuttle programme and Mr Pym in perspective.

In a useful introduction to the subject, Jasani & Lee make it clear that space has long been the preserve of the US military. Of the 3000 satellites launched worldwide between 1958 and 1983 more than 2000 have been of direct military use. Although the Soviet Union puts more satellites into space than the USA, its hardware generally lasts only a few days, while that shot up from the USA stays in working orbit for years. Except for the peak years of the *Apollo* programme, the \$5 billion a year space budget of the US Department of Defence has always been comparable to NASA's. Since 1981 even official figures concede that Department of Defence space spending has overtaken the civilian variety. Today, for example, 80 per cent of US military communications go by satellite.

In space as elsewhere the Soviet 'threat' is marginal. During the *Sputnik* era, when both Washington and Moscow used prestigious civilian satellites to test military rocket launchers, the Soviets were ahead. They chalked up successes while every one of the first 19 US launches failed. Now, however, the tables are turned. In photo-reconnaissance, the task for which an unparalleled 40 per cent of the world's military satellites have been launched, the USSR requires separate vehicles for the making of general and detailed films. Moreover, its films can only be recovered physically days after they are exposed. By contrast, a single US spy satellite can take both types of pictures — and it can transmit them electronically to base in real time.



Heavenly bodies

Reagan's hopes of being able to knock out Soviet Intercontinental Ballistic Missiles will not be realised for some years. Yet perhaps 25 of the 70 space shuttle trips planned will involve tests of Star Wars lasers. A chapter by Jasani in the indispensable Stockholm annual shows that Reagan's budget for research and development in Ballistic Missile Defence now runs at \$1 billion a year.

Ballistic Missile Defence is a logical development of anti-satellite warfare — the use of lasers, X-rays, nuclear/conventional missiles or plain old ballbearings to knock out enemy spacecraft. Once more the USA leads the field; its jets can smash satellites while Soviet jets cannot. In both Ballistic Missile Defence and anti-satellite warfare, however, costs are high, technical problems formidable and American superiority unchallenged. So why did Reagan take time out to astonish the world about them in his famous speech of March 1983?

The answer is that space posturing against the USSR aids Reagan in his relations with Bonn and Tokyo. Above the stratosphere, America still calls

the tune in a way that it no longer can back on the *terra firma* of profitability and world trade. By playing up the military domain of space, Reagan makes up for the underlying weakness of America's economy as against those of West Germany and Japan.

What unites all four books and the AUEW TASS paper is their resentment at America's prowess in space. Like Pym, Jasani and the left-leaning Stockholm crew condemn Star Wars as a violation of several East-West peace treaties — principally the Anti-Ballistic Missile accord of 1972, agreed when detente was still in fashion. The International Institute of Strategic Studies book, always an excellent guide to British military thinking, makes the same complaint. Geoffrey Pardoe, previously project manager on Britain's Blue Streak missile programme, speaks up for the European Space Agency and its successful *Ariane* satellite project. The high technology engineering union Tass wants a £600m 'coordinated approach to Britain's space role'; a British Nasa, in fact.

Reagan's Nasa is bad news. But a European or British Nasa is something different. Jasani & Co want European satellites launched to 'monitor' adherence to arms agreements by the USA and USSR. Slowly but surely, a European Darth Vader is coming out of the shadows.

James Wood

Carnival of the oppressed

B Traven, *The rebellion of the hanged*, Allison and Busby 1984, pp248, pbk £2.95

B TRAVEN was the pseudonym of German revolutionary Ret Marut who fled Germany after the failure of the 1918 uprising and settled in Mexico. *The rebellion of the hanged* is the fifth title in his series of six 'jungle novels' set against the background of the Mexican revolution which began in 1910. It is a remarkable book.

The story is simple but evocatively told. It unfolds with the rhythm of the rebellion of workers indentured to fell trees in the swampy mahogany forests. Candido, an Indian peasant, indentures himself to the Montellano brothers to raise the \$200 to pay the Spanish doctor to operate on his wife. His wife dies, but Candido is thrown into prison and marched with other peasants to the lumber camps.

Through Candido we are introduced to the brutality of life in the camps. The Montellano brothers are facing a crisis. They have to repay their outstanding debts or face foreclosure by the bank. They have already closed one camp made unworkable by an early start to the rainy season. They are determined to make workers at the other sites produce 400 tonnes of lumber rather than the usual 200. The Montellanos are made more nervous by reports of peasant uprisings in the rest of the country.

To keep control of their workforce the Montellanos and their foremen have developed a system of brutal torture. Workers are suspended by their four limbs from the branches of the tall mahogany trees. Their bodies, covered in lard, are attacked by ants, ticks and other parasites. In the morning when they are cut down, those who have not died in the night are forced to work.

No desertions are possible from the 'regiment of the hanged'. Candido attempts to escape from the camp after one of his sons dies during a river crossing. He is easily recaptured and the brutal Don Severo Montellano cuts off his ears and those of his remaining son. Slowly, however, the nucleus of an opposition grows within the workforce. The peasants watch and wait, secreting the odd weapon that they can steal.

The blinding of Don Acacio Montellano by a terrified Indian worker and his suicide, shatters the confidence of his brothers. They ease up on the workforce hoping to restore calm. The rebels seize the moment to strike.

What follows is a brilliant account of a revolutionary upsurge. This really is the carnival of the oppressed. Traven celebrates the destruction of the former rulers of the camp, but he does not stop there. Within hours of the overthrow of the Montellanos the workers defend their rebellion by spreading it beyond the camp. They prepare to march out of the jungle and into the wider Mexican revolution.

Within the constraints of a novel Traven addresses many questions of the revolution. While on their own the Indians are powerless; the individuality they felt through their identification with their land before they came to the camps is nothing compared to the individuality they can express as part of the rebellion. Traven motivates the need for a conscious leadership if the force of the upsurge is not to be dissipated after the first successes against the regime.

Most important is Traven's passionate description of the assertion of class power, defying bourgeois literary conventions. The violence of the rebels is celebrated — whether it is revenge for the tortures inflicted by the bosses on the workers in the past or as a brutal necessity to wipe out the old regime for good.

Traven is unique as a novelist who not only takes sides, but stays on the same side all the way. Read *The rebellion of the hanged* now.

John Johnson

Double standards

S Bornstein & A Richardson, *Two steps back*, Socialist Platform Ltd 1984, pp143, pbk £3.50

THIS USEFUL BOOK on the history of the Communist Party of Great Britain in the years from 1935 to 1945 exposes the party's conservative influence on the working class. Written by two veterans of the British Trotskyist movement, *Two steps back* shows a good feel for the period and for the subject matter. The authors' main thesis — that the Communist Party was generally more right-wing than the Labour Party — will not be news to readers of the next step. Nevertheless, the documentation which backs up this argument is convincing and compelling.

Two steps back can also be recommended for a negative reason. The lessons which the authors draw from the experience of the thirties are the standard ones of British Trotskyism — they are merely presented more coherently than usual. For Bornstein and Richardson, the decline of the Communist Party and the future of other left-wing parties demonstrates that life outside the Labour Party is unrealistic. Thus they present any attempt to build an independent revolutionary party as a form of 'left sectarianism'. To sustain this argument, Bornstein and Richardson equate the labour movement with the Labour Party.

'The British Labour Party and the trade unions have to be approached as a unitary phenomenon, or as allied concepts from inside'.

Two steps back argues that entrism is a practical principle because independent organisations 'do not possess the potential to transform themselves into mass organisations'. These pessimistic conclusions are common currency on the British left. The left holds up disastrous past attempts at party building as a justification for entry work inside the Labour Party today. Our analysis is different. The failure of past attempts to build a revolutionary party did not result from the left's organisational independence, but from its political dependence on Labourism. In other words, so-called revolutionary parties of the past were only organisationally, but not politically independent of the tradition of Labourism. Today, the Socialist Workers' Party typifies this trend. The SWP's organisational independence goes hand in hand with its ideological incoherence. The SWP's recent turn to the 'united front' is an attempt to legitimise its adaptation to Labourism in its day to day work.

Bornstein and Richardson operate double standards in their treatment of political forces inside the British labour movement. They quite rightly denounce the Communist Party for its betrayal of the working class. But they are much more reserved in their critique of the Labour Party. It is true that the Communist Party advanced the most reactionary policies, calling for the continuation of a coalition government with the Tories before and during the 1945 General Election. But the Labour Party was no better — in fact it was worse. Bornstein and Richardson either suffer from Stalinophobia or are completely assimilated into the Labour Party or both. Throughout the book they quote leading Labour politicians favourably against the Communist Party.

The authors' contrasting treatment of the Communist Party and the Labour Party in their approaches to democracy in the workers' movement is instructive. They point out how the Communist Party tried to intimidate British Trotskyists into silence, using physical and other means. They contrast this intimidation with the toleration of the Labour Party:

'Practices of this type have been traditionally rejected inside the trade unions and the Labour Party. Though most Labour supporters were just as sincere in their enthusiasm for the war as were the Communists, their good-humoured toleration of even the most outlandish views protected many a dissident and gained a hearing for him that he would not otherwise enjoy'.

The 'good-humoured toleration' of the Labour Party will come as a surprise to readers of the next step. Obviously, neither author has ever put forward a political challenge to the Labour Party. RCP supporters who have done so have found the response less than tolerant. Even mild-mannered left wingers such as Sheffield council leader David Blunkett has resorted to the basest lies, accusing the RCP of being directed and funded by the CIA. And if Bornstein and Richardson are so enamoured of Blunkett that they cannot face the truth, they would do well to remember Harold Wilson's witch-hunt of striking seamen in 1966 — a prototype response when Labour feels under threat.

The double standards which characterise Bornstein's and Richardson's approach are not the result of personal failings. They reflect a resignation to what is realistic — an inevitable outcome of entrism. Those who remain outside Labour's orbit weigh down on the conscience of yesterday's revolutionaries. Read *Two steps back*. It presents a formidable case against entrism.

Helen Swift

Write to . . .

the next step

BM RCP London WC1N 3XX

Tory squealers

Tory students are always the first to whinge on about 'defending British democracy' against Irish freedom fighters. But when it comes to democratic debate around the issue of Ireland, they prefer the slippery, silent approach.

The Federation of Conservative Students recently wrote to the board of governors at Portsmouth polytechnic to complain about the affiliation of our Revolutionary Communist Society to the students' union. The Tories' letter expressed their 'disgust at the offensive nature of this party' and 'its blatant support of IRA terrorism'. The FCS argued that we should not be allowed union facilities to address 'a large audience for IRA propaganda', nor be given 'a budget for the promotion of terrorism'.

While the Tories sneak off to the polytechnic establishment about student union affairs, the Revolutionary Communist Society has been campaigning openly to win students' support for Irish freedom. When the board of governors met to discuss the Tory letter, we protested outside in defence of our democratic rights and against the Tories' idea of democracy. The governors hastily decided it was best to ignore the Tories' sour grapes.

We can agree with one point in the Tory letter:

'The Revolutionary Communist Party represents a serious departure from the other "armchair revolutionaries" that have dominated the students' union in recent years.'

We intend to live up to our reputation and continue offending the Tories by raising opposition to the Irish War in the polytechnic and in Portsmouth.

Carol Taggart
Portsmouth RCP

Images of women

I liked your article 'What we give and what we get' on women and the unions (*the next step*, October) in which you expose the TUC's opportunistic, tokenistic and diversionary policies regarding women. It is particularly important to stress two points. Firstly, that capitalism, and not men, is the foundation of women's oppression and that the end of that oppression is possible only by destroying capitalism and not by modifying men's behaviour. Secondly, that the issue of equal pay is a diversion from the real fight for equal work for women and a living wage for all workers.

However, one part of the article is, I felt, open to misunderstanding. While capitalist economics is the cause of women's second class role in the labour market, media images do more than simply reflect that position. There is a dialectical relationship between images (and languages), and reality. Thus the way in which women are depicted at present also educates people to understand the oppression of women as part of the natural order of things. Children are taught that only men

can be construction workers or fire-fighters; girls are brought up to expect a passive role in drudgery, low-paid, second class jobs, and sexual exploitation.

Images which contradict reality rather than reinforce the oppression of women are important because they lead people to question reality and make demands. Surely propaganda of this kind is essential within the context of the overall struggle for economic change? Does the RCP really accept a naive economic determinist view of society?

Cathy Dyer
Hackney

the next step replies:

While it is right to argue that media images perpetuate the idea of women as housewives and child-rearers, it does not follow that a campaign against advertising stereotypes — even if it were successful — would have a significant impact on workers' consciousness. The strength of media portraits of women derives from the fact that they correspond to everyday experience. Women are seen as inferior because they are seen to occupy a subordinate position in society.

Rather than waste time trying to change women's inferior status on the TV screens, we should devote our energies to challenging women's oppression at home and at work. Workers will only begin to fight for women's rights when they are convinced that it is in their interests to do so. Images cannot do this because they are devoid of political content. Men might object to sexist advertising but it doesn't inspire them to go out and start fighting for women's rights. Campaigning for all-day nursery facilities or free abortion on demand is a much more fruitful way to advance the cause of women's liberation.

The TUC's campaign against sexist stereotyping in the media is just as much of a diversion from the real fight for women's rights as its token positive discrimination policies.

A striking miner

We now face the most crucial two weeks of our nine-month long strike. They have been long, hard and barbaric months where, for the first time, we've seen the real violent anti-working class face of the British state.

They've spared us nothing in their attack on us and our strike. We in this North Yorkshire area have had two local men killed on picket lines, hundreds hospitalised after police violence and nearly two thousand men and women arrested and dragged before kangaroo courts.

A typical example of what kind of treatment we've had in the state conspiracy to criminalise striking miners is shown in the case of one of our local pit's pickets — Alan Edwards.

Alan was arrested at Creswell colliery in Notts while picketing on Thursday 26 July 1984. He was remanded in custody by Chesterfield Magistrates Court the day after his arrest along with four other Yorks miners. All five of them were taken to Leicester top security prison where they were eventually held for 11 days. For

what? For being striking miners fighting for jobs in Thatcher's police state of 1984. These men's only crime was going about age-old standard trade union practices established by workers' struggle in this country over 150 years.

We've had thousands of police descend provocatively in riot gear with truncheons always at the ready on our pit gates in order to get one or two scabs into work. Police horses charge into groups of pickets indiscriminately.

Broken legs are not unusual. We've had police invading our communities like armies of occupation treating us and our families like dogs. We've experienced the butchery of the state and cannot ever forget it — nor should we or will we ever forget it. All this is still going on and more fiercely now the pressure is really on with this back-to-work campaign of the management.

We've learned many lessons — especially political ones about our 'traditional' leaders and where they stand when the state unleashes its savage violence on us for fighting for the basic right to work. Neil Kinnock says of the present situation that there are 'fantastic pressures on the miners' and that his position is that he'll wait to see whether or not the strike crumbles. In his position of downright contempt for us in our fight, which will go on for as long as necessary among the majority of us, he speaks for the whole traitorous Labour and trade union bureaucracy. What an embarrassment we must be to them all. We've learned a lot and come a long way since the first days of our strike in March this year and no matter how our strike develops in this immediate period we can never unlearn our painful political lessons about the traitors of the working class. Things can never go back to the way they were. And no matter what kind of pressure the Tory government, the state, the NCB and all their agencies put on us, we are absolutely correct to fight on. There can be no question of surrender or negotiated settlements which the TUC or Labour Party cowards call for. For us jobs and pits are not negotiable. Jobs are our basic right and NUM leaders should note basic rights cannot be defended by 'economic' arguments. We've hung on to that 'old song' long enough and it's got us nowhere. As far as we are concerned the *Plan for Coal* is dead. In burying it and fighting on, we must now fight to forge out a *Plan for Workers*.

Keith P Hammond
Prince of Wales colliery
Yorkshire

Unholy alliance

At the annual general meeting of Huddersfield polytechnic students' union last month, Tories took advantage of the increasing move to the right of most students in universities and polytechnics up and down the country. They wiped the floor with the Labour students in a debate over a National Organisation of Labour Students' (NOLS) motion in support of the miners.

The debate started when a Revolutionary Communist Students' (RCS) motion was taken as an amendment to the Labour proposal. The Labour supporters had argued that pit closures would

be 'economically damaging to our society'.

We knew that the Tories would win this argument hands down, because trying to argue what is economically viable in the context of a capitalist recession would be playing into their hands. Our amendment stated that 'every miner has the right to a job irrespective of the economic state of the coal industry'.

Furthermore, the Labour students condemned 'unnecessary violence and provocation on the picket lines', implying that both sides used unnecessary violence. Again they were trying to find some non-existent middle ground in the class war. The Tories use state violence to defend their class interests. We know the miners have to use violence to defend working class interests, and so we proposed that the NOLS motion be further amended to read 'the miners have the right to use every means necessary to defend their jobs'.

The third part of the RCS amendment was to demand that the polytechnic should open up all its facilities for the use of the miners and their families. We argued it was the least students could do. This was ruled out as being unconstitutional.

Our whole amendment was spoken against by one of the Labour students who was a Militant supporter. When our motion was defeated, he jubilantly claimed that he had seen to the defeat of the RCS motion. When the Tories heavily defeated the Labour students' motion, it became obvious that it was the Tories who had given him overwhelming support in speaking against us. So much for Militant's Marxism.

It was sickening to listen to the Tories take apart so easily the reformist arguments of the Labour supporters. Not having class arguments, they were finally forced to rely on moral appeals to win support for their motion. The Labour students gather their support from the middle ground. They should realise that you can't have it both ways in the class struggle. We have to be uncompromising in the fight for our class interests as the Tories are for theirs. Being uncompromising in the fight for our class interests means that we are a thorn in the flesh of the Tories, in their otherwise dominant position. One day we will be the axe that chops them down. Join the RCS and it will be a day we will see sooner than later.

Graham Marshall
Huddersfield polytechnic

Race debate

In November, *London Housing* published a letter signed by a number of GLC-funded community organisations in East London which criticised Workers Against Racism's approach to fighting racism. Below, we reprint the letter and our reply.

As community organisations in East London, we would like to reply to Jake Jethwa's article (*London Housing*, September 1984) on fighting harassment on housing estates.

Jake outlines the tactics of ELWAR (a front for the Revolutionary Communist Party) against harassment — door to door surveys, identifying victims and attackers, and galvanising tenants into doing something.

This approach has been useful where the family suffering attacks wants to stay and fight, as they have done when offered good housing in areas of their choice (such as Glamis estate and Beaumont Square).

Our community organisations have done and continue to do all of these things on several estates in the borough. In addition, we have campaigned for a more effective response from the housing authorities and the police, and with the work of the Race and Housing Team and the impending eviction of a racist attacker we are now beginning to get these.

The serious implication of Jake's article is that when families don't want to stay and fight the racists, even if offered support, they should be forced to do so because otherwise this will be 'giving into the racists'. Jake's example of the Hadrian estate cannot be compared with the Lincoln and Teviot estates as it is in the western end of the borough, within walking distance of the centre of the Bengali community in Spitalfields and Shoreditch. It is also not actually an estate, but one block on the St Peter's estate.

This estate is made up of a mixture of housing to which the Bengali families could be transferred. This and its closeness to Brick Lane makes it more worthwhile to stay, compared to the isolated estates in the east of the borough like Lincoln, Teviot, Coventry Cross or Aberfeldy.

Jake does not take into account the background of the families who are asking to be transferred because of racist harassment. First, they are local families who have been kept in bed and breakfast hotels outside the borough, their lives disrupted for months and sometimes years. They are therefore the most vulnerable of those waiting to be rehoused.

Second, they were not given the option, but rather forced on to these estates under threat of eviction from the hotels. We argued for, and have forced the authorities to adopt, policies in line with the following arguments:

1. There must be equal access for Bengali families to housing in areas where their community is well established (this has not happened in the past);
2. The hostile estates in the west of the borough can be opened up only with the active consent of the Bengali families concerned (it will be the more confident and well established who will want to move, not those straight out of the hotels);
3. With the active consent of families who will have been given the choice of moving to these estates, with the right to leave if they cannot cope, and with the combined support of the community organisations and the authorities, the racists can be isolated and defeated. It is not for the RCP, the GLC (in the shape of senior officer Alan Dorney), Tower Hamlets councillors or officers (like Bernard Kilroy) or any other organisation to judge whether or not a family can cope with racist attacks. We are not being attacked day in, day out; they are.

If the family wants to move, this should be respected — it may be a victory for the racists if they are transferred but it is also a victory for the racists when someone gets beaten up.

Federation of Bangladeshi Youth Organisations; Tower Hamlets Homeless Families Committee; Community Alliance for Police Accountability; Spitalfields Housing And Planning Rights Service.

ELWAR replies

Our critics' assertion that it is not up to us to judge whether or not a family can cope with racist attacks is dishonest. This is precisely what the GLC and its Race and Housing Action Team are doing — with the full support of the FBYO and CAPA.

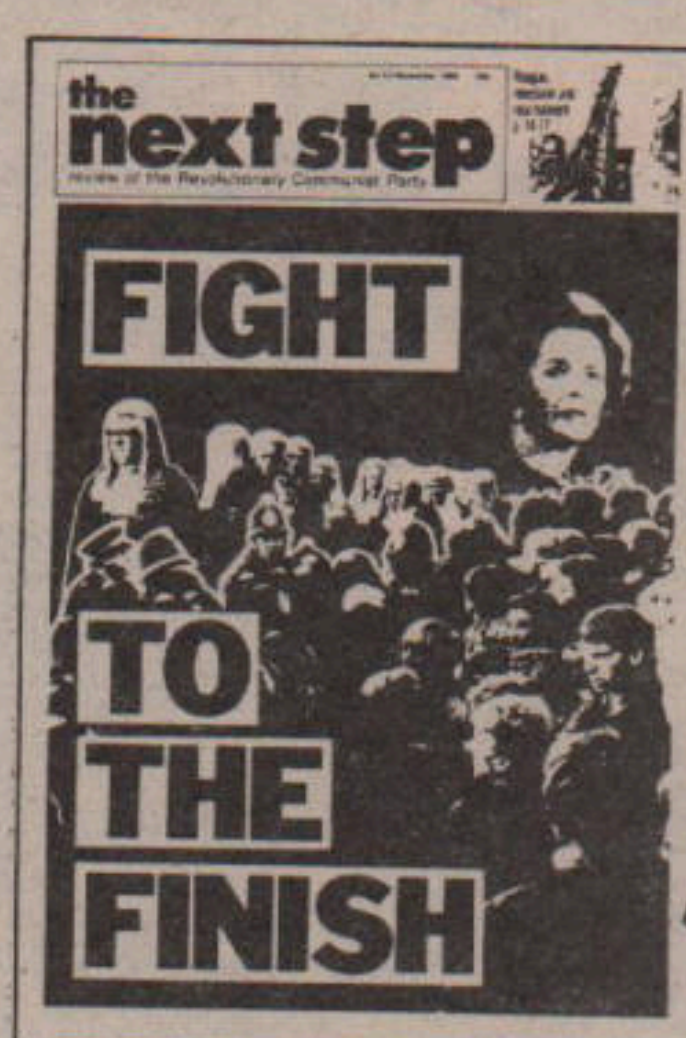
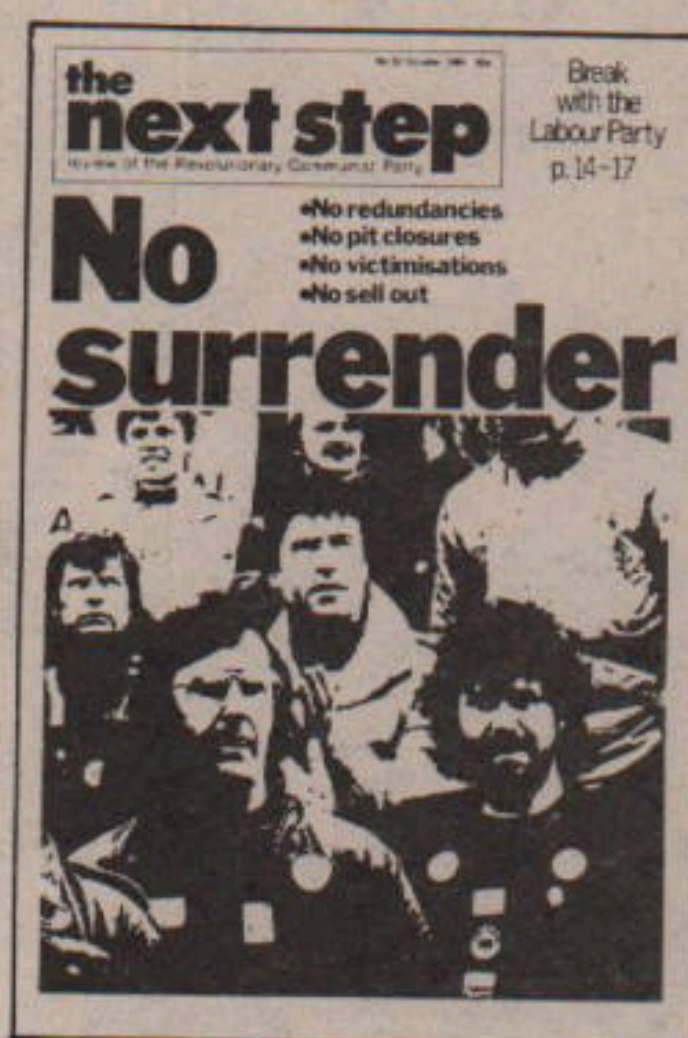
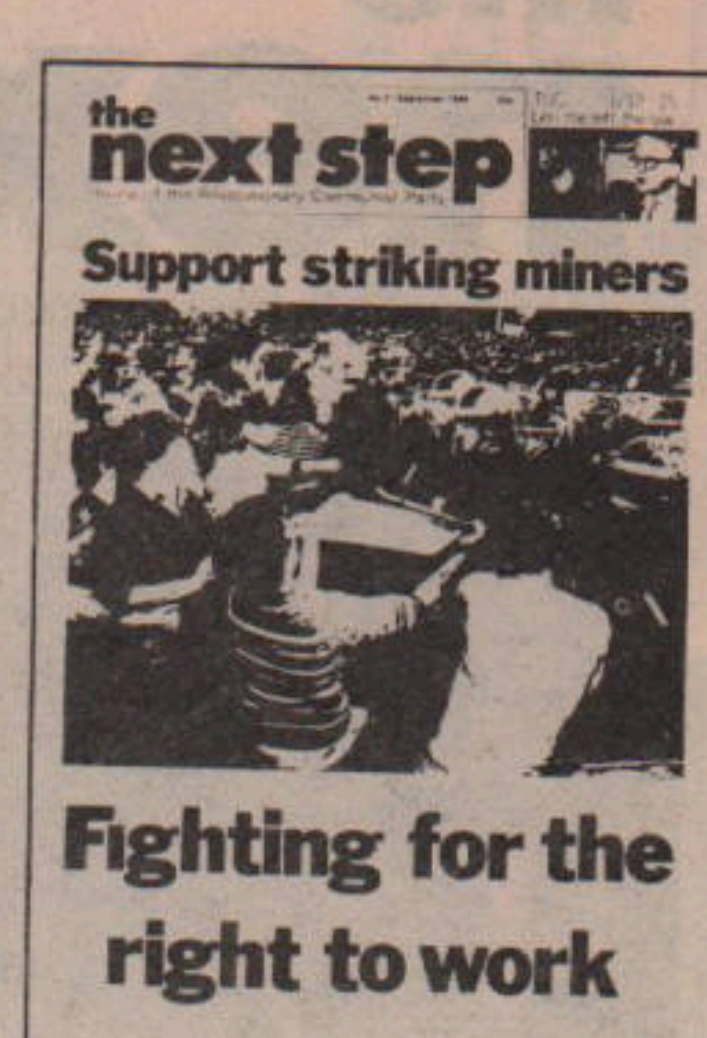
To give just one example. Lincoln estate has been the scene of considerable racist violence. Twenty five families have asked to be transferred. This is not surprising given their complete isolation and lack of support. The onus is on the families to defend themselves as best they can or move out. Their fate rests on how much racial violence they can endure. Rather than organise defence of the families under attack and challenge the racists, the GLC and RHAT have capitulated and gone for the transfer option.

If RHAT considers that the level of intimidation is high enough it will prioritise a family for transfer. If it doesn't, as in the case of several families on Swaton Road and Knapp Road, RHAT tells the families to suffer in silence until the GLC's policies have a positive effect. They will be waiting forever.

CAPA et al claim that they are getting a more positive response from the GLC. But where are the results? Racist attacks are on the increase, the racists are more confident and Bengalis are still ghettoised on the worst estates in Spitalfields and in the worst blocks on estates in the west of the borough. The GLC's policies are cynical and dangerous. In line with its fair allocations policy, the council has offered small numbers of Bengalis decent housing on some of the better estates. They have been used as guinea pigs to test the response of the racists. Things have gone so far that a backlash is almost guaranteed. Even the GLC's token gestures don't work in practice because it is not prepared to stand up to the racists and defend Asian families under attack.

The most cynical aspect of the GLC's approach is its attempt to blame white workers for its own failings. The left-wing Labour council promises Bengali workers a fairer share of council accommodation and tells white workers that they will have to make do with less. Because it accepts that cuts in housing expenditure are necessary, Labour cannot provide enough housing to go round. Workers are ranged against each other in the scramble to get a share of the limited housing stock available. The GLC's refusal to provide the housing we need means that its fair allocations pledge is a sham and its policies can only exacerbate racial divisions in the working class.

The approach of CAPA et al seeks to evade the hard task of confronting the real problems. We need to challenge the racists now. Transfers are not freely available for every Bengali family under attack. Nor do they offer any long-term solutions. Racism will not disappear simply because we ignore it. The only realistic strategy for combatting racism in East London is to reject Labour's capitalist accounting and fight for decent housing for all workers whatever the cost to the capitalists. Why should workers make sacrifices to get their system out of the mess that it's in? Blaming white workers for Labour's failings and putting the onus on Bengali families to defend themselves is a cop-out.



Take the next step to a weekly!

monthly review of the Revolutionary Communist Party

If you want to see a front page like this every week, contribute to our Christmas appeal and rush donations to BM RCP, London WC1N 3XX. Make cheques payable to RCP Association

Become an RCP supporter

Revolutionary Communist Party

Want to join?
RCP supporters' groups meet in

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

Every Tuesday
Every Wednesday
Every Monday
Every Thursday
Phone 01-729 0414
Every Thursday
Every Tuesday
Every Friday
Every Monday
Every Tuesday
Every Wednesday
Every Thursday
Every Tuesday
Every Friday
Every Monday
Every Wednesday
Every Wednesday
Every Wednesday
Every Thursday
Every Thursday
Every Thursday
Every Wednesday
Every Thursday
Every Thursday

Get in touch!

New supporters' groups are being formed in a number of other areas. Phone Judy Harrison on 01-729 0414 for details or see sellers of the next step.

Revolutionary
Communist
Students

The RCP is active in colleges and universities everywhere, organising meetings, debates, miners' solidarity work, anti-imperialist activities and social events. In December we are going in force to the NUS conference. If you're interested in setting up an RCS society in your college or joining us at the NUS conference, get in touch. Phone 01-729 0414.



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

Subscribe to the next step

Please send me *the next step* every month.
I enclose a cheque/postal order for £.....
(Make cheques/postal orders payable to Junius Publications Ltd)
For subscription rates see page 2

Name

Address

Tel

Union/Org

Send to Junius Publications, BCM JPLTD, London WC1N 3XX

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
01-729 0414

Kate Marshall will
answer all enquiries
by return of post



the next step

review of the Revolutionary Communist Party



Target Nicaragua

Riding high after his landslide victory at the polls, Ronald Reagan has kicked off his second term with a renewed threat to invade Nicaragua.

The USA had a clear run in Central America up to the late seventies, enforcing its interests through repressive right-wing regimes. But popular opposition to its puppet regimes has forced the USA to reconsider its strategy.

In 1979, the bloody civil war between the right-wing government in El Salvador and the forces of the Farabundo Marti National Liberation Front reached new heights. That same year Maurice Bishop's New Jewel Movement overthrew corrupt pro-US Prime Minister Eric Gairy in a swift popular coup in Grenada. And in Nicaragua, the Sandinistas ousted the 30 year old regime of the US-backed dictator Anastasio Somoza.

Target Grenada

Confronted with the anti-imperialist resistance of the Central American peoples, US policies in Central America shifted towards direct US intervention. To justify this policy, Reagan swiftly invented a triangle of Soviet-backed subversion; Cuba - Grenada-Nicaragua. In 1983 Reagan struck at the most vulnerable anti-imperialist regime - Grenada. Grenada was chosen partly as an example to the rest and partly because it was the only country the mighty USA could bring to heel without immense cost to its own declining powers.

Nicaragua presented a more difficult invasion prospect, so the USA has kept up the pressure on the regime by a combination of internal destabilisation and external threats.

A 15 000-strong army of contras, counter-revolutionary guerrillas armed and trained by America, has wreaked havoc on the Nicaraguan people. The contras' campaign of sabotage, torture, rape and plunder has cost 8000 lives and damage worth \$500m to Nicaragua's fragile economy.

The USA has further sought to isolate the Sandinistas by stepping up its intervention against Nicaragua's neighbours. Honduras, which recently hosted some 5000 US troops for military exercises, has been turned into a military stockade for US imperialism. US military assistance to El Salvador has shot up over the past four years. In Guatemala the death squads of the US-backed military regime have already claimed 10 000 lives and they are still counting.

The Contadora trap

The Contadora countries (Mexico, Venezuela, Panama and Colombia) have presented themselves as agents for a negotiated resolution of conflicts in Central America. Their proposals have been supported by many European countries, the Socialist International and the Labour Party in Britain. However the Contadora proposals aim only to achieve by persuasion and negotiation what the USA has tried to achieve by threats of invasion. Their latest set of proposals include a freeze on the acquisition of new weapons; international regulation of the size and equipment of military forces in the region; and the right to conduct international military manoeuvres on Central American soil.

The object of these proposals is to

persuade Nicaragua to accept restrictions on its independence and sovereignty. The aim is to open the way for more US and European interference in Central American affairs.

Concessions

Despite economic and military sabotage on the domestic and international front, the Nicaraguan people have had a taste of freedom and democracy denied to them for so long under the old Somoza regime. When it came to power five years ago the Sandinista regime set about rebuilding the economy. Its health, education and housing programmes have made a significant impact on the level of social welfare in the country.

However, further progress has been severely limited by the drain of resources into troop mobilisation and arms expenditure. This year's coffee harvest, which brings in some 30 per cent of Nicaragua's foreign exchange, is in jeopardy because coffee pickers are being drafted into military training in Managua. Although the contras pose no direct military threat, their campaign of terror is conducted in the vital forestry, fishing, grain, and cattle producing areas.

The Sandinistas' response to the US economic and military blockade has been to try to appease their Western critics. They have also sought to pacify US hostility by making concessions to its demands. Thus in 1982, the Contadora countries succeeded in persuading the Sandinistas to stop providing military aid to their allies - the El Salvadorean guerrillas. Last month's general

elections in Nicaragua were held to indulge the imperialist propaganda war against the regime. The 'national dialogue' which the Sandinista regime is planning to conduct with all the right-wing parties is another attempt to appease US criticisms.

The Sandinistas are caught between having to win acquiescence to their regime internationally and maintaining popular support for their rule at home. But every concession made to imperialist pressure means more sacrifices for the Nicaraguan masses and another step back towards a Somoza-style tyranny.

Real wages have already fallen by some 40 per cent this year and goods are rapidly disappearing from the shops. The people of Nicaragua cannot afford to make any concessions to Western pressure whether it comes from the warmongering Reagan or the soft-talking European imperialists in social democratic clothing.

Solidarity

It is up to the Western working classes to extend solidarity to the Nicaraguan people by opposing the schemes of both US and European imperialism. Given Nicaragua's grave economic condition, the complicity of Britain and the acquiescence of the Socialist International in blocking EEC and other international loans is nearly as damaging as full-scale military invasion. The British labour movement must reject the negotiated solutions backed by the Labour Party as vigorously as a US military invasion of Nicaragua.