

THE JOURNAL OF THE
MARXIST INDUSTRIAL GROUP

ISSN 0140-7856

THE MARXIST

BRITAIN and EUROPE

COMMENT

A FIGHTING EXIT

Number Thirty-Five
Price 15p

BRITAIN AND EUROPE

In the course of their contention for world supremacy each superpower is constantly seeking to improve its strategic position relative to the other. This includes attempts to draw the second, as well as the third world countries into their respective orbits, so supplementing their economic and military potential.

If this is allowed to take place the world will eventually become polarised into two antagonistic power blocks and war will be inevitable.

The most important task at this stage is to prevent this polarisation taking place, and the most feasible means of mobilising people to this end is by emphasising the importance, the necessity of national independence.

In isolation it would be difficult for any one of the intermediate countries to withstand indefinitely the economic and military pressures which the superpowers are capable of exerting.

If one country found itself in the position of having to stand alone the issue could not be shirked, but the most desirable course is to seek co-operation with other states. As far as Britain is concerned, this means forming a close association with Western Europe, and that means with the E.E.C.

The central question is, how can Britain best influence its development - by staying in or withdrawing from it?

Providing that there is an ongoing struggle to influence the direction of its development so that national sovereignty is underpinned, not undermined, the best option is to remain in.

In the pre-referendum debate there was a tendency to present the E.E.C. as a fully matured organisation, or at least one whose direction of development was already predetermined. Experience shows that this is not so.

The contradiction between and within the member states, and between the national governments and the European bureaucracy, are such that the organisation can be kept in a state of flux for some considerable time by the actions of even one of the member states, if the situation warrants it. The situation we have in mind is one in which national sovereignty is being undermined.

There are two theoretically possible lines of development for the E.E.C. One is towards complete economic and political integration culminating in the creation of a European superstate, with decisions being taken on the basis of majority voting either in the Council of Ministers or a European parliament.

The other is co-operation between sovereign states aimed at assisting each member to achieve a balanced, self-reliant economy with decisions being taken by national government representatives on the basis of unanimity, so that no state or group of states could impose their will on the others.

The first of these options would inevitably result in the economically strongest state or region dominating the rest, for uneven economic power gives rise to uneven political power.

It is sometimes argued that this need not necessarily be the case as the E.E.C. is committed to giving regional assistance for the purpose of ensuring even economic development. Against this is the fact that the E.E.C. is a capitalist organisation committed to a basic reliance on market forces.

This being so, there is no reason to believe that regional aid from Brussels will be any more successful in achieving a rational geographically balanced industrial development than the system of aid to development areas pursued by successive post-war governments in Britain.

Economic Integration

This is to be achieved by the abolition of tariff barriers and the removal of restrictions on the free flow of capital between member states. By this means the industries situated in the member states will have uninhibited access to a European market of about 250 million consumers instead of national markets of perhaps 50 million or so. The theory is that this will assist them to effect economies of scale which will enable them to become more competitive with industries situated outside.

Since Britain joined the E.E.C., competition from the industries of the other member states has tended to keep the price of some manufactured goods below the level that would have probably applied if the domestic manufacturer had had a captive market. In the process the consumer has bene-

fited but the other consequences have been less welcome.

Domestic producers of such things as washing machines, fridges, and their associated components and sub-assemblies have either been pushed out of the market entirely or have had to curtail production due to a fall-off in sales, with a consequent loss of employment.

The other side of the coin is that the successful companies have grown in size. This is in accordance with the normal process of capitalist development.

If this is allowed to continue it is almost certain that the end result will be a European industrial structure that is even more geographically unbalanced than it is at present. This can already be seen in the fall in manufacturing production in the U.K. relative to its E.E.C. partners.

It is argued that, over a period, this trend will be counteracted as production costs will tend to rise in those areas where industry is concentrated, and the transnationals will then seek out new low cost areas to which industry will be moved.

Inasmuch as this will happen, the likelihood is that these new low cost areas will be outside Europe, but in any case, this method of determining the geographical distribution of production should be resisted by the working class because it is, in fact, a means of getting them to compete with each other to see who can accept the worst standards.

In short, the free flow of capital is not in the interests of the working class.

Political Integration

Centralisation of the bureaucracy, the judiciary, the armed forces and the police and security services would place greater power in the hands of the representatives of the most powerful units of European monopoly capital. The unified forces of 'law and order' could then be used in any part of Europe.

By this means the status quo could be maintained in a member state in which class contradictions had become so acute that the internal security organs were incapable of maintaining 'law and order' unaided.

The prospect of taking advantage of uneven development to establish socialism in one country at a time would recede. It would be a 'free world' version of Brezhnev's doctrine of limited sovereignty.

For these reasons we reject the concept of European economic, political, and military integration in the sense outlined above.

The question is, is it possible to prevent this development? To answer this, we need to take a look at some features of the working of the E.E.C.

It was established by the Treaty of Rome, and came into being on the 1st January 1958. What could be termed as its general aims were set out in the following declaration by the Heads of State of West Germany, Belgium, France, Italy, Holland, and Luxembourg:

"(We are) determined to lay the foundations of an ever closer union among the peoples of Europe.

Resolved to ensure the economic and

social progress of their countries by common action to eliminate the barriers which divide Europe.

Affirming as the essential objective of their efforts the constant improvement of the living and working conditions of their peoples,

Recognising that the removal of existing obstacles calls for concerted action in order to guarantee steady expansion, balanced trade and fair competition.

Anxious to strengthen the unity of their economies and to ensure their harmonious development by reducing the differences existing between the various regions and the backwardness of less favoured regions.

Desiring to contribute, by means of a common commercial policy, to the progressive abolition of restrictions on international trade.

Intending to confirm the solidarity which binds Europe and the overseas countries and desiring to ensure the development of their prosperity, in accordance with the principles of the Charter of the United Nations,

Resolved by thus pooling their resources to preserve and strengthen peace and liberty, and calling upon other peoples of Europe who share their ideal to join in their efforts;

Have decided to create a European Economic Community."

In the introduction to the book "European Community, Vision and Reality"* the authors observe:

"The process which is set within the Rome-Treaty involves a complex relationship of conflict and cooperation between member states, and between states

and central institutions. This process is more than a question of nuts and bolts as it will help to determine what will emerge: a 'Europe des patries' or 'Les Etats-Unis d'Europe'.

Even in the realm of participation the realities of political Europe have not fulfilled the dreams of the 'Europeans'. The Parties at Strasbourg, the trade unions and other pressure groups, the active lobbying in Brussels, are all attempts to take part in the decision-making process.

At every turn frustration has met many of these attempts. This partly due to the complexity of the structure and processes of the Communities, and partly because the European ideal has never captured the passionate commitment of the old nationalisms, resulting in a lack of identification with Europe."

One of the early decisions was that majority voting in the Council of Ministers would automatically come into effect on the first of January 1966. Taken at face value, this early decision could be interpreted as being an irrevocable commitment to surrender national sovereignty, a move towards a European superstate but "there's many a slip" In the event, the contradictions (the reality) proved to be stronger than the ideal.

The need for the European capitalist states to unite in order to survive in a world increasingly dominated by the superpowers does not and cannot eliminate the conflict of interests between them. The E.E.C. is not, and was never intended to eliminate competition between the industries of the member states; one of its purposes is to ensure, as far as is possible, that

this competition is 'fair', according to capitalist values, hence a superabundance of rules and regulations which are supposed to prohibit restrictive agreements between firms and the abuse of dominant positions, as well as attempts to harmonise social security benefits, length of holidays, equal pay, etc.

But, as always under capitalism, observance of the law is only for the artless; to the sophisticated they are merely a challenge. This is particularly so when there is a danger that power relationships between 'partners' are likely to be upset.

This expresses itself as nationalism, a defence of the national interest, and is the outcome of an awareness that complete unity between capitalist states can only be established on the basis that the one that is strongest rules the roost.

As we remarked earlier, to achieve political superiority a state must first achieve economic superiority, or to put it the other way round, in order to avoid being subordinate to another, each state must ensure that its economic strength is comparable with that of its partners, as well as with its enemies.

Those sections of the capitalist class who are aware of this kind of power relationship can be allies of the working class in the fight to maintain national independence.

The attitude taken by France at the time when majority voting was due to come into effect is an illustration of this. As a result of a number of grievances, France boycotted E.E.C. meetings from July 1965.

One of the French grievances was an unwillingness to accept majority voting in the Council of Ministers.

"While not asking for the cumbersome process of treaty amendment, the French nevertheless wanted the Member governments officially to commit themselves never to overrule any country when the country involved considered that its "vital interests" were at stake. To this the other five would not agree, but the following form of words was selected, recording an agreement to differ:

- 1 Where, in the case of decision which may be taken by majority vote on a proposal of the Commission, very important interests of one or more partners are at stake, the Members of the Council will endeavour, within a reasonable time, to reach solutions which can be adopted by all members of the Council while respecting their mutual interests and those of the Community, in accordance with Article 2 of the Treaty.
- 2 With regard to the foregoing paragraph, the French delegation considers that where very important interests are at stake the discussion must be continued until unanimous agreement is reached.
- 3 The six delegations note that there is a divergence of views on what should be done in the event of failure to reach complete agreement.
- 4 The six delegations nevertheless consider that this divergence does not prevent the Community's work being resumed in accordance with the normal procedure.

.... there can be no doubt that in a trial of strength the ultimate power lies not just with the Member Governments but with any single Government. Doubtless Luxembourg could not hold the Community to ransom for long, but any other Member country could, if it chose to, ignore the spirit and the letter of the Treaty."

Stephen Holt, "The Common Market, the Conflict of Theory and Practice", pp 73-76.

Up to this point, the general tenor of our remarks would probably find favour with many anti-marketeters, but at present it is our view that membership is our best option, the touchstone being whether membership will underpin or undermine the national independence of Britain and the other member countries.

National independence is an empty phrase unless there is an adequate economic base to sustain it. The ability to feed oneself is basic, but in the contemporary world one must also have an industrial base that is capable of producing the commodities commonly regarded as necessary for a civilised standard of life; the arms for self-defence, the instruments of production which provide the means of producing them.

It is fundamental that this must be achieved through a policy of self-reliance, of relying primarily on one's own efforts and resources, but this should not be confused with self-sufficiency, a concept that is impossible of realisation, except in a very few instances, and then only at the expense of greater privation than is necessary.

Exchange of some commodities, of scientific and technical knowledge and expertise,

not to mention culture and art, can be mutually beneficial and assist the participating countries to strengthen their national independence.

A few examples - We are all aware of the colossal usage of fossil fuels that is occurring at present. There are many aspects to this problem.

In terms of wastage, the basic cause is capitalism's pre-occupation with economic growth that is not primarily for the purpose of supplying human need, but simply to sustain the system. This kind of 'growth' results in the development of instruments of production which consume ever-increasing quantities of electrical energy, whilst creating huge unused reserves of human energy.

The solution to this contradiction lies in the elimination of capitalism and capitalist thinking. In the meantime, we must not lose sight of the fact that reserves of fossil fuels are limited and that new sources of energy will have to be tapped.

Nuclear fission as a source of energy is fraught with danger to life and there is a strong feeling that it is not worth the candle (!)

The development of solar, geothermal, hydroelectric, wind, wave, tidal, and other methods of energy generation all have their limitations.

The cost of other alternative sources, such as nuclear fusion, is so costly that it is beyond the capability of most countries, therefore the costs of research and development must be shared.

In the meantime, co-operation between countries and planning can play a big part in the conservation of energy. For instance, a rational geographical distribution of productive capacity could obviate the present wasteful practice of transporting goods many thousands of miles, that could be just as well produced nearer to the point of consumption.

Joint research and development on some projects where cost would otherwise be prohibitive, and the adoption of common standards when they are necessary for practical reasons can be mutually beneficial but standardisation for its own sake, or for the purpose of eliminating 'unfair competition' will only bring the whole concept of standardisation into public disrepute.

For example, to adopt common sizes for nuts and bolts is obviously sensible, but to lay down standards for ice cream, sausages and alcoholic drinks as the E.E.C. has already done, is ridiculous. Where standardisation is for technical or defence reasons it should be encouraged but where its main objective is to preserve or establish 'fair competition' it should be opposed as being unnecessary.

Again we must turn to France for an example. The journal "Safety", published by the British Safety Council National Safety Centre in its September 1979 issue, featured an article dealing with a dispute between the French and the E.E.C. Commission.

"The E.E.C. Commission has drafted a directive on the design of forklift and other industrial trucks following a move by France to change her national standards. Now the final draft of the E.E.C. directive - with over 40

pages of technical specifications - will create an 'E.E.C. truck' and make it illegal for other E.E.C. members to stop it being marketed."

The differences between the Commission and the French take the outward form of a dispute over safety standards, but the underlying reason behind the original French move was undeniably to put obstacles in the way of other countries competing in the French forklift market. This is recognised by the E.E.C. Commission when it observes that the French action "adds considerably to the barriers to trade".

As we remarked previously, when employers (and workers) feel that their interests are threatened, rules will be bent.

Many workers in manufacturing industry will probably be able to recall examples of this from their own experience. We have in mind instances where work that has been placed in U.K. factories by Continental manufacturers (probably for political reasons) has been rejected, when completed to specification, on very dubious grounds.

These actions by the management of Continental firms with the tacit, if not active, support of the labour force are contrary to the spirit of the E.E.C. regarding fair trade, but who can blame them for looking after their own jobs?

From a slightly different angle, there is the recent issue of the French refusal to allow the importation of sheep from Britain. Should we try to arouse indignation at the French disregard for 'the rules' or should we direct attention to the fact that unrestrained exports to France, where higher prices can be obtained, will inevitably

lead to higher prices in the shops here.

As the recession deepens, this protectionist tendency is bound to increase and political attitudes towards it will have to be more clearly defined. The Federalists, the Integrationists, are already clear on their position. They will uphold the E.E.C. Commission in whatever action it considers to be necessary to defeat every expression of what may be termed economic nationalism, on the grounds that it is out of date and reactionary.

In practice, this means that they will support increased intervention by the bureaucracy into every aspect of economic life but being democrats, they are also aware of the need to control the Frankenstein monster that they are creating and the obvious way (to them) is to make it answerable to a supra-national elected body.

This means upgrading the European Assembly from being a largely advisory body to one which can pass legislation which over-rides any made by national parliaments.

Of course, even with vastly increased legislative powers, the European Assembly will not control the European decision-making apparatus any more effectively than the parliament in Westminster controls the decision-making in Britain.

It only serves to create political confusion when some comrades throw Marxism out of the window and suggest that participation in the Euro-Assembly will make the E.E.C. more responsive to the needs of the people.

It is equally confusing when other comrades oppose participation on the grounds that the Euro-Assembly has no powers, the inference

being that if it had power they would support participation in it, thus implying that they are in favour of European economic and political integration.

For reasons given earlier, we are opposed to the creation of a European superstate and it is our opinion that support for the Euro-Assembly, particularly if it is accompanied with demands for greater legislative powers, will give a fillip to the Federalists and undermine the struggle for national sovereignty and independence.

Those of us on the left of the working class movement who recognise the need for European unity must pay attention to the widespread discontent with the financial consequences of membership of the E.E.C.

Of course it is necessary to explain that the root cause of rising unemployment and, for a growing section of the working population a deterioration in living standards, is the capitalist system itself. But the financial burden imposed on the British people by current E.E.C. financial practices is too serious to be ignored.

If there was no alternative to the high level of E.E.C. expenditure, or to the way that it is financed, then we would have to direct our attention to convincing the people that that was unavoidable and necessary for the purpose of protecting their long term interests.

As this is not the case, we should be at the forefront in demanding reductions in E.E.C. expenditure by reforming the Common Agricultural Policy and cutting bureaucracy, and finding a more equitable way of financing justifiable expenditure. Unless this is done, the friends of social-imperialism

will gain the ascendancy and use it to weaken European unity.

We should be demanding that commodities and capital should only be exported after home needs and price levels have been taken into full account. This would challenge the current 'wisdom' that unity can only be brought about by means of economic integration and through the medium of the market-free trade.

We should also be advancing the idea of consciously regulated trade for the express purpose of assisting each member state to build a self-reliant economy so that, taken together, Europe can become self-sufficient in as many respects as possible, particularly in food.

Because we believe that there is a need for European unity does not mean that the struggle to replace the anarchy of the market with a planned economy should cease. British membership of the E.E.C. is, at present, the only viable option, but it is only valid in the context of an on-going struggle to influence its direction of development.

It would be unrealistic for the tiny N.L. 'movement' in Britain to spend a lot of time arguing about a blueprint for European unity, but if the general orientation can be agreed upon, the consequential contradictions can be worked out as they arise.

We submit the following as a tentative general line:

1. Europe should be a free association of independent states, with all 'European' decisions being taken by the Council of Ministers on the basis of unanimity, so

COMMENT

The economic situation is worsening by the day as factories close down or work at reduced output levels.

As output from the production industries declines, the class struggle is bound to increase as each social grouping endeavours to safeguard its own economic interests.

While it is self-evident that attempts must be made to place the burden on monopoly capital, the fact must be faced that, given the present balance of political power, it is more than likely that it will be the rest of society that will bear the costs. Maintaining standards for some can only be achieved by reducing the standards of others.

We have already seen that the change from direct to indirect taxation has benefitted the higher income groups at the expense of the rest, but the economic situation has so deteriorated that it is now politically inexpedient for the Government to make further cuts in direct taxation that were promised.

Even in the short period since the election, practice is showing that monetarist policies are no more able to resolve the contradictions within the economic system than those based on the theories of Keynes.

Although Thatcher and Howe still exude confidence (publicly, at least), there are many signs that the general body of capitalist thought is concerned with finding a new 'saviour' who will not so much show them the way to the promised land as enable them to hang on to the one they have.

The Working Class

Unfortunately the working class movement is in no better shape in this respect.

All the major political and trade union organisations that claim to speak for the working class are still hooked on Keynesian theories, or are devoid of any guiding theory whatsoever, which means that, in practice, they unthinkingly adopt Keynesian slogans ("Boost public spending").

As a result, the working class has been forced onto the defensive (which is bad enough) but, more importantly, it does not have an economic theory and strategy that will enable it to go onto the offensive. As long as this void exists, working class resistance will continue to rely on spontaneous feeling and, as a consequence, will be sporadic and piecemeal.

The formulation of such a strategy should be given first priority.

This should not be taken to imply that we should have no regard for spontaneous struggles; on the contrary, they are the raw material from which a united, conscious movement will be formed. They provide Marxists with the opportunity to show their metal by providing correct tactical leadership whilst at the same time, conducting political and ideological work aimed at developing a movement that will fight for class, as distinct from sectional, interests.

The core of resistance to the employers' offensive can only be the industrial work-

ing class, and the only body that can provide it with day-to-day tactical leadership are the shop stewards. That the employing class is aware of this, there is no doubt, as the sustained efforts to weaken the influence of shop stewards shows. Constant denigration by the media is one aspect of the attempt to isolate them from the membership and the public in general.

The puppets in official positions in the trade unions continue to try to make the shop stewards more responsible to them than to their members as part of the process of controlling the membership, as distinct from representing them.

Each management does its best to subvert shop stewards by a combination of guile, flattery and intimidation. In these circumstances, the shop stewards would have to be supermen to avoid committing errors of judgement. The fact that thousands of them cope with these things and continue to faithfully represent the people with whom they work says a great deal for the advantage of having a sound working class outlook.

Sometimes defeats are suffered, but providing that lessons are learned, the working class and its organisations emerge stronger and more united than before. The fairly recent events at British Leyland is an example of such a defeat. The purpose of the Ballot was to drive the thin end of the wedge in between the shop stewards and the membership.

The actual wording of the Ballot made the outcome fairly predictable, and Edwardes was able to claim it as a victory over the shop stewards.

Our attitude in that situation would be to publicly stand by our evaluation but declare that, as that appeared to be what the workers wanted, we would abide by their decision. It would have meant a conscious refusal to be provoked by the media and the cockiness of Edwardes, but so what? Every dog has its day.

As we see it, the 'Edwardes plan' will require stricter discipline and severe curtailment of wage increases in the future. Sooner or later, resistance to these things will build up and then will be the time to hit back. The tactics should be for the stewards to bide their time while quietly working to acquaint the membership of what is happening at each stage.

In the event, the Communist Party, desiring to assert its 'leadership', made the error of causing a booklet to be issued which advised workers how to sabotage a 'plan' which the majority of them had voted to accept (or, at least, not oppose).

However well intentioned, it laid the stewards open to the charge that they were assisting the minority to dictate to the majority.

Furthermore, the opportunism of the C.P. has caused it to propose an alternative 'plan' which would keep production at a higher level than that proposed by Edwardes, a perspective that can have no basis in reality.

Having said this, the sacking of Robinson should not have been allowed to be carried out without a fight. The shop stewards did a good job in the circumstances, but their efforts were undermined by the desertion of the A.U.E.W. Executive Committee, led by

Duffy and Boyd who were more concerned with 'getting the reds' than with working class principle.

This should be contrasted with the commendable attitude of the Transport and General Workers' Union which favoured making the dispute official.

It is important, however, to keep the whole thing in perspective by remembering, for instance, the defeat at Fords of Dagenham a number of years ago. It did not destroy the organisation there, neither will this defeat destroy the organisation at B.L.

The Duffys and Boyds come and go, but the movement is indestructable. As Mao once said, "We should despise the enemy strategically but take it into full account factually."

The first part is the adoption of an attitude of mind that is sometimes called revolutionary optimism. The second part requires that a concrete appraisal must be made of all the factors that make up the conditions under which each battle is joined.

First and foremost is the slump that is still developing right throughout the capitalist world. Secondly, there is the obvious inability of any of the people in power to do anything about it. Callaghan and Healey in their day looked optimistic for 'the upturn'. Thatcher and Howe are unable to sustain such a pretence.

Within this general framework there are certain features that are, to a certain extent, peculiar to Britain and these must be

taken into account if the long term interests of our class and the majority of the people are to be realised.

The consequences of years of subservience to Keynesian economic theory has accentuated the inherent tendency within capitalism to boost non-productive employment at the expense of that in the production industries. The numbers employed in the latter have declined substantially in the post-war period but those remaining are constantly being berated by all and sundry (some of whom would not be able to distinguish a spanner from a polo stick) for failing to generate a sufficient surplus to maintain the constantly growing non-productive sector.

This is part of the reality behind the oft-repeated statements that "we are paying ourselves more than we are earning". Taken on a national basis, this is correct but it begs the question of who is doing the producing and who is getting the payment.

The social and economic function of some of those employed in the non-productive sector are indispensable to the life of society and no slight is intended when describing them as non-productive. The most important of these are connected with Health, Education, Transport, Sanitation, and so on.

There are, however, other classes and occupations that are parasitic in varying degrees or appropriate a great deal more of the surplus value created by the industrial workers than their 'function' in society warrants on any rational assessment.

The capitalist class head this category, but its political influence is bolstered by a very broad strata who are overvalued, overpaid, and in many cases, unnecessary.

We have in mind disc jockeys, notables on radio and television, pop stars, management consultants, property developers, advertising as a whole, etc.

On top of these is the biggest growth industry of them all - the class of administrators.

The tax changes brought about by the Thatcher government have, on the whole, benefited these elements at the expense of the majority of people engaged in socially necessary occupations.

In the long term there is the problem of how to reorganise society on rational lines but in the meantime, the problem is how to achieve a redistribution of the national income so that the burden of the slump is placed where it truly belongs, and those engaged in socially essential occupations will have their living and working conditions safeguarded. In this category we include, of course, the welfare of the sick, the aged, and those unemployed through no fault of their own.

The most simple way of redistributing income is by means of taxation. The incidence of taxation on different classes of the population is dictated partly by electoral considerations and partly by the more general necessity of trying to ensure the stability of the existing political and economic system.

Electoral considerations demand that sops be given to actual and potential supporters. This necessitates that the tax burden on other classes must be increased. The limiting factor here is the need to avoid a backlash which could lead to the eventual destruction of the system.

Bearing this in mind, the last thing that working class interests require is social peace, passive acceptance of lower living standards. A 'winter of discontent' may be a bit of a bind for the working class not actually engaged in the struggles, but it is the only thing that is going to make Mrs. T. sit up and take notice.

What the working class is sorely in need of are trade unions that will fight for class interests instead of each union pursuing its own sectional and trade interests without regard to the class. But this is something that must be fought for in the course of the ongoing, spontaneous struggles rather than attempting to hold things back until an overall agreement has been reached.

Widespread expression of discontent, including strikes, will certainly 'weaken Britain's competitive position' but there is no point in backing off because of the prospect that 'it will make things worse'. We will suffer even more if we give in without a fight.

If the Government had a plan for national recovery that would reduce unemployment, increase production, and contain a planned improvement in living standards, then there would be sense in considering co-operation, but in its absence, the ruling class must be faced with the decision to either back off or have their world pulled down around their ears.

At best, however, this will only bring about a stalemate, which is better than a retreat, but insufficient to ensure the resolution of the many problems facing the economy and the people.

As Marx pointed out - class struggle can either result in victory for one or other of the contending classes, or in their mutual destruction.

Unless the industrial working class, however united in itself, can mobilise other sections of the working population under its leadership, it may not be able to go much further than destabilising the present regime, a formula for anarchy which will encourage support for a strong man who will impose a solution on the warring factions.

However, the indisputable condition for changing society is the political, ideological and fighting unity of the industrial working class. Up to the present, the big battalions - those with most industrial muscle - have been able to take care of their own interests by relying almost entirely on their own strength and with little concern for ought else. Now the situation is changing.

World overcapacity in steel, shipbuilding, general engineering, the automobile industry, is making this practice more difficult. In the future, success will only be possible if they seek to fight to defend their common, as distinct from their trade, interests.

It may be that some of them, perhaps the miners, will be able to carry on a bit longer in the old way, but time is running out for them, too. Class struggle is now the order of the day.

The days of easy pickings (a relative term) are rapidly disappearing. Indeed, this trend has been evident for some time as far as the less powerful sections of the industrial workers is concerned, but now it

is generally applicable

There is always a time lag between objective conditions undergoing a change and people becoming aware of it, and there is a still longer time lag before they are able to assimilate the knowledge and formulate theories.

This is one of the reasons behind the apparent lack of fight at the present time, as shown by the acceptance by B.L. workers of the sacking of the convenor of shop stewards, acceptance of the closure of shipyards, steel works, and the many other, lesser-known redundancies up and down the country.

Closely linked is the argument that increases in wages will lead to increased unemployment. These things add a dimension to working class struggle that is outside the experience of all but the oldest industrial workers and the people in general are now in the process (whether they are conscious of it or not) of re-orientating their ideas to meet the new situation.

Marxists, if they are worthy of the title, will be doing their best to intervene in this process so that the correct ideas that emerge are popularised and so become the material force that Marx talked about.

The Allies of the Industrial Working Class

If the stalemate that Marx postulated as a possibility, is to be avoided, our class must seek out its natural allies among the rest of the working population as the next stage in extending its influence over the whole of society.

We would define these as being, firstly the manual workers in other than the production industries, closely followed by the non-manual employees who perform essential services for the mass of the people. We have in mind hospital nurses, doctors, auxiliaries; the lower ranks of Local Authority employees; those employed in public transport; teachers, employees in the distributive trades, etc. Some of those engaged in what is broadly termed the Arts can play a big part in the realm of ideas.

One of the links between the industrial working class and these potential allies is to be found in their common interest in defending the social and public services.

Because the people engaged in providing social services do not create surplus value they have no way of bringing direct economic pressure on the capitalist class. If they do take action, such as a strike or work to rule, it is usually the lower income groups who suffer most. The well-to-do have private medical treatment, private transport, private schools, etc.

The ideal solution would be for the industrial workers to use their collective industrial strength to defend the social and public services in general, and this should be the aim.

At the present time, successes can best be achieved by mobilising opposition to specific hospital closures or withdrawal of particular services. Sometimes this has just meant that a different hospital or school has been closed, so that the net gain has been minimal - except, that is, from the experience that mass pressure can bring results.

As we observed earlier, the logical thing to do would be to reduce unemployment and increase the volume of production, so providing society with a bigger fund from which to finance the social and public services required. But neither Tory or Labour governments have given any indication that they have a clue how to bring this about.

We are stuck with the immediate problem of how to finance essential services out of the present level of production. This means

- (a) finding ways of providing additional finance for them;
- (b) reducing the cost of providing the services;
- (c) establishing priorities.

The only means of providing additional finance in present circumstances is by increasing the rates. There are some Labour-controlled councils who maintain that expenditure must be maintained at all costs, even to the extent of increasing the rates by 70% or more.

In most urban boroughs this would be doing little more than redistributing income between those classes of the population who are more or less in the same boat as far as the pressure of rising prices is concerned.

It is understandable that people employed by Local Authorities should see rate increases as the solution to the problem, for in that way they can continue to have wage increases and job security.

It is equally understandable that other ratepayers who have no job security should object to rate increases for the purpose of maintaining job security for those employed by the Local Authorities.

The interest of the former is reflected in the slogan "No Cuts in Expenditure", the latter in "No Cuts in Services".

Of course it is necessary on a national scale to build up pressure for redistributing income in favour of the working class by means of taxation and finding different means of financing local authorities.

Of course it is necessary to explain the adverse effects of high interest rates on the production industries and Local Authority borrowing, and the contradiction between Thatcher's promise to "get Britain moving", and the high interest rates that are hastening the closure of manufacturing establishments. But these are long term solutions.

Taking everything into consideration, it is obvious that cuts in Local Authority expenditure are inevitable in the short term. This means cutting out some of the existing services and/or reducing the cost of providing them.

This fact has got to be faced, and no amount of 'revolutionary' phrasemongering will affect it one jot.

As far as deciding which services should be retained and which allowed to go, the final decision should be in the hands of the people; not by referendum, but on the basis that they must get off their backsides and fight for the services that they feel should be maintained.

As a first step, the Councils should be pressed to call public meetings at which Councillors must be subjected to close questioning on specific items of expenditure, and a breakdown demanded for the

costs of providing particular services. They must be made to listen to opinions that differ from their own, instead of the usual type of meeting that is rigged so as to make it an occasion for 'explaining' Council policy.

The years of indoctrination with bourgeois democratic ideas will not be easily overcome. "We have elected them, now let them get on with the job" is a very attractive philosophy because it provides an excuse for limiting political activity to putting an X on a ballot paper once every five years or so.

The kind of practical activity that we have in mind in this respect is nothing less than harassment of officials and Councillors in order to wear them down, coupled with a pledge that activity will not necessarily cease because of a decision in the Council Chamber. If such a decision lacks public support, there is no reason why opposition to it should be confined by the morality and procedural niceties of the Council Chamber.

On the other hand, there is a need to beware of the antics of the lunatic 'Left' which only serve to isolate the people engaged in the activity from the mass of the people.

Unity

The working class is often held back by a simplistic concept of unity that is peddled by the C.P.G.B., among others.

Unity with other classes is essential, but whether it is progressive or not depends upon its content. There is no political sense in the working class using its organ-

ised strength to support another class if, by so doing, it promotes the interests of that class at the expense of its own.

Take, for example, the slogan "No Cuts in Public Expenditure". If the working class gets hooked on it, it will inevitably find itself fighting for the interests of one of the few 'growth areas' of employment - the Bureaucracy.

Whether it is the Bureaucracy or the Services that will be hardest hit by the cuts in expenditure will be greatly influenced by the activity of the working class and its allies.

In the absence of mass struggle to protect the Services, it will be the bureaucrats who will determine how and where the 'savings' are to be made. That is an issue that we must face now.

No one in their right minds will expect them to put their jobs and their empires on the line, therefore the decision must effectively be taken out of their hands by mass activity.

The workers employed by Local Authorities, (those who actually do the work), may feel threatened by such an approach; but we would remind them that unless they support it, their jobs will be placed in jeopardy by the very people they chose as their allies - the Bureaucrats.

The Thatcher administration has publicly declared itself to be the enemy of bureaucracy, so how better to test its political sincerity than to put it into a position of having to honour its pledges, or stand exposed before its own supporters.

On the positive side, it must be said that the present Government has been more forthright in its opposition to Social Imperialism, and more outspoken in its condemnation of EEC financial arrangements than the previous Government.

The Labour 'opposition' has shown itself more concerned with trying to enhance its political image at the expense of the Tories than with real political issues. Its 'solutions' to the problems facing the people are nothing more than prescriptions for the medicine as before, and we all know what good that did.

The Steel Workers' Strike

At the time of writing this is now in its ninth week and without any outward sign of a settlement in the offing.

Villiers and his fellow directors have little room for manoeuvre in view of the tight rein kept by the Government on the finances of the British Steel Corporation but subsequent events have shown that the initial derisory offer of 2% was sufficient to inflame the feelings of people who were already frustrated by the impending and actual closures of steel works throughout the country.

Although the most prominent issue at the moment is wages, the underlying discontent with the state of the industry will persist even if a favourable wage settlement is reached.

The statement by Bill Sirs just prior to the strike that it would be a short sharp one could only have been made by a person who had become so bemused by years of 'good industrial relations' that he

ignored the objective facts of the situation.

Once the strike got under way, the initiative passed to the rank and file, a happening that is liable to give many full time union officials the nightmares. The signs are that Sirs and Co. are being carried along by the movement rather than leading it.

The strike is still solid, but how long it can remain so in view of the tough Government attitude and the absence of leadership is cause for concern.

We are not referring to the kind of 'leadership' that sets up its bivouac outside the headquarters of ACAS awaiting a summons. We have in mind a leadership that gives the strike a political perspective,

For example, one question that is constantly being asked by interested people not involved in the dispute is, "If the B.S.C. is broke, where is the money to come from to pay the wage increases demanded?"

At no time have the union leadership counter-posed the cash limits imposed in practice on wage settlements to the interest payments running at £1 million per day that are apparently regarded as sacrosanct.

In relation to closures, the demand to put back redundancies for a couple of years and limit imports of steel only make political sense if they are accompanied by demands for a plan to match steel output to a guaranteed internal market that takes account of the needs of the

people of Britain, including those of national defence. This in turn will only make sense if the concept of planned output levels is extended to other industries.

In short, the strike would be strengthened if it were given a perspective by counterposing the idea of a planned economy to the anarchy of the present system.

Unfortunately both the Labour Party and the trade unions are content to get the best they can out of the present set-up. They are afraid of setting off a political movement that may get out of hand.

The aim should be to expose the contradictions in the present economic system and point the way to resolving them in a way that corresponds with the legitimate demands of the workers involved in the struggle.

This is becoming even more important in view of the campaign to place further legal restrictions on union activity. This is directly related to the still deteriorating British economy. Unless this deterioration is challenged and alternatives proposed, people will accept the 'need' for retrenchment and hence the 'need' for restrictions on anyone who rocks the boat.

Also high on the agenda of union activity must be the constant reminder to Thatcher that resistance to Social Imperialism will be impossible without the positive support of workers in the productive sector.

It will not make her change her class position, but it will raise the question among the people at large of who is for unifying the country, and who is for div-

iding it; which classes are more important, the workers in production industries, or the finance houses.

Taken in the general context of a growing threat from Social Imperialism, these questions will assume great importance in the public mind.

Afghanistan and After

The invasion of Afghanistan has opened up a new and more aggressive phase in the development of Social Imperialism.

Formerly its military intervention was largely conducted either by proxy or with some regard for world opinion, insofar that it could claim to be assisting movements that had some degree of popular support.

The scale of the operation in Afghanistan proves that it has few allies or supporters among the population of that country. As time goes on, opposition will increase and the occupation grow more costly in terms of lives, money, and political credibility.

Although territorial gains have been made by Social Imperialism, the other side of the coin is that more people have become aware of its true nature, and that is political capital in the bank.

Time is not on the side of Social Imperialism, therefore it will be prone to taking greater risks in its drive to dominate Middle East oil supplies, with Pakistan as possibly its next objective. This being the case, it is to be expected that the Western imperialists will be making preparations to establish a strong-

er military and naval presence in the region.

There are elements in the U.S. and, to a lesser extent, in Europe who would not be averse to using the threat posed by Social Imperialism as an excuse to use military force to re-establish Western control of Middle East oil supplies. This was expressed in the proposal to establish a task force to safeguard U.S. interests in the Middle East.

Action of this kind would not only be indefensible in principle, inasmuch as it would violate the sovereignty of the countries concerned, but it would be counter-productive. It would be a setback for the movement to create a united front of second and third world countries for the purpose of defeating superpower hegemonism.

The Third World can only be brought into such a united front on the basis of a conviction, based on their own experience, that Social Imperialism constitutes the main threat to their independence.

The insatiable demand for oil by the industrially developed countries has given the oil-producing states of the Middle East a great deal of economic leverage and they will turn against any outside force that attempts to undermine this power.

The NATO states must make it absolutely clear that they will not use military force to get control of the oil resources of that region, or for any other reason that does not conform with the wishes of the people of that region.

A FIGHTING EXIT

The elderly are known to grumble, but it is a fact of life
They're the most docile section of the population,
Tolerating treatment that would lead others to opt for strife;
Their conditions are mostly far below their former station.
Is it that surprising that a lifetime of toil
Saps incentive - and stamina - to keep 'the struggle' on the boil?
(The 'mellowing of militants' has less to do with sagacity
Than flagging morale and incapacity).

It is, therefore, inspiring to cite an exception to the rule
In Kay, a veteran comrade, full of zest,
Whose last struggle to organise fellow tenants was a school
For those who think the old are merely fit for 'rest'.
Bluff, cocksure, in many respects she typified the Party member
Of her generation
- Though her attitude to King Street was far from veneration.
With others of the Willesden Branch she led the schism
Of ML cadres hostile to revisionism.

In retirement, her health failing, Kay remained in Brent
To be offered a place in a self-catering 'sheltered home'
For those whose lifetime's work has left them spent,
And though not helpless, find life difficult alone.
These establishments provide comfort as well as privacy
- A far cry from the 'Old Folks' Home' - donkey sanctuary.
(Each home is run by a resident warden, whose function
Stops little short of giving extreme unction).

In Kay's place the warden ran the home - or so she claimed
For his own advantage and reward.
"There's little opposition to his game;
Protesters are at worst abused, at best ignored.
Facilities are laid on - or not - as the case may be,
Depending on membership of his coterie.
To list his good points would be hard,
The man is, in truth, a bastard!"

The tenants were, as could be expected, resigned
To this apparently immutable state of affairs;
Until the 'balance of forces' was realigned
When Kay was crossed - and battle declared.
"Who the hell is this squirt
To take me on? I'll rub his nose in the dirt."
Most people face conflict with ill-concealed panic,
But Kay's lust for struggle was positively manic.

Agitation commenced, the least cowed were consulted
By encouraging all those abused and reviled,
Protests to housing officials resulted,
(No doubt to be placed 'on file').
It was certain, however, a clear lead was required
If the residents were to be well and truly 'fired'.
In one long letter were aired complaints capable of
corroboration.
(One must be mindful of defamation.)

This prompted a visit by two L.A. reps
Who promised all they could to resolve the matter.
But Kay wanted not waffle but positive steps,
Then out came the usual patter:
"This problem needs thorough investigation.
We'll refer it to the proper channels" - i.e. lateral delegation.
The trick when dealing with bods of this kind
Is to lay on the pressure until it concentrates their minds.

Kay realised her efforts would carry no clout
Without firm support from the bulk of the tenants
So a petition was drafted and - judiciously - handed out,
A call for the man's replacement - too late now for penance.
As confidence grew, the signatures multiplied;
Even the timorous cast fear aside.
Once the document had sufficient backing
It was sent to Head Office with a note, "Get cracking!"

OAPs getting active? Unheard of outrageous!
Where would it stop?
If they all set at naught the advice of us sages,
What room will there be for those now on top?
An official silence greeted the petition
For a month, administrators "reviewed the position":
Undaunted, Kay ceaselessly pestered by 'phone
Those clearly minded to "leave well alone".

And then out of the blue the officials descended
To establish the truth of complaints at their source
And interview those whose names were appended
To the petition - individually, of course.
"The tenants are undoubtedly wrong
But it would hardly do to meet the throng
Of them; in a crowd they might all get riled.
On their own they'll be more easily beguiled."

Not unnaturally, without support many of the tenants renounced
Their former views so clearly indicated.
And thus a letter from the Department pronounced
The warden fully vindicated.
Hearts less stout would have felt desperation
At the upshot of this fly manipulation,
But decades' experience on the shop floor
Taught Kay: One lost battle doesn't end the war.

Why the warden soon departed we can only speculate.
Had he not, after all, emerged with credit?
Perhaps in Kay's eye he caught the sealing of his fate,
Saw the writing on the wall - but this time, read it.
Unanimous, however, was the tenants' reaction.-
They promptly drank themselves to stupefaction!

To those who miss the lesson and read an elegy
Into the above, let it clearly be said,
Ordinary people can decide their destiny.
(Even if they cannot pen good verse - Ed.)

Kay died late last year. In her memory it would not go amiss to quote Lenin's words:

"Man's dearest possession is life, and since it is given to him to live but once, he must so live as to feel no torturing regrets for years without purpose: so live as not to be seared with the shame of a cowardly and trivial past; so live that dying he can say, "All my life and all my strength were given to the finest cause in the world - the liberation of mankind."

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 8

that the interests of one state cannot be over-ridden by the others acting in concert.

2. In order to underpin the independence of each state as a pre-condition for strengthening Europe as a whole, the association should promote the development of a self-reliant economy in each state.

3. Contrary to the aims of the self-styled 'Europeans', the objective should not be to create a cosmopolitan Europe, but one in which each nation is encouraged to give full play to its own national characteristics and culture, while learning to respect that of others. By doing so, the political and economic reasons for resisting aggression will be reinforced by a strong emotive appeal. It is also necessary to make continuous efforts to adopt a common agreed line on all external questions, so strengthening unity.

4. Sharing of research and development costs, exchange of technical information, and standardisation where necessary, should be encouraged so as to develop a European-based technology that is independent of the Superpowers. (The direction in which this technology should develop will be determined by class struggle because technology is also a class question.)

5. Defence - each state should retain control over its own armed forces but with no 'right' to enter the territory of other states except to expel external military forces.

Land forces should not operate outside Europe.

Standardisation of weaponry and military procedures should be encouraged in the interests of economy and efficiency.

6. Trade - relations with the Third World should be conducted on the basis of exchange of equal values, with the objective of assisting each one to build a self-reliant economy. Only in this way can social-imperialist influence be kept to a minimum.

MARCH 1980

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 18

Closer economic and trade relations should be established between the E.E.C. and the countries in that region, and military guarantees given by NATO regarding the inviolability of their territory, coupled with offers of defence pacts specifically directed against Social Imperialism.

It is possible that many Third World countries may need more 'Afghanistans' before they become convinced that it is Social Imperialism that presents the greatest threat to their independence. If this is the case, in the short term Social Imperialism may be able to temporarily strengthen its position in regard to territory, oil, and raw materials but in the process it will also be accelerating its own defeat.

A common front against Social Imperialism must have as its basic principle the upholding of the national sovereignty of all countries, large and small. Soviet occupation will force the people of the territories concerned to recognise what Brezhnev's theory of limited sovereignty means in practice, and resistance to the occupation will inevitably develop.

The capacity of Social Imperialism to suppress opposition at home and abroad will diminish as its repressive forces become stretched.

The foregoing is not intended as an excuse for passivity; on the contrary, we have tried to indicate that resistance to Social Imperialism cannot, and must not, be left to the imperialists of Europe and America who are only concerned to prevent an unfavourable redistribution of spheres of influence.

It is intended as a warning to beware of opportunist trends that may develop because of the need to take advantage of inter-imperialist contradictions in order to defeat Social Imperialism.

If the worst comes to the worst, and Social Imperialism does manage to exercise greater control of Middle East oil, it would certainly create great economic and social tensions in Europe, but that is a problem that will have to be resolved when it arises.

Correspondence and Subscriptions to:

T. Hill,
11 Barratt Avenue, London, N.22
(Cheques and Postal Orders payable to THE MARXIST)

Subscription rates (6 issues):

British Isles and Overseas (surface mail) - £1.80
(airmail) - £2.30

Printed and Published by the MARXIST INDUSTRIAL GROUP, 11 Barratt Avenue, London, N.22