HI STOR I C N OTES

MAGNA CARTA as the supposed foundation of British liberty was the fabrication of Sir Edward Coke, who died in 1634. The Great Charter of 600 years earlier, attempted to define the relationship between King and barons in the latter's favour. The elevation into a charter of rights was the product of Parliament's need, for propaganda purposes, to find in history its elevation into a charter of the fabrication of a staunch opponent of royal prerogative, was well suited.

Approach to which the greater length, the importance given to it in the Church and the greater power given to the barons are explained by circumstances. It is an elaboration of the accessions charter of Henry I. Its greater length, the importance given to it in the Church and the greater power given to the barons are explained by circumstances. The English barons of the time were no longer holders of estates in Normandy, and thus disaffiliated from the King's ineffectual efforts to regain his domains there, especially at a time of popular discontent and difficulty in raising the taxes required for war.

In 1213 John quarrelled with the Pope and only reluctantly accepted Langton, the Pope's nominee, to the archbishopric of Canterbury. Langton from his outset was a guiding hand in the barons' revolt. The King increased the tax (scutage) on a knight from two marks to three, which northern barons refused to pay. In a rebellion which gathered strength after the King's defeat at Bouvines in 1214, John could not drive a wedge between Church and barons, and the latter, with the support of London, refused to compromise. The King was forced to conciliate at the point of the sword at Runnymede in June 1215.

No sooner had he signed than the King renewed his war against the barons, with royal support this time. The Charter was denounced and the barons excommunicated, although this had less effect on the barons (who invited Philip, later Louis VIII of France to read its terms) than John's death in 1216. As soon as they were rid of the hated John the barons turned against the foreigner, accepted Henry III, and ignored or dropped from the rewritten charter of 1216 and 1217 the more rigorous strictures against royal power.

The Charter contains none of the cherished notions of later ages, trial by jury, freedom from arbitrary arrest, control of taxation by representatives of the people, and so on. The benefits fall almost entirely to the baronial class. The villeins or serfs, the overwhelming majority of the population have no rights whatsoever, except as they are tenant of their feudal overlord, the King, were an essential component of the feudal system, and the charter between King John and his barons is one among many. It is an elaboration of the accessions charter of Henry I.

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Perhaps the most famous tenant of Magna Carta is that of Chapter 39: "No freeman shall be arrested or detained in prison, or deprived of his freehold or outlawed, or banished or in any way molested, and we will set forth against him, nor need against him, unless by lawful judgement of his peers and by the law of the land." But since only trade unions have sought to apply this principle on an effective scale, many a charter has been passed since, to deny that right, not engendered by the makers of the Great Charter.
Statute of Labourers

virtually autocratic? And yet the flagellants who became a law to the populace by aspersing the Church hierarchy, wanted as suddenly as they had come like night phantoms when the authorities turned on them, setting and beseeching.

Even more inexplicable, however, is what one historian has called the plague's "greatest social disruption - a concerted demand for higher wages." Peasants, artisans, craftsmen, clerks, even priests were affected. Within a year of the plague passing through northern France, textile workers at Amiens had won three wages increases. In the guilds there were strikes for wages or shorter hours. The response of rulers everywhere was repression. The English rulers in emergency passed the first 'Statute of Labourers' (23 Edward III) in 1344 without as much as waiting for Parliament. All were required to work at the same pay as two years before. There were penalties for refusal. For leaving of employment to seek higher pay, for the desertion of workmen a vagrant could be forced to work for anyone who claimed him known. The testimony of employers in 1355 - that wages were higher than the pre-plague rate - was trebled the pre-plague rate in 1352 - that wages were double the rate of 1360, with fines being replaced by gaol, stocks or death. Indeed the tide of rebellion had swelled so far that it culminated in the great Peasants' Revolt of 1381. The observer today is primarily struck with awe at the courage of the British people at this time when their rulers (and even historians with hindsight) can only have expected subservience and submission. One other aspect of the plague Legislation is of interest. That is its fundamental difference to approach from the attitude of rulers in Britain today. For all the brutality of branding, whipping and flogging of the "able-bodied poor", and the consistent attempt to lengthen by statute the working day, the great object of the legislators was the driving of men into employment. The Statute of Labourers denounced not only those who chose "to pass the bread in idleness as their days" but also those who earned it unproductively. Repressible and self-interested in its underlying greed, which strove down the centuries to lengthen the working day, invading in the words of an economist of 1770, against the "conduct of our manufacturing population who do not labour, upon an average, above 4 days in a week", still its aim was to eradicate what men saw then as a crime against God and society - unemployment.

Thatcher's Plague

Even the destruction and havoc of the plague would have puzzled the men of those days less than today's reversal of the laws on which they sternly based the nascent capitalist system. Based on their need to employ, to exploit. The Plague would have been easier to comprehend as punishment visited by God on a sinful world, than the dotage of the system they created, which under the impact made lack of work an "uncommon boon". Today, as then, the most difficult thing to comprehend are the unpredictable reactions of man at times of crisis. Would that we might revere against our Plague as our forefathers did.


cuts off the young, a rootless

terrifying nightmare. Woe is me of suddenly as...
Two of these more music, the Peasants’ Revolt and the Levellers.

"They were ye ye to be
know your friend from your foe.
Have enough and say ‘Hoy!’

An anonymous priest in the country of Kent had been freed from his third prison sentence for egalitarian and heretical sermons. His literature were the band of men led by Wat Tyler — in revolt against government attempts at wage fixing (Statute of Labourers 1351), the Hundred Years War, and the increasing profiteering. Poll Taxes of 1377-82 doubled two years running. It is often said that the revolt was prompted by the king and his lords, and it was the increasing profiteering that led to the rebellion.

The trick worked. Many were satisfied with these promises. Many more were outraged. The hungry, frightened ‘army’ found solace in the teachings of John Ball, Tyler and Jack Straw. He said that the lords and that the people of the strange countries, which were coming to towards London, returned back again to their own houses and shut none, come on further. "No Parliament can hardly sanctioned all the concessions made.

Order' may have been restored, but that does not always result in tranquillity. No sooner had the ‘peasants’ revolt’ been defeated, than riots erupted in all towns and villages. In the following years, the people of England, calling them to go and destroy those shop, along with John Buk and Christi, the sons of Lord Edmund’s purse. John Ball was beheaded by John Shirle, whom he was for that he had been convicted. In the trial it was said that Adam had been hanged and drawn immediately, as they disposed.

After the Peasants’ Revolt

ADAM CLINNE (of Ely)
On the Saturday after Corpus Christi, Adam, and many other insinuates and vagabonds, were captured in the houses of various clergy and were tried for the murder of the king and the bishop of Ely; they set fire to those.

On Sunday and Monday Adam proclaimed that all law officers who were carrying out their duties should be executed. Adam carried this to a further extent by killing the commoners, and declared on behalf of the Great Fellowship that an one who carried out any service for, or obeyed their lord, would be executed. In the trial it was said that Adam had been hanged and drawn immediately.

The Levellers (see before them in this and the next section) were struggling for independence. Both Richard and John Buk were sentenced to be hanged and drawn immediately. All their property was seized by the king.

John Shirle (of Nottingham)
At his trial, John Shirle was described as a vagabond because he had travelled from county to county during the disturbances. The ‘crime’ he was hanged was for insinuates of the preamble of the so-called King’s Peace.

He said that the lords and ministers of the king should have been hanged and the judge of John Ball. He said that John Ball was a traitor and good man, who killed the king and the lords were opposing the people and that there was no crime for which he had been put to death. John Shirle said that the death of John Ball must be avenged — that the king and his ministers should die. At his trial John Shirle stood his ground and did not deny the charges.
"ALL wars are against the principles of the New Testament and are but the murdering and plundering for the glory of Kings."

"Many of the trades of the commonwealth, such as goldsmiths and armurers, are unnecessary and wasteful." "The property of the Church should be distributed to the poor and the clergy should cease to kiss their own poverty..."

These were some of the conclusions reached by the Lollard movement in 1369. Conclusions which ensured that they would be suppressed as subversive.

The Lollards or 'mourners' had emerged at the same time as the Peasants' Revolt in 1381, although the links between the two movements were not direct, for the Lollard movement started from the centre of the British theological establishment at Oxford University.

John Wycliffe, a fellow at Oxford, had risen to influence as a heralding to the crown in its attempts to reuse the power of Rome abroad, and the Church within. This humourless, pedantic scholar was paid to use theology against the theologians, and as often as he found himself arguing against Church and monarchy, and ordered to 'shut up or else'.

But already its attacks on the corruption of the Church and clergy, on the imposition of doctrines like 'transubstantiation', and the editors of the Church had been taken up by others in the 'lower orders'. They were especially attracted to the argument that "All Christians are by treaty in particular, ought to know their work and defend it." For the first time the content of the Bible was translated into English and ordinary men and women could "learn the words of the Gospel according to their simplicity". The Church could no longer claim the authority to tell people what to think and do, and theGift of the authorities on the word of the 'masses' would never be the same again.

The Lollard movement was more than just a religious sect. It was a fight for the right to literacy. Men and women readied themselves secretly for reading, writing and worshipping in their own language. In this sense, too, it was a nationalistic movement. And more important, it was a movement for intellectual independence - for these blacksmiths, carpenters, ploughmen and weavers interpreted their Bible in a very different way from their 'superiors'.

Surprise, surprise. Pope and King suddenly forgot their quarrel and agreed on the one thing that all ruling classes have in common - that each barrier to the lower orders should be suppressed, without, in the King's words, 'there may be one spark remain hid under the ashes, but that it be utterly extinguished and speedily put out.' The history of Britain ever since has shown the validity of that hope.

The introduction of the death penalty by burning for Lollards could not persuade men and women to stop thinking their own thoughts. Bibles not tracts in English rather than Latin were smuggled out of London around the country. Literacy courses were held in conjunction with collective bible readings and discussions held in back rooms, kitchens, workshops. The mission of the Lollards was not to be stopped. Organisations and co-ordination between different groups was maintained - the only reason we know of the Lollards at all is because of the prosecution brought about by those who betrayed. But nevertheless, this did not stop discussion with the kindred lollard movement in Bohemia, nor the organisation of an abortive uprising in 1415.

One rebellion, scene of executions, and over a hundred years later the traditions of democratic debate, learning, organisation and independence of mind in opposition to the state was still thriving with the Lollard movement.
Class wars in 1549: part 2 of a 4-part series

Class wars in 1549

Part 3 - Class Wars 1549

**PLEASANTS** of the South West, with other workers and sympathising gentlemen, had formed an army in defence of their lands and livelihood. At land battles in Exeter, a crucial supply and political centre for the area, controlling most of the surrounding villages. The government's troops were sent to destroy them. Their first major battle took place at Fenno Bridges where the longobards and braver of the Cornishmen proved useful allies against the fancy mercenaries from abroad. Their siege caused the people of Exeter to question the political structure of the city, where all wealth and political power was in the hands of a few, selfish, rich merchants and the like. The rebellion of Exeter was essential unless some of the monarch's and householdmen's richest supporters were to be destroyed. A fierce battle took place in the region of Fenno Bridges in Devon. Mary. The rebel leaders dug in and the government forces were stopped. The battle was fought near the town of Exeter. The government's troops were unable to defeat the rebels, who were able to withdraw safely and continue their rebellion elsewhere. The rebellion ended with the defeat of the government's troops, and the rebels were able to continue their struggle against the government. The rebels were able to mobilise others to join their cause, and the rebellion spread to other parts of the country, leading to further conflicts and battles between the rebels and the government.
Conclusion this series on the large scale combat waged by peasants and artisans fighting for food and land in the mid-sixteenth century, we look at what happened in Norfolk.

The Norfolk men had established an efficient, organised tradition of defense against the exploiters. As enclosures of their lands increased, as more were driven into vagrancy and unemployment, their forces of opposition intensified and they moved from defense to attack.

On July 8th, 1549, they gathered and for speech they informed each other of the need to revolt and stop the closures. Local skirmishes ensued as the rebels took over the landowner's farms and massed an army. Then the whole of East Anglia began to rise.

The gentry fled, leaving a few hardies, and the army forcibly entered Norwich, the county town. They started to govern it themselves. They formulated careful accounts of their main grievances against the injustices of late feudal rule and took them up where they were, realizing that their own actions were more productive than petitions to the King.

Under the so-called "Oak of Reformation" the people administered their own justice and condemned the evil actions of the feudal lawyers who had oppressed them. Here they also held free, open debate to resolve their doubts and differences.

The Government's forces were tied down in the South West in their war with the peasants, the rest were in London producing the threatened Lord Protector. However, local leaders began to recruit troops and guns for themselves. The rebels responded acrimoniously. Having overcome the city they made life so dangerous for the population of Britain that eventually an army was sent out against them. Their crucial encounter came in August at Dissindale.

The peasants sang: "The country goeth, Rob, Dick and Jack, With clubs and clouted shoes, shall fill the vale of Dissindale/With butchered bodies/With slaughtered victims." In fact it was to be the murdered peasants' bodies that filled the vale. The Government was ruthlessly massacred them saying they were worth no more than beasts. And after their victories they engaged in horrifying "pacification" measures like those undertaken in the South West.

To all ten thousand people proceeding courageously against raised rents, unjust lands, unjust taxes, lack of food, violent inequalities and administrative corruptions, were killed in 1549. The scale of this massacre was massive, for the population of Britain at that time was only about three million.

Looking back at these years we see the bravery and militancy of our ancestors fully born out and get some idea of the great sacrifices they were prepared to make. They made life so dangerous for the population of Britain that eventually an army was sent out against them. Their crucial encounter came in August at Dissindale.

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Robert Crowley, the Archdeacon of Hereford between 1559 and 1567, was a man who constantly annoyed the church authorities and rising bourgeoisie with his political poems and pamphlets and popular printing presses. He annoyed them because he identified with those oppressed by the accumulation of capital and because he articulated a critical understanding of political ideas and events.

Though he professed to hate rebellion, the impetus behind his work, the tradition and contemporary movement of which it was part, were revolutionary, working class. Of the expropriating bourgeoisie he said: "Yea, there is not so much as a garden ground free from them. No remedy therefore, we must needs fight it out, or else be brought to the like slavery that the French men are in." He doesn't blame vagrancy, caused by the enclosures, on personal indolence so much as class oppression. When he tells beggars to find work he iscondemning the system, exactly like our own, which deliberately creates unemployment.

... there are poor people Welloste innumerable.

That are dryve to begge And yet to workes they are abro... Crowley could see only two classes and the ruling class was characterized by its individualistic, self-seeking corruption:

The charite of rich men Is now done over And this is a Citye In name, but, In deed, It is a packe of people Past seek after meede For officers and al do sake Their owne gaine.

But for the wealth of the commons
Not one taketh pains
In hell without order I may it well call
Where every man is for himselfe.

And no man for all.

He plainly denounced those stealing land for profit to their faces and asked them to: "Cast down the class oppression. When he tells beggars to find work he is condemning the system, exactly like our own, which deliberately creates unemployment.

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Historic Notes  
Stow’s ‘A Survey of London’ 1598

"THE INHABITANTS of the towns about London, as Iseldon, Henton, Shoreditch and others had so inclosed the common fields with hedges and ditches that neither the young men might shoot nor the ancient persons walk for their pleasure in those fields: their bows and arrows were taken away and honest persons arrested." So wrote John Stow, tailor, freeman of the Merchant Tailors Company of London in 1598.

His indignation was shared by the citizens of London "who, he wrote, "congregated in a great number and followed a turner dressed in a fool’s coat, who was crying, "Shovels and Spades, Shovels and Spades", so many people followed it was a wonder to behold. Within a short space of time, hedges about the city were cast down and ditches filled up; such was the diligence of these workmen that soon all was made plain." Approvingly Stow described how the King’s Council had to accept the wishes of the people of London, so commanded the Mayor to see to it.

He would have admired but accepted as commonplace the heroism, the calm and the orderly re-generation of London by its citizens after the great fire caused by the Nazis. He would have have understood the new artisans, the firemen, the bus drivers, the builders who again brought sweet water and made all plain.

For pleasure go back to Stow. Read how "in the holidays all the summer youths are exercised in leaping, dancing, shooting, wrestling and casting the stone while maidens trip in their timbrels (whatever they were) and dance as long as they can well see". Read of the rebels Jack Straw, Wat Tyler, of whom Stow disapproved. Nevertheless he described Wat Tyler as a "rebel upon whom no man durst lay hand". That is not a bad epitaph for a leader of the people.

He would have felt proud of London. He quoted Geoffrey of Monmouth the Welsh historian as saying that the city was founded by Brute descended from Aeneas the son of Venus, but as a sophisticated man agreed with Livy that this was pardonable as humans like to think of their achievements as more sacred and of greater majesty.

He also pointed out that London was a town of note, founded by King Lud before the arrivals of the Romans. His heroes are not the nobles but the citizens, the artisans, grocers, poulterers, fishmongers, tailors, goldsmiths, silk weavers, who used some of their wealth in creating beautiful buildings, schools for poor boys such as St. Paul's, bringing sweet water to the city and giving charity to the poor.

The Communist Party of Britain (Marxist-Leninist) has endeavoured in its pamphlet: "London Murder" to show how greedy rich men and foolish arrogant councillors have brought London and its citizens to their present sorry state. Reading Stow’s "Survey of London" and the CPBML’s pamphlet: "London Murder" gives a glimpse of the dangers for London but also the capacity of its people to rebuild and recreate after disaster, natural or man-made.

For pleasure go back to Stow.

"In the holidays all the summer youths are exercised in leaping, dancing, shooting, wrestling and casting the stone while maidens trip in their timbrels (whatever they were) and dance as long as they can well see". Read of the rebels Jack Straw, Wat Tyler, of whom Stow disapproved. Nevertheless he described Wat Tyler as a "rebel upon whom no man durst lay hand". That is not a bad epitaph for a leader of the people.
The Levellers... as pioneers

The Levellers were usually presented as being a small fringe group of reformers with an insignificant role in history. Yet in truth they can be seen as the forerunners of the largest and most successful of the English Levellers party in the country. The first and most famous of the Levellers' achievements was the formation of the General Council of all Agitators and officers above the level of the rank and file, with the objective of bringing about a change in the status quo. This move was prompted by the Levellers' belief in the need for a more equitable distribution of wealth and power in society. They were also keen to challenge the authority of the monarchy and the aristocracy, and to promote the principles of democracy and popular sovereignty.

The General Council of the Army debated the Agreement at the end of the Civil War, and the Levellers were well aware of the need to capitalise on the momentum of their victories in order to achieve their goals. They were also keen to ensure that the Levellers' movement was not undermined by internal divisions, and that the Levellers' programme was not weakened by the corrosive influence of the anti-leveller groups that were emerging in the aftermath of the Civil War.

In this context, the Levellers' programme was clear and straightforward. They called for a wholesale reform of society, with the abolition of slavery and serfdom, the redistribution of land and wealth, and the establishment of a democratic government. They were also keen to promote the principles of non-violence and peaceful resistance, and to challenge the legitimacy of the existing social order.

The Levellers were not, however, a monolithic group, and there were differences of opinion within the movement. Some Levellers were more radical than others, and there were debates within the movement about the balance between revolutionary action and constitutional politics. Nevertheless, the Levellers' programme was clear and well-defined, and it was this clarity that allowed them to attract such widespread support and to become the leading force in the post-Civil War period.

The Levellers were also able to capitalise on the momentum of their victories in order to achieve their goals. They were able to secure the release of many of the Levellers who had been imprisoned during the Civil War, and they were also able to attract a wide range of supporters, including many of the leading figures of the new British working class. The Levellers' programme was also well-suited to the needs of the post-Civil War period, and it was this that allowed them to become such a powerful force in the years that followed.
William Walwyn’s ‘The Bloody Project’

In the 17th Century, the British people were fighting internal warfare. After years of peace, this dynamic was broken by cause of a great uprising of masters. From the point of the concept becomes a great revolutionary pamphlet, The Bloody Project was written by one of the most radical of the Leicester leaders, William Walwyn.

Walwyn was the disillusion of the people who were becoming aware that they were fighting a bourgeois revolution. Describing themselves for the growing bourgeoisie. They had formed a bourgeois condition but this had suddenly broken up into self-seeking factions. Walwyn writes that the main compel in their kingdom is “a certain group of one general to set upon another.” If this continued and the English people fought for one or other of the tyrants it would be they who would suffer while “the King, Parliament, great men in the City and Army” acquire “Honour, Wealth and Power”.

In Walwyn’s opinion, to shed blood for money or to support this or that interest and do it “for a cause not rightly sound” is sinful as it is “to engage in war to kill and destroy, but upon a lawful call and invitation from the Supreme Authority.” This authority could only be provided by the people it called for and for all people. If this were established people could take the orders to fight because the orders would be their own. Walwyn writes every individual to be political aware and know that political decisions are made by everybody, from the individual conscious the “good of the nation surrogate”.

Many of our ancestors, like Walwyn, called for a science of Revolution. We now have that science: we have had our bourgeois revolution. Let us unite, as Walwyn stated, and make socialism in Britain.
When Scotland and England united in 1707, it set the scene for progress throughout Britain...

1707: The Treaty of Union

Great Britain was born as a state in 1707. The Treaty of Union was ratified by the Scottish Parliament on 16 January 1707 amidst much furore and rhetoric and a large measure of disdain and distaste in both England and Scotland. After ratification by the Parliament in Westminster, the separate parliaments of England and Scotland ceased to exist. They were replaced by a Parliament of Great Britain. They had already shared a ruler, Queen Anne of the House of Stuart.

This union was a formal recognition of the ascendancy of capitalism over feudalism in all of this country. The absolutist Stuart monarchs of the 17th century toyed with union; the brief but productive Commonwealth (1649 to 1660) made tentative moves in that direction. Once united, the combined resources and talents of the two countries were at the service of capital, then in its dynamic phase.

Some Scots cried, “We are bought and sold for English gold.” That was not far off the mark in a way, though not by direct bribery. Budding Scottish capitalism was weak compared to that in England. It had been mortally wounded by recklessly pouring capital into the ill-
fated Darien Scheme. This damaged the Scottish economy on a scale
greater than the failures of RBS and others in 2008.

In the 1690s Scots venture capitalists had proposed the
establishment of a colony, Darien, on the Panama isthmus in Central
America. This was an attempt to match the burgeoning imperial
ambition and colonial acquisitions of English capitalism. The scheme
aimed to cut the time and cost of transporting goods to and from
China and Asia and to establish Scotland as a power to match France,
Holland and England. An estimated £400,000 was raised; half the
total capital available at that time throughout the country below the
tribal Highlands.

The one person who had visited the Darien peninsula warned against
the venture. Lionel Wafer, a buccaneer and ship’s surgeon, told all
who would listen about the heat, humidity and fever-plagued
conditions, but he was ignored. The colonisers of the first five ships
that sailed from Leith in 1698 were attacked by disease and by the
Spanish. A third of them, around 400 people, were dead within
months of landing. Over the next two years others arrived to meet a
similar fate. In all, nine ships were lost; 2,000 men, women and
children were drowned, buried, captured by the Spanish or sold to
English plantation owners. Half the capital, £200,000, was lost.

Bankrupt

Scotland was bankrupt; English capitalism took advantage. The
treaty of 1707 did not allow for equal terms of trade. The Scottish
linen industry was impoverished by cheap imports brought from
Ulster by English merchants. Scottish coal owners had to sell cheaply
into the English market.

There were bloody but relatively short-lived anti-Union riots. However
there was little enthusiasm outside of the Highlands for a return to
the absolutism of the Stuarts. James Edward Stuart, the Old
 Pretender and half-brother to Anne, received only marginal support
for his claim to the throne in 1715. That was despite riots in London
against the Hanoverian king, George I.

The Stuarts always wanted to be restored to the crowns of Scotland
and England; they intended to rule as their forefathers from London,
not Edinburgh. By the time of the 1745 Rebellion of Charles Edward
the Young Pretender, the Stuarts were even more marginal though
supported by French loans. Their army reached as far south as
Derby, before retreating in the face of the delayed British response.

The battle of Culloden in 1746 ended the uprising. The British army
there included three Scots battalions and two of Highlanders.
Nonetheless the vengeance wreaked afterwards on the people of the
Highlands was nothing short of genocide. That began a process
carried on by their own clan chiefs and landowners through the Highland Clearances which took place over the following 100 years.

Across Britain other changes came with the rise of modern industry and of the proletariat that grew with it. Workers dug coal, made iron and textiles, built ships and railways and much more. In the 200 years since the last Jacobite Rebellion, the population of Britain rose from under 10 million to over 50 million, more than 95 per cent of us being workers.

Our own organisations, unions and political parties and labour movements born of those unions were uniquely non-sectarian and nationally based. A common interest against capital overrode earlier divisions of religion and location that formed the background to the political events of the 17th and early 18th centuries. For the most part British workers moved on from religious and linguistic backwardness, some of which is still prevalent in European trade unions to this day.

Since industrialisation Scottish workers have been an important part of the British working class, whether exercising their skills, science and creativity or organising in defence of our class. The union of the two countries into a Britain made by workers has made us, with our national institutions and organisation, the guardians of a working class future for this, single, nation.
Adam Smith and the economics of destruction

THOUGH it appears to everyone that Britain is now being governed by the most illiterate and unthinking persons that any state could be cursed with, those statements claim that their acts are based on sound economic theory. The master they seem to be following is the Nobel prize winner, Friedman, though he feels that the Tory Government is not following his precepts in all their splendid simplicity! So we have on television a programme chaired by the ex Labour Prime Minister's son-in-law, where an American-from Europe may display his wares in the market place, a Friedman goes to Downing Street to confer with Thatcher. To date, he has extolled the successes of Hong Kong and South Korea and has made great play with the name of Adam Smith. We were given the spectacle of the cameras in Smith's University, unnamed. Did the University - was it Glasgow or Edinburgh? - not wish to be named and if so why? It would be worth our while to look at the work of Smith and other "Classical Economists" to see exactly which Smith holds the pen. For the moment, let us put on one side Karl Marx. He has always been as great an embarrassment to economists as smoking was to cigar manufacturers.

The great era of Classical Economics was 1800-1850; it is sometimes claimed that it began with the publication of Smith's "Wealth of Nations" in 1776. Adam Smith lectured in Edinburgh in 1748 and was a Professor of Logic and Moral Philosophy in Glasgow from 1751 to 1764, and for 160 years was recognised as the most influential economic writer. Through such bodies as the Political Economy Club, the British Association and the Royal Society, Smith influenced the thinking of many in positions of power. They were the men for the period, a time of change as population and national income exploded; the population rose from 6 million in 1700 to 22.7 million in 1871. National income rose from £50 million in 1700 to £916 million in 1871. Nevertheless, real wages did not start to rise until 1800. This was the period of expansion in manufacturing, cotton, railways and agriculture. Smith's underlying theory was of "harmony", that a benevolent order was to be found in the interaction of phenomena, not quite "god in the machine", but coming from a good Scot, of course, moral. It was the "pursuit of self-interest". Smith wrote "It is not from the benevolence of the brewer or the baker that we expect our dinner but from their regard to their own interest. We address ourselves, not to their humanity but to their self-love and never talk to them of our necessities but of their advantages". Competition provided the framework and it worked by means of the price system. However, Friedman and the Tories have discarded parts of Smith's thinking, who believed that competition eliminated excess profit and allocated capital and its resources when the technology, processes, names and total resources are all in a state of flux. He also believed competition itself to be part of the growth process, ordering the market, increasing productivity and leading to further capitalist accumulation. Adam Smith always insisted on the framework of justice, sympathy in each man for the feelings of others, leading to private rules of behaviour and the formulation of positive laws of justice. He accepted the conflict between masters and workers over levels of wages it masters combined to depress wages and he recognised the conflict of individual interests and social interests. "The Wealth of Nations" is worth studying if only to see how our new tyrants through their economist, Friedman, now using British people as experimental rats, demean and degrade Adam Smith, using the dross and throwing away the gold.
Britain was the first country to industrialise. That was before our rulers turned against manufacture...

The Industrial Revolution and the transformation of Britain

Astonishing, unprecedented changes occurred in 18th and 19th century Britain, which heralded an utterly different way of life. Britain was the first country to become an industrial nation and embrace a mechanical age. Its industrial revolution broke a tradition of economic life rooted in agriculture and commerce that had existed for centuries.

Britain was the first to industrialise because a conducive mix of internal circumstances cleared away hindrances: there was a national identity, the peasantry had disappeared, tenant farmers and labourers weren’t so tied to the land, feudal regulations had gone, there was free trade across the country, a commercial revolution had taken place, the Civil War had ended royal monopolies, the aristocracy was involved in commerce and capitalist farming, our island was free of foreign armies with lots of natural resources, rivers and ports.

Salt’s Mill, Bradford: the textile mill was built in 1851. Now it’s a heritage centre...
Photo: Workers
There was a leap forward in society. Previously the only sources of power available had been wind and water, human and animal strength. These were gradually displaced by machines and inanimate power. Industrialisation demanded new skills, especially in the precision engineering, machine tool and metal-working trades.

New expertise was needed to build and maintain machinery, operate boilers, drive locomotives, mine coal and tend spinning-mules and power-looms. Work grew more specialised, while the new type of worker could command high wages, belong to a trade union, maintain a family and aspire to education.

There was a spectacular trans-formation of the coal, iron and textile industries with the development of steam power to drive machinery, as in the cotton industry, which had an amazing effect on the productive energies of the nation. Factories no longer had to sit by rivers, and could run 24 hours a day with shifts.

The factory system developed fast in the textile areas of Lancashire, Yorkshire, the East Midlands and in certain parts of Scotland. Fresh sources of raw material were exploited. Capital increased in volume and a banking system came into being.

Coal was the fuel of the industrial revolution. Production doubled between 1750 and 1800, then increased twenty-fold in the nineteenth century. Pig-iron production rose four times between 1740 and 1788, quadrupled again during the next twenty years and increased more than thirty fold in the nineteenth century.

The inventors of the new machines – people like James Watt, James Hargreaves, Richard Arkwright, Samuel Crompton, Edward Cartwright – were as much products as producers of the new conditions. As conditions grew ripe, the great technical inventions came. A combination of rapidly expanding markets, a supply of available wage labour and prospects of profitable production set many minds to work on the problem of increasing the output of commodities and making labour more productive.

**Child labour**

Child labour was widespread during industrialisation, particularly in textiles. In the early 18th century it is estimated that around 35 per cent of ten-year-old working class boys were in the labour force, rising to 55 per cent (1791 to 1820) and then almost 60 per cent (1821 to 1850). Factory owners were looking for a cheap, malleable, fast-learning labour force and found them among the children of the urban workhouses, who were only lodged and fed, not paid.

Industrialisation allowed the population to increase rapidly. In 1700 Manchester, Salford and suburbs had perhaps a population of 40,000; by 1831, it was nearly 238,000. Other great manufacturing
centres underwent a similar swift expansion and often hamlets grew into populous towns. The estimated population of England and Wales in 1700 was about 5 million; in 1750, 6 million; in 1801, 9 million; in 1831, 14 million. In 1801, there were only 15 towns with a population of over 20,000 inhabitants; by 1891 there were 63.

Advances in farming such as an increase in the acreage of land under cultivation, crop rotation, machines for planting seeds, selective breeding of animals and better use of fertiliser expanded food production. Forced enclosures of land concentrated it into the hands of bigger landowners. That was blatant robbery but the process produced enough food for those flocking to growing industrial cities and meant smallholders became either hired labourers or worked in industry.

The balance of population shifted from the south and east to the north and midlands. Men and women born and bred in the countryside came to live crowded together as members of the labour force in factories. Mass production demanded popular consumption. Average incomes rose though the rich benefited more than the poor. It brought higher standards of comfort and made a wide range of consumer goods available such as matches, steel pens, envelopes, etc.

The increasing demands of industry meant that good communications were of fundamental importance in order to transport things and people. The difficulty of travel that was typical of medieval times onwards was ended. Better surfaced roads, canals, steam packets at sea and eventually railways transformed the economy and people’s lives. The village was no longer the world.

The transformation caused by the industrial revolution brought suffering as well as improvement, notably in the long working hours, overcrowded urban conditions and use of child labour. But life had been harsh in the preceding rural existence where individuals were left to fend largely for themselves. The industrial revolution concentrated attention on economic and social defects and brought collective solutions to the problems people faced whether through the formation of trade unions, a factory inspectorate or demands for health and urban planning.

Britain was for a while “the workshop of the world”. Latterly its rulers have destructively turned against manufacture. Now, wanting a future, the people and manufacturers must press for its return.
The destruction of the old Highland society took with it not only a class opposing the rise of the bourgeoisie – the feudal Scottish clan leaders – but also trampled on the rights and well-being of tenant farmers trying to eke out a living...

The Highland Clearances

WORKERS, JUNE 2011 ISSUE

The Highland Clearances offer an example of the way class contradictions are resolved by the tyranny of capitalism. The ending of the clan system helped pave the way for the rising industrial bourgeoisie to focus its attention on developing industry rather than defending its internal borders. In the process of enclosing vast tracts of land for sheep, the tenant farmers were forcibly removed and thousands transported.

A significant event in this process was the clashing of two armies, representing contrasting economic systems, at Culloden Moor in the Scottish Highlands in 1746. The Duke of Cumberland’s forces, acting for King George’s government, routed Prince Edward’s Jacobite army, last hope of the exiled Stuarts. In doing so they broke decisively the power of ancient, tribal clanship that had existed in Highland society, bringing into line the final area out of kilter with the rest of bourgeois Britain. After Culloden, the Highlands were refashioned and incorporated into a modern, capitalist environment.

The old order broken

Following Culloden, the ancient feudal rights and organisation of the clans were abolished. No exception was made: the Gordons, who had stayed loyal to King George, were treated no differently from the other clans. Even the most harmless symbols of clan loyalty were prohibited: wearing the kilt and playing the bagpipes were forbidden, a ban not lifted for 30 years. The intention that “a sheriff’s writ should run” in the Highlands as certainly as it ran everywhere else was achieved. Subsequently, all the Highlands observed the laws of the bourgeois parliament in Whitehall and lived on the same system as the whole of Britain.

Almost immediately, roads were constructed that made the demise of the highland clans complete. Between 850 to 1500 miles of roads were hastily built; in effect military, strategic roads that split the block of Highland clans into fragments. This extinction of the older society completed a process started long before, which alone made it possible for Britain in the next hundred years to become the workshop of the world. There were now no feudal lords to be conciliated or cajoled by the rising employing class.

Clearances and suppression
The Highland society, which had operated for generations, made no economic sense to modern bourgeois ways. Tenant farmers scratched a living off the rugged terrain, paying only small rents to chiefs whose wealth did not match that of their lowland contemporaries. By the end of the 18th century, the surviving chiefs and new landowners realised that serious profit could never be made that way.

In England the capitalist agrarian revolution was transforming agriculture. New farming techniques and mechanisation together with enclosure of formerly common land made farming more productive and profitable. These property upheavals had been going on in England since the 17th century in a much more gradual way. In the Highlands, however, these agrarian improvements had been delayed, partly because some landowners were too poor to put them into practice, partly due to the complex clan system that regulated and restrained Highland society.

With sudden rapidity the Highlands were driven through a series of changes that had taken hundreds of years in England. After 1746 harsh suppression and legal measures undermined and destroyed what remained of the clan system. Realising that their old ways were over, the clan chiefs transformed themselves into landlords who saw their clan retainers as an unprofitable expense. Landowners began to view their territory as a source of economic revenue instead of military men. More became absentee landlords and sought to convert their acres into cash.

The cry of “sheep devour men” was heard again. Landlords slowly disengaged themselves of all their followers who could not be used as shepherds or compelled to rent small farms. A first big clearance took
place on the Drummond estates in Perthshire in 1762. In 1782 the Glengarry estates, Inverness-shire, followed suit with the rent roll rising from £700 to £5,000 in 32 years. It is estimated that as many as 200,000 people were evicted in clearances by the turn of the century. These early clearances were for sheep; later ones were for deer. Between 1811 and 1821, some 15,000 tenants were removed from the 1.5 million acres of the Countess of Sutherland’s estates. Buildings were set alight to force the tenants to leave; many were herded onto ships. Many thousands of Highlanders left their homes and were forced to make new lives on the Scottish coastal plains, in the Scottish lowlands or across the oceans. Some were drawn to the burgeoning industrial revolution: for instance, many went to work at the New Lanark Mills that opened in Lanarkshire in 1784. The clearances continued until the mid-19th century, when most farmers had been cleared.

Cheviot sheep, bred for toughness and able to thrive in difficult weather conditions, could generate large incomes, perhaps more than ten times as much as cattle on the same land. But the tenant farmers had to be removed. Many, who retained their loyalty to the chiefs, complied. Those who objected found they had limitations imposed upon them.

**Landowner laws**

The law strongly favoured the landowners: the farmers had no leases and were merely tenants at will who could be evicted from their homes with only minimal notice. There were incidents of resistance. In some cases brutal methods were used to evict tenants. The armed forces were called upon by landowners in times of trouble.

As it transpired, landowners needed funds to carry out the clearances and the returns from sheep farming were only temporary. Indeed, by the end of the nineteenth century that industry had collapsed and the Highlands were drastically depopulated. Its economy still does not thrive to this day. The callous land grabs in the Scottish Highlands were not accidental but flowed from capitalism’s drive to displace and uproot all pre-existing economic forms, to remake everything in its own image, and crush everything getting in the way. We can learn from this and be warned!
The 200th anniversary of the building of the first iron bridge is upon us. It marked the culmination of 70 years work four miles up the valley at Coalbrookdale. The work was done by men denied opportunity for development of their skills elsewhere.

Abraham Darby innovated the process of smelting the iron. He staked his fortunes on the idea to use coke instead of charcoal and set up his iron furnaces on the banks of the Severn in 1709. The supply of relatively cheap iron was a major technical breakthrough. During the 18th century, iron gradually took over from wood for making ploughs, wheels, machines, pit props, and from stone for certain building purposes. Under the management of Darby's son and grandson, the Coalbrookdale works continued to play a key role. This was no accident, but stemmed from the traditions and beliefs of the Dissenters who made the revolution. Abraham Darby's father was a part-time farmer, part-time nailmaker and locksmith. This was normal in the Black Country—there were said to be 20,000 such smiths within a ten-mile radius of Dudley Castle. The overwhelming majority of these, masters and men alike, were Quakers. In the cities the power of the trade guilds was still strong, and because the guilds were closely linked to the Church of England, it was practically impossible for a Dissenter to find employment or to start a business in any established trade centre. It was Dissenters who pioneered new trades in hitherto rural areas, such as the Black Country. They had the area into a part of the Parliamentary side in the Civil War. Although Radicalism had lost much of the fire in its belly after the restoration of Charles II and the establishment of the Church of England, the spirit survived. Although business success rapidly divided craftsmen into master and men, nevertheless the master remained outside the constitution. Their children were sent to the Dissenting Academies, the first schools to teach the sciences. Meanwhile 50 miles away, the rural backwater of Coalbrookdale was being transformed into an industrial centre. In 1711 Newcomen invented a steam engine designed to solve the problem of drainage of mines, which allowed mining of over 20 ft depth to start. In 1722 the first iron cylinder was cast at Coalbrookdale. wrought iron was still the main form of iron, and in 1749 Abraham Darby II used coal successfully in its smelting, but it was still their skill in casting which paved the way. Out of the molten womb of these same furnaces were born improved machines with rotating motion which wound coal from company mines, powered forge hammer, rolling mill and cylinder boring machines: James Watt's separate condenser, Hoope's double cylinder winding engine.

From then on their fame derived from their connections with transport, paving the way for locomotives. In 1777 Abraham Darby III turned his back on the profits to be made in casting cannon to be used in the American War of Independence, and instead the original furnace was rebuilt and enlarged to cast the great ribs for the iron bridge. The parts, weighing 378 tons, were brought to the site by water, hoisted by rope, both halves simultaneously, and secured at the crown. This was the inspiration of Telford's bridges, the new length of span and economy over stone being vital to the transport revolution of the time. Although the suspension bridge soon took over (in 1826 the Menai Straits was built with a single span of 580 ft.), it was the use of iron that was the key. While not romanticising a picture of an industrial 'Merrie England', remember that these inventions did not derive, on the whole, from dreams of vast profits. Safe profits lay elsewhere. This minority of entrepreneurs believed in themselves, their righteousness, their importance to humanity. The attempts of Mrs Thatcher today to claim their reflected glory in the name of free enterprise, whilst destroying their work, would make these good Quakers turn in their graves.
Historic Notes

How the Times have changed

"The Times," was founded on January 1st, 1788 by John Walter, a coal merchant. He turned to journalism after bankruptcy in a printmaking venture and was described by a contemporary as "a dishonest and worthless man as I have ever seen." The chief source of the paper's income was "suppression fees," bribes paid by various interests, and not least the government, for selective coverage of news. It was his son, John Walter II, who, on taking over the editorship in 1802, began the tradition of more impartial collection of news for which "The Times" became famous. He maintained his own channel steamer, connected to a special train, ran his own pigeon service and courier post, and was one of the first to use the electric telegraph.

"The Times" account of the battle of Trafalgar was published days before the government, so prodigal of men's lives in its mismanagement of the war against Napoleon, even knew. "The Times" based its success on the addition of the most advanced printing systems of its time. The introduction of new machinery then, as now, always carried the danger of redundancy and worse conditions. It acquired its immense readership, because of its editors' devotion to a new ideal of factual reporting. Delane in 1841 took over the editorship from Barnes, champion of Electoral Reform in 1832, who gave the paper its nickname "The Thunderer." The philosophy of Delane, carrying on from his predecessor in an editorship which ended in 1877, was "to obtain the earliest and most exact intelligence of the events of the time and instantly byBalancing them reveal them the property of the nation.

John Walter III, who controlled the commercial side, had the business acumen not to interfere with his great editors. Contrast the paper under Thompson! At one point, the price ran affected first of all by Barnes and then by the rotary press which "The Times" was the first to adopt, had a circulation greater than that of all its competitors together. In the days before the International News agencies were inserted to filter the news on which today's press depends. "The Times" had the correspondents all over the world. Some individuals were so outstanding that they altered the course of history: like Russell, whose dispatches from the Crimea turned the tide of public opinion against the cruel and incompetently waged war. Although its reporting was too little and too late, "The Times" stirred the nation's conscience over the Highland Clearances. Nevertheless, the paper was always a capitalist enterprise and as such placed in 1894 from the Walters into the ownership of Northcliffe and then the honours, whose pro-fascist connections were notorious. Dawson was brought in to "extend the imperial effort" he carried through the years of Britain's imperial decline and the Depression. From 1923 to 1941, he used the paper as an instrument of personal policy. A friend of Hitler, he saw himself as the "Secretary-General of the Establishment." The paper declined in circulation. It was seen more than ever earlier as a means of personal enrichment of its owners and since they were incapable of running it successfully for this end, they sold it in 1966, an ailing paper, to Thompson. The ideal of journalism pursued to make facts the property of the nation, was always threatened by capitalism, and has now savagely, but we hope only temporarily, been suppressed by the paper's capitalist owners.
Capitalists and workers are engaged in a constant battle to exert influence and control over pay and conditions as the two classes contend in the sphere of work and industry. This is as true now as it was at the birth of our class several centuries ago...

**Unions in illegality: the Combination Acts of 1799 and 1800**

**WORKERS, SEPT 2010 ISSUE**

When the 18th century began, the guild system still applied. A guild comprised several kinds of "class": from the merchants (or large masters) to the apprentices, though power rested in the hands of the merchants. Therefore small masters and journeymen began to form unions of their own to protect themselves and their interests. Nevertheless they failed to obtain incorporation or the right to create combinations, effectively compelled to secrecy when it came to organisation.

During the 18th century, mercantilist capitalism gradually gave way to industrial capital. The old methods of wage fixing became ineffective. A rising class of capitalist employers prompted the emergence of defensive labour organisations, combinations of workmen whose cooperation was the only means at their disposal for survival and protection. The combinations, embryo trade unions, were mostly of skilled and semi-skilled workers, artisans and craftsmen. They aimed to achieve abolition of the worst evils of the capitalist system and some improvement of living conditions. More and more trade clubs or societies were seeking to fix wages and conditions by collective bargaining. Employers resisted these efforts, constantly petitioning the government to uphold ‘ancient law’ and suppress the ‘unlawful’ organisations of workers.

Class clashes were numerous: 383 disputes were recorded between 1717 and 1800, but most incidents went unrecorded or were settled without recourse to law or officialdom. Most of the disputes centred on wages. In 1766 the shipwrights of Exeter, for example, decided not to work for masters who were seeking to employ them at "less wages than have been from time immemorially paid to journeymen shipwrights" and imposing longer hours than had been "usual and customary".

Some combinations were powerful and effective, threatening their masters to "strike and turn out" if their demands were not satisfied. During the 18th century, many acts were passed outlawing combination in one specific trade or another, as for example in 1718 against wool combers and weavers. In the same period workers lost several laws affording limited protection in this or that industry.

**Repressive**

Although the launch of the proceedings remained in the hands of the employers, the Combination Acts brought the government into a more repressive role against trade unionism because of fears that it would spread to the newly industrialised regions, especially the Midlands and the North, a goal only partially achieved.
The outbreak of war against revolutionary France intensified these fears because it was thought that revolutionary ideas would spread among the working class and that the unions would become centres of political agitation.

So at the end of the century, the government gave the “masters” complete control of their workers. As the Industrial Revolution in Britain got underway, all the legal restraints on workers in particular industries were standardised into a general law for the whole of industry. All the regulations and laws that recognised a worker as a person with rights were withdrawn or became inoperative. Initially, the act against illegal oaths was used to break up the existing trade unions. Then, the Combination Acts of 1799 and 1800, originally specific to the millwrights, were turned into a general prohibition and outlawing of trade unionism.

The acts forbade any combinations of workers to act together to improve their wages, reduce working hours or otherwise change their conditions of labour, with any violation punishable by three months imprisonment, or two months of hard labour. Magistrates, who were usually agreeable to the employers, passed sentence. It was the first time that penalties were prescribed for workmen as a class.

**Ingenuity**

With trade union organisations declared illegal, workers hoodwinked their opponents by reappearing as mutual benefit associations or similar bodies. (There are no limits to human ingenuity.) A large number of secret organisations carried on the fight against the employers and spurred the workers into resistance.

Where the government partially managed to constrain trade union development and activity, it did so more as intimidation than through undertaking prosecutions. Unions operated in a context of risk rather than of full and constant constraint. Over twenty-five years of illegality, the Combination Acts did not stop workers’ organisation nor were they totally enforced.

**Convicted**

Thousands of journeymen were convicted under these Acts, whereas no one employer was. The Times Compositors Union was suppressed in 1810 after they asked for a rise in their wages. Workers employed in the new factories and mines were constantly persecuted and often forced to combine secretly, for instance the iron founders in southern Wales. Resentment grew into opposition, most notably in the Luddite rebellions of 1811 and 1813 (to be featured in a forthcoming ‘Historic Notes’).

Introduced in wartime, the acts were not repealed with the return of peace in 1815. Repeal came in 1824, celebrated by an outburst of strikes. In 1825 a less stringent law was put in their place.

The temper of young industrial capitalism was harsh. Workers were refused education, political rights and any voice in their conditions of employment but they did not succumb and found ways to make progress.
The French Revolution: A Turning Point in Time

The French Revolution is considered one of the most significant events in world history. The storming of the Bastille on July 14, 1789, marked the beginning of a period of radical change that transformed France and influenced the course of European and world history. The French Revolution was not only a moment of political upheaval but also a period of cultural and intellectual shifts.

The Revolution was a result of social, economic, and political factors. France was facing financial crises, and the aristocracy was seen as腐化 and out of touch with the common people. The social hierarchy was top-heavy with nobility, and there was a growing middle class interested in political and social change. The Enlightenment ideas of liberty, equality, and fraternity were also influential.

The storming of the Bastille on July 14, 1789, was a pivotal event in the Revolution. It symbolized the end of the absolute monarchy and the beginning of a new era of republican government. The revolutionaries sought to create a society based on liberty, equality, and fraternity, and the Revolution served as a catalyst for these ideals.

The Revolution brought about significant changes, including the abolition of feudalism, the creation of a democratic system of government, and the establishment of a national identity. However, it was also marked by violence, with the Reign of Terror lasting from 1793 to 1794. The Revolution ended with the death of Louis XVI and the execution of Marie Antoinette, and it left a legacy of radical change and political uncertainty.

In conclusion, the French Revolution was a turning point in history, marking a transition from feudalism to modernity. It was a period of great upheaval, but it also paved the way for new ideas and institutions that continue to shape the world today.
French Revolution - Struggle Between Classes Part 2.

On 20 November, 1792, the discovery in castle walls of arms and papers that proved Louis XVI had had secret negotiations with foreign envoys sealed his fate. On 20 November, 1792, the Convention attempted to prevent it. There was no revolution. The Girondins were attacked as traitors to the nation; but the Convention had been a failure. The Reign of Terror was a failure. The battle between the Girondins and Montagnards brought the Convention to a division and without. Some of the Girondins (the Marat or Plain) opposed the guillotine; others were for the guillotine at the Gironde when they were against the King.

The Terror was a failure. The Reign of Terror was a failure. The path to the guillotine with the guillotine.

Napoleon Bonaparte led successful revolution in Haiti, inspired by 1789.

The Girondins were the dominant force, yet the Montagnards eventually came to the fore. The Girondins printed paper money, a feature of their inflationary policy. Thus rather than well their grain and save the paper money, the farmers protested to board the grain. Economic crisis and food crisis was the result.
Multiculturalism: reactionary from roots to fruit

When he was asked what the legacy of the French Revolution was, it is said that Chou Fin-kei, the grey Chiang Kai-shek, replied: "I don't know, it is too soon to say!"

Chou was well aware that revolutionaries and ideas that help shape them can have the most profound and strangest consequences. The French Revolution swept two ideas to the forefront of man's mind. In revolt against the feudal view of society obsessed with rigid orders of class, rank and status, the revolutionaries proclaimed the "universal" brotherhood of man. And, against those who declared that the existing order of things is preordained and fixed for all time, they argued that man can reshape his own society according to a rational programme. Revolutionaries have always harnessed these ideas. But, in so doing, insist that any attempt by people to order the economic affairs of society is doomed to failure. The markets must be "free"; class must rule.

Interestingly, a new book by French philosopher Alain Finkielkraut reflects a growing need to declare the ideals of the French Revolution. And, significantly, his book, which appeared for the first time in English last year, was the main theme coming as much from the "left" as the "right".

The French Revolution, Finkielkraut points out, created its own "ironic, counter-revolutionary". In the face of the universal brotherhood of man brought together by reason, the GermanRomantics argued that the culture and spirit of that particular nation was unique. And, anticipating Marx's idea that being determines consciousness, and that ideas reflect this unspoken, different, even non-conscious and out thoughts reflect this uniqueness, says Finkielkraut: "They repudiated universalist feelings and glorified national particularism. A train of thought picked up and used by Adolf Hitler."

Now, in one of the stranger ironies of history, the same ideas are being revived, but this time by the "multiculturalists". The multiculturalists increase reason through their anti-racism, says Finkielkraut. "With the subversion of the cultural for the biological conception of collectivity, racism has not been abolished; it has simply returned to its starting point."

The word "culture", he continues, has been seized by the multiculturalists to serve as a standard to "divide the human race into collective, incommensurate and irreducible entities". And while reproaching the values of "toleration" between cultures, they breed the opposite. That whole theory assumes that one "culture" cannot understand or accept another; they live in separateness and division. "They carry notions of difference to the extreme, visiting any community of nations or cultures between men." Finkielkraut traces what the essence of the multiculturalists has been to explain a fault to reject to other people what had been stolen or destroyed by Western imperialism. In reply to imperialists who praised the "purity" of their culture, the multiculturalists replied that white cultures may be different, they are equal.

But by insisting that all cultures are "equal", the multiculturalists who like to think of themselves as radical and progressive, end up defending the indefensible - cultures that are narrow, reactionary and oppressive. Cultures, for instance, that cast out barren women where the witness of one man counts for two women. Such a train of thought goes further than the absurdity of bedding people who attack such "laws" as "racist" or "imperialist". It is an attack on thought itself, charges Finkielkraut. Hence the title of his book, "The Undoing of Thought".

These are the same people, he points out, who argue that man's thinking cannot transcende his cultural background. It is quite a common play nowadays, to use the line of argument that "you cannot understand this question because you are white, or because you are a man". But, says Finkielkraut, that is a rejection of thought and reason. I no longer think because I am; my "culture" or race merely "think in".

When Shakespeare is dismissed at a "dead, white, male", when all cultural creations are declared to be of equal validity (when, as he puts it, a pair of boots is declared equal with Shakespeare), there can be nothing to aspire to, no purpose in intellectual or moral effort, no concept of progress.

Capitalism, Finkielkraut points out, has already settled on this idea. In its drive to turn all human creations into commodities, it has blotted out the line between culture and "entertainment" that can be marketed, bought, sold and leased as "all culture at once".

Non thought

But, he adds, when this phony egalitarianism equates the highest intellectual activities with bawdy or rock and roll, "non-thought", as he calls it, has "donned the same label (i.e. culture) and enjoyed the same status at thought itself". "This is the first time that those who in the name of high culture, dare to call this non-thought by its name are dismissed as racism and reactionaries." "When hatred of culture becomes itself a part of culture, the life of the mind becomes one meaning."

Finkielkraut himself does not suggest many solutions. His own approach remains weak after 250 years, and that is simply to praise the values of the Enlightenment, of liberty and reason. But he avoids the question of what is "liberty", or how to reason with the unreasonable.

But the strength of his book is in his acute analysis. The multiculturalists and the anti-racists are still regarded today as being "left wing". But Finkielkraut shows how the entire thinking, from its roots to its fruit, is deeply reactionary.

One year on: celebrating Bastille Day. Two hundred years later the ideals of brotherhood and reason are washed away by "left" as well as the right.
The end of the 18th century saw a new system that encouraged employers to pay below-subsistence wages. It was called after an area in Berkshire...

1795: The road to Speenhamland

In 1597 the English parliament ruled that rogues and vagabonds (note the emotive terms) should be sent back to their parishes for punishment and forced labour. The Poor Law Acts of 1598 and 1601 inaugurated a system of poor relief based on parish responsibility and parish rates which was to last until 1834.

The system encouraged Justices of the Peace (usually local employers) to fix parish wages as low as possible, as workers could be kept alive by having their wages topped up by the rates. Money for parish poor relief was raised by collecting a rate, based on the estimated value of each property, and collected by the parish constable and "overseers of the poor".

In 1637 in John Milton's village of Horton, a local mill-owner cost parish ratepayers £7 5s (£7.25p) a week to supplement the wages of
his workers. (Little wonder that ratepayers often opposed new industries setting up in the parish.)

Later, the 1662 Settlement Laws restricted the parish obligation to look after persons who had a permanent settlement; anyone else seeking assistance had to return to the place where they were born.

In 1723 the Workhouse Test Act made the poor enter workhouses in order to obtain relief. Between 1601 and 1750 a vast, cumbersome system of poor law was created, mainly serving the interests of landowners in rural society.

**The Speenhamland System**

In the second half of the 18th century England’s economy and society began to be transformed. There was population growth, industrialisation requiring greater mobility of labour, and mass enclosures of land. The earlier system of poor law continued, but was amended to respond to the new conditions.

In 1782 Gilbert’s Act excluded the “able-bodied poor” from the workhouse and forced parishes to provide either work or “outdoor relief” for them. It also permitted parishes to build workhouses. "Indoor relief" (in workhouses) was confined specifically to the old, sick or dependent children.

Britain was at war with revolutionary France from 1793 until 1815. Grain imports from Europe stopped, and poor harvests in 1795-6 meant grain prices shot up. Many at the time also blamed middlemen and hoarders for the rises. Food riots marked the spring of 1795. The ruling class feared that working people might be tempted to emulate the French, and revolt. Acute social and economic distress spread throughout the rural south of England, placing strains on the poor law system.

In May 1795, magistrates in Berkshire (one of the counties most affected by enclosure) met in Speenhamland and observed, “The present state of the poor does require further assistance than has been generally given them.” Seeking to retain control over the labourers and prevent disturbances, they established a minimum level a family needed to survive and decided to use the poor rate to make up the pay of those who found themselves below the level.

Their proposed basis for “outdoor relief” was that “when the gallon loaf (8lb 11oz) shall cost one shilling, then every poor and industrious man shall have for his own support three shillings [15p] weekly either produced by his own or his family’s labour or an allowance for the poor rates and for the support of his family one shilling and sixpence”. For every penny that the loaf rose above one shilling they reckoned that a man would need three pence for himself and one penny for each member of his family. This system spread rapidly and was soon adopted or modified in many other counties experiencing social distress.
“Speenhamland” was not created to support the unemployed or eradicate poverty. It aimed to provide a (mainly rural) labour force at low direct cost to employers, using local taxation (“poor rates”) as subsidies to supplement the poverty wages of farm workers.

The system allowed employers, including farmers and the nascent industrialists of the town, to pay below subsistence wages, because the parish would make up the difference and keep their workers alive. Workers’ low incomes went unchanged. Speenhamland was a tactic to institutionalise poverty without letting it reach chronic heights or outright malnutrition.

The impact of paying the poor rate fell on the landowners of the parish concerned. It complicated the 1601 Elizabethan Poor Law because it let “working paupers” draw on the poor rates. The Berkshire magistrates had also proposed another option – that farmers and other employers should increase the wages of their employees. But that idea met with little response.

Under the Speenhamland System ratepayers often found themselves subsidising the owners of large estates who paid poor wages. It was not unknown for landowners to demolish empty houses in order to reduce the population on their lands and also to prevent the return of those who had left. At the same time, they would employ labourers from neighbouring parishes. These people could be laid off without warning but would not increase the rates in the parish where they worked.

During the 20 years after the end of the Napoleonic Wars in 1815, attitudes to the poor began to change and the system was criticised by landed ratepayers as being expensive. Others said it impeded mobility of labour. It encouraged farmers to pay low wages and to lay off workmen in winter and re-employ them in spring and summer, as it enabled them, just, to survive.

**Forced labour**

A Royal Commission in 1834 called for the abolition of “outdoor” rate relief and recommended the maintenance of workhouse inmates at a level below that of the lowest paid workers – a crude piece of intimidation to everyone. The resulting 1834 Poor Law Amendment Act created a system of “indoor” relief and forced labour in a rapidly expanded system of hated workhouses. But that’s another tale.

Systems such as working tax credit and housing benefit, and the introduction of universal credits, are basically a re-enactment of the Speenhamland principle. They are another version of institutionalised poverty, a modern attempt to divert our class from trade union struggle for wages by offering paltry handouts taken from our class’s taxes (see article in May 2013 issue of Workers at www.workers.org.uk). ■
In 1797 the fortunes of the British ruling class seemed to be waning; after 4 years of war Napoleon was triumphant over Europe. Belfort and Lille were on the point of rebellion and there was a run on the pound and the Bank of England. But more terrifying to the Establishment was the mutiny of the sailors at Nore and Spithead.

There was discontent with food, pay, accommodation, conditions of service, punishments, leave and treatment of the sick and wounded. In a small ship 186 feet long and 52 feet wide, 1600 had to live, crowded together with only 14 inches space allowed between each man. Throughout the war press gangs raided towns, small towns and villages, knocking on the head any man they met or snatching him forcibly from his home. Free fights and riots from the victim did not stop the King's Men. Sailors returning from 3-year voyages even before they could draw their pay, were sold and sent to war-ships for the duration. The prisoners and poor houses were secured. It resembles the 'bomb-out' of the First World War by the army (the term illustrating the concept of the establishment for ordinary men, a concept which seems to be shared by a new breed of 'narcissistic-leni­​sions'.)

Starved, half-frozen in leaky ships, these conscripts plus the innocents who had accepted bounties in the hope of paying their debts, began to articulate their grievances. These were many. For 160 years, pay had not increased; it was 6 shillings a week for an able-bodied seaman and 4 shillings and 6 pence for an ordinary seaman. A sailor was lucky if he got half his pay allowing payment into the Chatham Chest for the disabled, paying up to 2 months pay to a profiteering purser for his 'ships', his trade. His pay was stopped if he was in sick-bay even with wounds received in battle, and his pay was always in arrears from 2 to 10 years.

The food was execrable—wretched biscuits, years-old meat as hard as mahogany and porridge so foul that even the pig which were carried aboard refused it.

Water was flavoured with vinegar to hide the bitter taste, so sour water was rife. To fall sick or wounded at sea was a death warrant and with little or no medical attention bleeding and gunshots caused more deaths than wounds. Finally wounded men were thrown alive overboard on the plea that they would die anyway. No shore leave was allowed lest the sailors did not return. All these ill's were overshadowed by the punishments, flogging which took the flesh off a man's back for the most trivial offence, up to 360 strokes. In the latter event a felon was given the alternative of hanging as a more merciful and just as sure a death.

Letters were sent to the Admiralty by sailors. 'We are sick of life, about so that we do not know what to do. Every man in her would sooner be at it like a tragic hero than remain any longer in her.' If we hope your Lordships will be kind to us and grant a new command for the Captain is one of the most barbarous and inhuman officers that ever a crew of unfortunate men had to endure. A man, a hideous misfortune, rush to the 'Char­lotte', secretly and for months. Doubt they were mislead to the Thames. But the 'whistle' seems to be shared.

The Admiralty ordered removal of all beauty and bounties from the estuary making the Thames unnavi­­gable. Some of the ships manned by the crews ran aground, some were re-taken by officers. On June 12 the delegates decided that united action was no longer possible and 'it was every ship for itself'. The mutiny was over. One delegate committed suicide, others disappeared to Europe but the leader Parker, allowed himself to be taken and hanged that he receive all the punishment and that no other should receive it. On June 19 he was hanged from the yards of the 'Sandwich'. 39 of his fellows were hanged. Nine were flogged, one receiving 385 lashes, and 29 imprisoned.

Reforms were made afterwards, but not enough for there was another mutiny, this time at Falmouth in 1901. The greatest gain of all was, however, that never again could the rulers of British rest in complacency, sure of the safety of 'The Wooden Walls of England'.
Deemed not respectable enough by the labour movement’s later historians – they dismissed “Luddites” from their accounts...

The early 1800s: national workers’ organisation arrives

WORKERS, SEP 2013 ISSUE

It was during the first half of the 1800s that a nationally organised working class first emerged throughout Britain with centres in for example Sheffield, Birmingham, Leeds, Nottingham, Glasgow and the West Country.

The early vanguard were the clothing workers, known as “croppers”, who had become strong enough to enforce a closed shop in many of the workshops in Wiltshire and Yorkshire. Parliament by 1806 had been warned that a croppers system “exists more in general consent to the few simple rules of their union”. Until then croppers had evaded all chance of conviction for “combination”. They had formed themselves into a “club” and had accumulated over £1000 to provide for their members in the event of sickness preventing them from being able to work.

The croppers were also in correspondence with the cotton weavers, who through combination had formed an impressive nationwide union that existed from 1809 to 1812. With its centre in Glasgow it had strongholds nationally including Manchester and throughout Lancashire, Cumbria, Scotland, and Carlisle.
Strike

By 1811 the weavers could raise 40,000 signatures in Manchester, 30,000 in Scotland and 7,000 in Bolton. A disciplined and well supported weavers’ strike from Aberdeen to Carlisle then took place in 1812 with the aim of securing a minimum wage. The strike was eventually broken when the Glasgow leaders were arrested and jailed, with sentences ranging from four to eighteen months. The ruling class feared Britain was on a direct road to an open insurrection, so unions had to be broken.

Responding to what had happened to the Glasgow weavers, Luddism, which had been first deployed in Wiltshire in 1802, then took up the baton. It moved out from the grievance of the croppers to more general revolutionary aims among weavers, colliers and cotton spinners. “It is a movement of the people’s own” was how William Cobbett, a political commentator of the day, described it.

The Luddites are normally portrayed as a lunatic irresponsible fringe that stood in the way of progress by trying to wreck factory machinery. But Luddite opposition to machinery was far from unthinking. Along with machine breaking they made proposals for the gradual introduction of mechanisation, with alternative employment to be found for displaced workers, or by a tax of 6d. per yard upon cloth dressed by machinery, to be used as a fund for the unemployed seeking work. All of the proposals were rejected by the employers.

The focus in portraying Luddites simply as machine breakers was initially founded by Fabian historians (the Hammonds and the Webbs) writing in the late 1890s and early 1900s. The Fabians took it upon themselves to pioneer the written historical study of the early labour movement. Their aim was to portray the period 1800 to 1850 in the narrow context of the subsequent Parliamentary Reform Acts used to widen the vote from the 1860s onwards and to link this to the growth of the Labour Party during the early 1900s. They did not see Luddites as satisfactory forerunners of the “Labour movement”. So Luddites merited neither sympathy nor close attention.

Liberal and conservative historians decided among themselves during the early 1900s that “history” would deal fairly with the Tolpuddle Martyrs but the men executed for Luddism between 1812 to 1819 should be forgotten – or, if remembered, thought of as simpletons or people tainted with criminal folly. The Fabian view persists to this day in many quarters. But the facts tell a different story.

Politics

Rather than simpletons “Luddites and Politics were closely connected” shouted Thomas Savage in 1817 just before he and five other Luddites were executed at Leicester. In November 1816, 14 Luddites went to the scaffold in York defiantly singing “Behold the Saviour of
Mankind”. Asked whether the 14 should all be hung simultaneously on a single beam the presiding judge replied, “Well no, sir, I consider they would hang more comfortably on two.” Their relatives were not allowed to bury the bodies.

A similar thing happened in Nottingham when 3,000 mourners went to the funeral after the hanging of Jem Towle, a leading Luddite – but magistrates prevented the funeral service being read. A friend later said, “It did not signify to Jem, for he wanted no Parsons about him.”

The Luddites, from 1812 to 1819, were the first to launch the agitations which led to the 10-hour movement during the 1840s. It was they who said that if a new machine were to be introduced the extra value generated should mean workers do fewer hours for the same or more pay or be redeployed. In particular they argued that child labour should be curtailed in factories as part of negotiating the introduction of new machinery. In “polite circles” at the time, factory child labour was considered “busy, industrious and useful”.

The employing class, its government and its snivelling apologists hated the Luddites so much because of their thought-through views on political economy. It was these ideas, not the cowardly gradualism encouraged by the Fabians, that eventually led to self-confident British trade unionism. In keeping with the recent victory over Napoleon and his designs on Europe, the call by workers in 1816 was “Ludds do your duty well. It’s a Waterloo job, by God.”

The Luddites were renowned for their organisational skills, and through their transition towards collective bargaining after 1819 applied those skills to developing the British trade union movement. Many of them for the rest of their lives were involved with the social movements that followed. It was Marx and Engels who keenly identified in the passing of the 10-hour bill in 1847 that “for the first time in broad daylight” the political economy of the working class was in the ascendancy.

In 1834 the Whig Ministry, shortly after widening the vote to include the new factory owners, sanctioned the transportation of the labourers from Tolpuddle for the insolence of trade unionism, which by now was already firmly rooted elsewhere. The sour fruits of Parliamentary Reform had been anticipated by comments in the Poor Man’s Guardian by a worker from Macclesfield on 10 December 1831. He reckoned that “it mattered not to him whether he was governed by a boroughmonger, or a whoremonger, or a cheesemonger; if the system of monopoly and corruption was still to be upheld”. What is most revealing from this period is the way British working people in the teeth of a ruthless enemy created a political force without negative and petty regional division between the North and South of our country.
Historic Notes

Developing capitalism integrated Britain

SCOTTS and English in the course of time achieved a national British unity, or Devon plantation of the government of Scot-land and England. While Henry VIII dissolved the monasteries and disestablished the Church, the process to sections of the bourgeoisie to gain its allegiance, so James IV and V (1513 - 1519) sold to landlords the right to inherited possessions. The sufferers these monasteries imposed on their people in the abolition of the Crown in England (1531, Solway Moss 1542, Tynie 1547), the increased taxation imposed by the alliance with the Pope and France were followed by the independence of Mary Queen of Scots. The fruit lessedly tried to impose Catholicism and French alliance on a population who by now, as in 1560, were for Reform, and demanded closer trading ties with England.

City dwellers rebelled and took over monasteries by force. John Knox of the Presbyterians, with other things, education for all and abolition of the Church hierarchy, had spread. The idea of unity with England could not be realised. The basis of the system was fixed by James VI of Scotland, after a troubled regency, was the satisfaction of the great land-owners. James' accession to the English throne in 1603 signifies the beginning of an era when the change in the direction and sectarian movements of dissension, and sectarian movements of dissent, and Reform on both sides of the border gradually found their way to London for his due execution.

As the waves of evictions of the previous 10 years - and crested into pestens towards the urban hovels of Glasgow or Edinburgh. Millstone of sheep now grazed on the valley the people had cultivated. The people died, while the sheep lived on for a noble and profit. A nascent capitalism's policy, that as now, to Scotland and Britain as a whole, was destruction of a self-sufficient economy - of food, of cattle, and of the people. The cattle on the land emptied of livestock, as far as practicable, and also the most delicate part of her person. Bad poor Scots been wandering on the banks of the Danube and Black Sea, I could understand it, but in Christian Scotland to be brutalised, and that was a sin of it without a blush of shame.

Today we have the legislative force of a Scottish Assembly. So in 1805, the Scots were offered the great Reform Act, which left vir­

Great Britain of the Scotts, of the struggles of Mary Queen of Scots sold proposals. The Solway Leagues and Covenant of 1643, Scots and English fought together for Parliament in the Civil War. The Scots, to whom the King in extremity surrendered, handed him over to London for his due execution.

In 1660, the Covenanters ferocity was a prototype of the English agents for the revolution, its population, in spite of emigration and the destruction of the Clearances, soaring from one million to 4 million in 1600. The iron furnaces of James Beaumont Nシーン, burning Scottish milled coal provided the steel for the Clydebridge, and the success of great modern engineers, from Robert Hopper onwards. Advances in technology and industry completed the integration of the economics of the people of Scotland and England.

The working class of Scotland and England fought a single British capitalist enemy. The English Catholic Emancipation Act was accompanied in Scotland by judicial decrees against trade unions. The Reform Act in 1832 was effective on both sides of the Border. With the skilled workers, there began the long struggle for the establishment of a national and now international political party in Scotland. The rise of the working class called against a national and now international political party in Scotland.

The economic misery of Britain can be curbed by the government, by splitting the country up into sections. It has always been a capitalist strategy to segregate and divide, in the modern jargon, "devolve." A devolved area allows the people to be kept up on more easily.

The policy of isolation and back­wardness forced on the Highlanders at the close of the last century shows just how profitable and in­humans the constant capitalist strategy of devolution is.

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Wilberforce's opposition to the slave trade was founded on the same basis as his hatred of trade unions, free speech, habeas corpus and universal suffrage: the interests of capitalism...

**William Wilberforce: enemy of the working class**

**WORKERS, JULY 2007 ISSUE**

Far too much credit for the abolition of slavery is given to William Wilberforce, one of history's biggest hypocrites and reactionaries. It was only by their own action that the slaves were freed.

During the 18th century, Britain became the slave carrier for the sugar planters of France and Spain, her rivals. The sugar colonies were far more important to France than to Britain. St Domingue (present-day Haiti), controlled by the French, was more fertile than the British West Indies (which included Jamaica), where the soil was becoming exhausted. The sugar from St. Domingue cost a fifth less and its exports and profit rates were twice that of Jamaica. By 1789, its sugar production was a third more than that of all Britain's West Indies colonies.

Prime Minister William Pitt raged that the slave trade, "instead of being very advantageous to Great Britain, is the most destructive that can well be imagined to her interests." To ruin St Domingue, he urged his friend William Wilberforce to campaign against the slave trade: the abolitionist movement was created to serve British state interests.

The British ruling class's frenzied reaction to the French revolution of 1789 intensified the antagonism with France, as she became not just a rival but also a political alternative. In 1791, St Domingue's slave-owners offered to leave French rule and put themselves under British rule, to keep their slaves. In 1793, Pitt accepted their offer and agreed, blocking abolition for the next 14 years.

When St Domingue's slaves rebelled against Pitt's betrayal, he sent hundreds of thousands of troops to try to crush them, in a disastrous and futile war. 50,000 British soldiers died, 50,000 were permanently invalided. When St Domingue's revolutionary government ended slavery and declared independence from France in 1804, the British ruling class did not need the slave trade any more and so could abolish it in 1807.
Toldpuddle: time for a rally against Wilberforce? He piloted through Parliament the anti-union Combination Acts, which made all unions illegal.

Reactionary in Britain

In Britain, Wilberforce was the foremost apologist and champion of every act of tyranny, from the employment of Oliver the Spy and the illegal detention of poor prisoners in Coldbaths Fields jail to the Peterloo massacre. Wilberforce supported the 1794 Habeas Corpus Suspension Act, which let the government imprison people against whom it had no evidence at all. Habeas Corpus was suspended until 1802. Across Britain, trade union members, journalists and publishers were arrested and detained.

Wilberforce backed a series of Acts between 1795 and 1799 to suppress sedition, used to curb freedom of speech, assembly and organisation. Consequently, the state prevented meetings of the Literary Society of Manchester, the Academical Society of Oxford, and even of a mineralogical society, on the grounds that the study of mineralogy could lead to atheism. He backed the Tory government's Six Acts of 1819, including the Blasphemous and Seditious Libel Act, known as the Gagging Act.

In 1794 he backed the prosecution of twelve members of the London Corresponding Society for high treason. Their crime was to advocate universal suffrage. When a jury acquitted the defendants, he backed the government's decision to arrest 65 leading members of the society and imprison them without trial for two years. No wonder that it was said of Wilberforce, "he never favoured the liberty of any white man in all his life."
Wilberforce wrote that Christianity "renders the inequalities of the social scale less galling to the lower orders, whom also she instructs in their turn to be diligent, humble, patient: reminding them that their more lowly path has been allotted to them by the hand of God; that it is their part faithfully to discharge its duties, and contentedly to bear its inconveniences." William Cobbett called him the prince of hypocrites, who praised the benefits of poverty from a comfortable distance.

The bishops and baronets of the Proclamation Society (as Wilberforce's Society for the Suppression of Vice was earlier called) prosecuted the impoverished publisher of Tom Paine's The Age of Reason. In 1801 and 1802, it launched 623 successful prosecutions for breaking the Sabbath laws. Pitt's government declared The Rights of Man seditious and prosecuted those who published and sold copies of Paine's book.

Censorship
The government, with Wilberforce's support, imposed censorship, launching 42 prosecutions of publishers, editors and writers between 1809 and 1812. It became a criminal offence to write that the Prince of Wales was fat (he was), or to report that Foreign Secretary Lord Castlereagh had ordered the flogging of Irish peasants (he had).

Wilberforce also backed persecution of the whole working class. He proposed a general Combination Act, calling combinations – trade unions – "a general disease in our society". The Pitt government's acts of 1799 and 1800 were the severest of their kind ever enacted in Britain. They made all unions illegal as such, whether conspiracy, restraint of trade or the like could be proved against them or not.

In theory, the acts applied to employers as well as to workers, but workers were prosecuted by the thousand, never a single employer. In 1834, a year after the emancipation of the slaves, the penalty for trade union activity was still transportation for life.

In sum, as his biographer the last Lord Birkenhead wrote approvingly, Wilberforce "was a Tory through and through; he never shed the political ideas he had inherited from Pitt and his religion intensified his conservatism."
The British Empire, still so often praised for its shaping of world history over the last few centuries, was at root a slave empire...

Abolition? What abolition?

WORKERS, MAY 2007 ISSUE

The British Empire, still so often praised for its shaping of world history over the last few centuries, was at root a slave empire, held together by slave-trading between slave colonies, a world system mirroring only more grotesquely its domestic system of wage slavery. Between 1660 and 1807, British-owned ships carried 3.5 million Africans, 40,000 a year, across the Atlantic – more than any other country. British property owners were the world's chief slavers.

A part of Britain's ruling class, not the nation, owned the slave ships, the slaves and the plantations. British workers did not control their own labour power, never mind own other people. William Cobbett noted that in 1832, "white men are sold, by the week and the month all over England. Do you call such men free, on account of the colour of their skin?" Black chattel slavery and white wage slavery were parts of the same system.

Wage slaves at home
By the 19th century the more powerful part of Britain's ruling class were those who exploited wage slaves at home. They led the abolitionist movement, ignoring the eighteen-hour days worked by children in Bradford's mills. They backed the laws that attacked trade unions and suspended Habeas Corpus. They funded their foreign philanthropy by increasing the exploitation of their white slaves at home. The trade unionist Oates said, "The great emancipators of negro slaves were the great drivers of white slaves. The reason was obvious. The labour of the black slaves was the property of others. The labour of the white slaves they considered their own." As the Derbyshire Courier noted, "We make laws to provide protection to the Negro: let us not be less just to the children of England."

Bronterre O'Brien wrote, "What are called the working classes are the slave populations of the civilized countries." From birth, workers were mortgaged to the owners of capital and land, forced into wage slavery. Britain's property owners gained far more profit from their 16 million wage slaves than from their million chattel slaves. O'Brien again, "We pronounce there to be more slavery in England than in the West Indies ... because there is more unrequited labour in England."
The empire was based on exploiting wage slaves and used the free movement of goods, capital and labour to extend its exploitation. The wars of the 17th, 18th and 19th centuries were fought to keep, or add to, Britain's imperial and slave-trading conquests. For example, in the 1790s, British slave owners united with French slave owners to try to defeat Haiti's revolution. The government sent more soldiers to the West Indies, and lost more, than it had when trying to crush America's independence. Of the 89,000 sent, 45,000 died, as did 19,000 sailors. France lost 50,000 dead. Haiti's freed slaves defeated the armies of the two greatest slaver powers, but the British forces laid waste to the island, destroying almost all its sugar plantations.

By 1807 the slave trade was becoming less profitable: it employed only one in 24 of Liverpool's trading ships and the West Indies sugar industry was dying. All the plantations were running at a loss; many had been abandoned. Two-thirds of the slaves carried in British ships were bought by Britain's imperial rivals France and Spain, to grow sugar which undercut West Indies-grown sugar on the vital Continental market. All these factors opened the way to the Abolition of the Slave Trade Act; from 1 May 1807, no more slave ships sailed from Britain.

But the government let the British Army and the Royal Navy force slaves into unpaid military service and buy and sell slaves until 1812, breaking its own law. The office of Jamaica's Governor General wrote in August 1811, "I am commanded by the Commander of the Forces to direct that you will go on purchasing Negroes for the Kings Service after you have completed your own regiment. The men so purchased are only to receive rations and slop clothing, no pay is to be issued to them until they are further disposed of."

Further, in 1814, Foreign Secretary Lord Castlereagh agreed that Bourbon France could resume slave trading to restock her colonies and to resupply Britain's West Indies plantations. As Lord Grenville said, "We receive a partial contract at the Congress of Vienna by which the British Crown has sanctioned and guaranteed the slave trade."

Slavery lost its former importance to the metropolitan economy. The slave colonies took an ever-smaller share of Britain's exports. From 1820 the slump in the West Indies grew worse and worse. In 1832, an official wrote that the West Indies system "is becoming so unprofitable when compared with the expense that for this reason only it must at no distant time be nearly abandoned."

Revolts at home
The years 1830-32 also saw the Swing Rising in Britain, revolution in France, a major slave revolt in Jamaica and the parliamentary Reform Act. All led to the 1833 Slave Emancipation Act, which freed the 540,000 slaves in the British West Indies. Parliament gave the planters £20 million (£1 billion in today's money) as compensation for the loss of their slaves. The working class paid the money in tax, though they pointed out that the Church should have paid, as it owned so many slaves itself and as its priests justified the slavery of both black and white, at home and abroad. The Empire then imposed
another form of servitude on the "freed" slaves of the West Indies – compulsory six-year "apprenticeships". Later in the century, it used indentured labour, with workers forcibly imported from India.

Slavery had been profitable in the 18th century; abolition was even more profitable in the 19th. The effort to "stop the foreign slave trade" was designed to damage rival empires and to protect the West Indies planters, now denied annual slave imports, from competition by sugar producers Cuba and Brazil, still reliant on buying slaves. The suppression of the slave trade on Africa's West and East coasts brought ever-closer control of West and East Africa, at first by private companies like the British East Africa Company, later by the Empire itself. Abolition was a weapon to expand the empire.

Throughout the century, the Empire continued to steal people, land and resources from Africa, reinforcing slavery there and killing millions of African people. The Empire continued to contribute to and profit from the slave trade well into the twentieth century. As Marx wrote, slavery is "what the bourgeoisie makes of itself and of the labourer, wherever it can without restraint model the world after its own image."

Abolitionism was an early form of the fake internationalism we see today – LiveAid, Live Earth, Blairite calls to intervene everywhere, Oxfam's delusions about Britain being "a force for good on the world stage". We would be satisfied if Britain was a force for good in Britain, and the world better served.
The Friendly Societies

A NINETEENTH Century writer, talking about the British working class, wrote that the strongest emotion among them was "... a universal determination to provide for themselves in sickness and in health, from the cradle to the grave and, at all costs, to keep out of the clutches of the hated Poor Law and to escape the ultimate brand of shame, resort to the workhouse in old age."

It was this desire for independence and self-respect that led workers early in the Nineteenth Century to establish Friendly Societies. These consisted of groups of men and women who clubbed together to pay weekly contributions into a fund, from which they received money if ill or unemployed, and which provided a level of support in old age, finally paying the funeral expenses on death.

In the days before the Welfare State such funds were the only means by which the working class could escape the terrifying grip of total poverty. The Nineteenth Century saw terrible housing conditions, lack of cheap essentials, and appalling long hours of work in bad conditions for low wages. These were the background for the radical working class movements of the time.

Friendly societies provided for

a need that went far beyond mere survival. They were the means by which the working class maintained their independence and pride. They were not thrust upon them by any other class but were an outgrowth of working class morality and social independence, a specific response to poverty and the indignities associated with it. Their emphasis was on collective organisation in the face of poverty. They offered a way not only to overcome poverty, but also charity, a way in which they could achieve independence of the State, the Poor Law and the Workhouse.

With many principles in common with Trade Unions and with the same working class culture and collective identity, Friendly Societies provided the basic organisations from which many Trade Unions developed and in which many Trade Union leaders were trained. Their aims were often directly in opposition to the bourgeois state.

Throughout the Nineteenth Century Friendly Societies provided a form of insurance, and organisation. This enabled us to the Twentieth Century to fight for better welfare provision. This, however, is rapidly being destroyed and the choice that we are now faced with is, either a future like our past or revolutionary change.
Much maligned, almost a byword for backwardness, the Luddites were in fact fighting for their livelihoods and self-respect at a time when trade unions were virtually illegal...

The 1810s: The Luddites act against destitution

Luddite machine breaking began in 1811 in the hosiery districts of the Midlands counties. Framework-knitting traditionally had been carried out in workers' homes, though the frames belonged to the employers. Trouble arose around the making of new, cheap “cut up” hosiery and the use of a new wide frame that reduced the numbers of workers employed and also produced shoddier goods. More and more factories began installing machinery and increasingly handloom weavers were thrown out of work.

The mill owners in Nottinghamshire and Derbyshire suddenly began receiving letters threatening the destruction of their machines. These proclamations were signed in the name of Ned Ludd, or sometimes General Ludd and his Army of Redressers. Threats did not remain idle but were translated into physical action. Under cover of darkness and in a disciplined manner, bands of men attacked mills and factories with a military precision to destroy the mechanical looms (‘frames’) that were cutting their wages and putting them out of work.

In Nottingham over a three-week period in March 1811, more than two hundred stocking frames were destroyed by workers upset by wage reductions and the use of un-apprenticed workmen. Several attacks took place every night and 400 special constables were enrolled to protect the factories; even £50 rewards (a phenomenal sum for the time) were offered for information.

Action against machines quickly spread north to Lancashire and the West Riding of Yorkshire, and into Leicestershire. Contemporary accounts indicate that bands of machine-breakers were huge, numbering hundreds or sometimes thousands of people. Unlike the Midlands, the offending machines in the cotton and woollen industries of the northern counties were chiefly to be found in factories rather than workers' houses, hence under the direct protection of employers' hired guards, which led to more violent, often less successful acts.
In Yorkshire in the 1810s, the croppers – a highly skilled group of workers who produced the cloth’s fine finish – turned their anger on the new shearing frames.

Their most notable attack took place at Rawfolds Mill near Brighouse in April 1812. Two croppers and a local mill-owner lost their lives; three croppers were transported and fourteen were hanged. In February and March 1812, factories were attacked in Huddersfield, Halifax, Wakefield and Leeds. Throughout 1812, activity also centred on Lancashire cotton mills where local handloom weavers objected to the introduction of power looms.

**Thousands of troops**

In an attempt to control these widespread Luddite manoeuvres, there were in 1812 as many as twelve thousand troops deployed by the government in the four northern counties – more troops than Wellington had available in Spain that year to fight Napoleon’s armed forces! Luddites met at night on the moors surrounding the industrial towns, where they rallied, manoeuvred and drilled their forces. They enjoyed, particularly in the early years, extensive popular support in the immediate community.

Luddism was not the first example of attacks on new machinery in Britain. Sporadic machine breaking had occurred long before the Luddites, particularly within the textiles industry. Indeed, Hargreaves and Arkwright had had to move to Nottinghamshire, away from open animosity in Lancashire. But the industrial revolution by this time was adding to the misery and causing the movement. Bad housing, employment of women and children at cheap rates, insanitary and unsafe conditions in factories and mines, and the replacement of labour by machines all played their part in the distressed state of the people. The ongoing Napoleonic Wars also added to their desperate plight when Napoleon’s blockade prevented British manufacturers and traders from selling their goods, having a destructive effect on the cotton industry.

Employers cut wage bills, workers were sacked and machines were made more use of. In addition, there was a series of bad harvests (1808-12). Food prices rocketed and food riots broke out in 1812 in places like Manchester, Oldham, Ashton, Rochdale, Stockport and Macclesfield. (A load of potatoes could cost twenty weeks wages.) Great economic distress subjected workers to “the most unexampled privations”. From being among the most prosperous of workers, handloom weavers quite suddenly found themselves facing destitution.

The government introduced a series of repressive measures to deal with the Luddites. The Frame Breaking Bill (1812) made the destruction of machinery punishable by death. Trials of suspected Luddites were held before judges who could be relied upon to hand
down harsh sentences. Several dozen Luddites were hanged or transported to penal servitude in Australia. The spy system was reintroduced. The Anti-Combination Act (1799), under which trade unions were forbidden, remained in force. No wonder Luddism was characterised by one historian as “collective bargaining by riot”.

**Revival**

Despite the repression, further sporadic incidents occurred in subsequent years. In 1816, there was a revival of machine breaking following a bad harvest and a trade downturn. 53 frames were smashed in Loughborough. But by 1818 machine breaking had petered out.

It is fashionable to stigmatise the Luddites as mindless blockers of progress. But they were motivated by an innate sense of self-preservation, rather than a fear of change. The prospect of poverty and hunger spurred them on. Their aim was to make an employer (or set of employers) come to terms in a situation where unions were illegal. They wanted to protect a centuries-old, craft-based way of life that gave them livelihood and self-respect. Frames were left untouched in premises where the owners were still obeying previous economic practice and not trying to cut prices.

At times the Luddites did improve real wages. Luddism was a deliberate tactic employed by a self-acting, self-organising working class grappling with many desperate problems during industrial capitalism’s harsh autocratic beginnings.
Luddites - workers against exploitation

The term 'Luddism', has in common parlance, come to mean 'mindless wreckers'. Nothing could be further from the truth. Luddism was a coherent working class movement which grew up in the early 19th century in the cloth industry in Nottinghamshire and which spread to Lancashire, Yorkshire and other surrounding counties. The slick explanation for this movement, which made a concerted attack on machinery in the cloth industry, is that it was a spontaneous outburst of violence against new machinery which had brought about a loss of jobs and a drop in wages. However, hosiery machines had been in use in Nottinghamshire since Elizabethan times. Moreover, the workers in the industry had suggested and made many improvements to the machines since that time. Similarly, in 1812, when the Luddite movement in Lancashire was growing, power looms were not much in evidence. In fact, hand looms increased in number well into the 1820's. New machinery in itself was not the target of Luddism.

So-called friends and experts on the working class, V they bother to acknowledge the existence of Luddism at all, take a slightly different line, but come to the same conclusion: 'stupid, ignorant workers who can see no further than their noses.' The explanation is that the poor workers were misguided, that all mechanization was progressive at a time of emerging capitalism. All such explanations are facile. First, to say that the Luddite movement was spontaneous and unorganized is to say that the person involved has not thought about it. In fact, the Luddite movement was very organized, with well thought out campaigns. The organization was so good, at a time when any working class activity was illegal, that the ruling class never broke it. Indeed, this is the reason that we know so little about it. Vast numbers of men, from far and wide, were organized with military precision into forces to attack planned targets, often factorying, where the owner had introduced new machines to undercut labor, produce shoddy goods and hard workers like cattle. Were the Luddites wrong to organize against this? Far from mindless wrecking, the stockholders of Nottingham hucksters on frames, owned by employers who had agreed to the conditions laid down by the workers, declaring: 'This frame is making full-fashioned work, at the full price.' These frames were smashed.

Those participating in Luddite activities were from a wide range of trades, not just from the cloth trades. As the records of those Luddites caught and convicted show, were were cutters, cobblers, farm labourers, inn keepers and mechanics. That the Luddites were an integral part of the working class community in which they lived is shown by the support they received from their communities which hid them, hardly ever was it activism informed upon, except by spies, and that only rarely because spies found great difficulty in breaking into the organization and communication. Luddism must not be seen in isolation from other working class movements, both before and after 1812-14, the hey day of the movement. Known Luddites included those who were at the forefront in organizing the emerging trade union, the Chartist movement, as well as former Jacobins and Jacobites. Some apologists of Luddism say that it was a 'narrow' trade union movement, to achieve higher wages and preserve jobs. As if trade unionism was ever narrow! What was at issue was the freedom of the classes to develop and destroy the customs of the trade, with the lowering of wages, the destruction of skills and a reduction in the quality of the finished product. The principles that the Luddites fought for were the exact opposite of these. It is the same fight that we are faced with today: firstly survival and eventually the destruction of the system that maltreat us, physically, morally, economically and mentally.
PETERLOO .. A MASSACRE REMEMBERED

Lancashire was beset with the expectations of a new age at the end of the Napoleonic wars in 1815. The cost of the wars had been off-loaded on the British people in the form of indirect taxation. A weaver, for example, lost 25% of his purchasing power through tax bur- dens. Britain itself became a battleground against the backdrop of the Corn Laws against the landed classes, each armed with a power through tax burdens. John Bull's glorious return in March 1817, assembled, each armed with a blanket for the march to London. Employment, and starvation wars had been off-loaded on the people. By August 16, 1817 the local mill owners, cotton merchants, shopkeepers, and publicans had agreed to form the Manchester Yeomanry, an armed organ dedicated to the suppression of 'revolution'. They recruited from the most ragged scum and outcasts from the thousands of abodes around the town.

Strength sapped
The summer of 1818 saw the Yeomanry sent out of town. Twenty thousand were set aside for a rally on St Peter's Fields to demand universal suffrage for adults and for the Corn Laws to be repealed. Henry Hunt, a leading reformer, would be the main speaker. The day before the rally the Manchester Yeomanry sent their sabres to get sharpened.

Bloodthirsty
Come the morning of the rally, there were reports of gangs of Yeomanry threatening for blood in the city's pubs. By lunchtime 80,000 workers had assembled in St Peter's Fields, attracting the attention of the capitalist press, the first political event of its kind to do so. They sat outside the speakers' rostrum. They followed the speakers' points and, when the speakers went out of sight, a troop of Yeomanry, numbered veterans of the Napoleonic Wars.

Bloodthirsty
Concerned for their family's welfare, the workers marched peacefully through the city, the Yeomanry's sabres in order to hack their way into the town. The Manchester Yeomanry was in a state of rebellion, but the crowds were heard. In the street, there were reports of gangs of Yeomanry threatening for blood in the city's pubs. By lunchtime 80,000 workers had assembled in St Peter's Fields, attracting the attention of the capitalist press, the first political event of its kind to do so. They sat outside the speakers' rostrum.

Riot Act
Despite the intervention, the crowd remained peaceful and patient, unaware they were forming the Riot Act. Sixty thousand Yeomen drew their sabres in order to hack their way into the town. The Manchester Yeomanry was in a state of rebellion, but the crowds were heard. In the street, there were reports of gangs of Yeomanry threatening for blood in the city's pubs. By lunchtime 80,000 workers had assembled in St Peter's Fields, attracting the attention of the capitalist press, the first political event of its kind to do so. They sat outside the speakers' rostrum.

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Dedication
Those early days of trade union activity took place without telecommunication, public transport and the modern media we take for granted, and it is important not just to commemorate their suffering, but to learn from their dedication.
FOR a brief period in the summer of 1831 the workers of Merthyr took control of their town. Incensed by privation, disease, degradation and misery wage rates the people, with miners in the vanguard, rose against the authorities. The uprising was triggered off by a substantial reduction in the wage rate but demands for voting rights, parliamentary reform, and the ending of the truck system were also features. ‘Bread or blood!’ is said to have been the rallying call.

The first target of the people was the Court of Requests. This was an institution which gave bailiffs the orders to seize workers’ personal belongings which were auctioned to repay debts. The building was ransacked and records were burnt. Infuriated, the magistrates summoned troops from Brecon. The soldiers marched through the town and occupied the Castle Inn.

Townspeople rallied to this point and the troops were completely surrounded. So afraid were the mine and iron works owners at this massive show of strength by workers that they offered to concede some of the demands, but the soldiers panicked and a worker was killed. It was then that the crowd attacked and attempted to seize the arms of the soldiers.

Twenty were killed. Shot or hanged to death. Seventy were wounded.

Cavalry reinforcements were sent to the aid of the trapped infantry. The following day the people of Merthyr captured ammunition supplies which were being transported from Brecon. The same day troops from Swansea were overpowered and their arms taken before they could enter the town.

News of the uprising spread to all parts of South Wales and thousands travelled to Merthyr to support the people.

The authorities, terrified that towns in other parts of Britain would rise, completely surrounded Merthyr with a huge force. They were prepared to slaughter every man, woman and child occupying the town.

The people faltered. They became divided. Some were prepared to accept the terms the iron masters had offered on wages. Others wished to stand out until guarantees were given to end the truck system and the insanitary living conditions in the town. There were those who wanted voting rights granted before they would surrender.

On Monday June 6th morale had become so low that the people began to disperse. The uprising had ended.
THE British working class has waged war on capitalism for over one hundred and fifty years. The capitalist development of the factory system in the early decades of the nineteenth century with all the accompanying exploitation and misery was a stimulus to working-class organisation and unity. During the formative period in the history of the working class it was already obvious to workers that, as the producers of all wealth, their birthright was nothing less than the complete control of the means of production and the state. It was quickly realised that capitalism was a system of exploitation which could only survive at the expense of the well being of workers. In 1831 the 'National Union of the Working Class' identified political oppression with social injustice. A statement from its congress said: "Why were the laws not made to protect Industry, but property or capital? Because the lawmakers were compounded of land and landowners, possessors of property, and the laws were made to suit their own purposes...Had the producers of wealth been the makers of law, would they have left those who made the country rich to perish by starvation?"

The delegates at the congress discussed the contradictions that had been caused by the rise of capitalist industries. Many pointed out that whilst constituting a majority in society the working class were the victims of the new industrial system and expanding economy, developments which should have brought material benefits for all. "The rights of property are the wrongs of the poor," declared one member.

At the third Co-operative Society Congress of 1832, several speakers described operatives and employers as separate and hostile forces. In 'Pioneer', which appeared in 1833, Morrison criticised Owen's paternalism and claimed that the working class was an independent class: "Orphans we are and bastards of society." As Morrison pointed out, "The capitalist merely as a property man has no power at all, and labour, regulated by intelligence, will in a very few years be the only existed power in this and in all civilised countries."

There were different strands of working-class organisation springing up in the 1830s but Horatio O'Brien, who is identified with three of the main movements, the struggle for reform, Trade Unionism and Chartism, described the common element of working-class consciousness: "A spirit of combination has grown up among the working classes of which there has been no example in former times...The object of it is the sublimest that can be conceived, namely to establish for the productive class a complete domination over the fruits of their own industry."

Workers have struggled to free themselves from the capitalist yoke for over a century and a half. Even in 1833 the workers were forming their own ideology, a Marxist-Leninist ideology. Workers fought to end exploitation and in their day-to-day class struggles they aspired to the control of society by the productive class itself. They saw unity and combination in the Trade Unions as their strength against capitalism. They realised that their potential power was limitless. Today the working class has the experience of a century and a half of struggle behind it and capitalism is in decline shows the aggression of weakness.
Workers and the vote. An introduction

THE STRUGGLE for freedom of the press has existed since it was possible to print dissenting views. John Bunyan, the tinker author of Pilgrim's Progress was imprisoned many a time for his publications. In the late 1800s papers like 'Hogs Wash' and 'Pigs Meat' (a reference to workers being termed 'the swinish multitude'), fought a running battle with papers like the Government subsidised broadsheet 'The Times.'

But it wasn't until the turn of the century that the struggle began in earnest. The Napoleonic Wars brought hunger and misery to the people of Britain along with its slaughter. Resistance brought repression - the banning of trade unions in 1799, and the 'Gag Acts' of 1817 and 1819. These tried to succeed where the Combination Acts were failing - to stamp out independent working class ideas and organisation. Public meetings were banned, habeas corpus suspended, penalties for sedition increased.

Workers' reading rooms were closed, and taxes imposed on all publications to take them beyond the pocket of 'the mob'. Further to this, 'Prosecution Societies', financed lavishly by landlords and capitalists, paid stooges to take papers to court for blasphemy and sedition. The military, as at Peterloo, and the law were brought together to crush the growth of independent working class thought and organisation.

Richard Carlile, a tinplate worker suffered nine years of prison for his publication of 'The Republican'. His supporters including wife and sister collected between them 200 years of incarceration for selling it. Families like that of Joseph Swann, a Macclesfield hatter, were left to starve when the breadwinner was imprisoned for hawkimg papers like 'The Poor Man's Guardian'. But their spirit was unbroken. In place of the tax-stamp, the illegal 'Guardian' printed: 

'Knowledge is Power. Published in defiance of the law, to try the power or right against might.' Our aim, it said, is to publish 'knowledge calculated to make you free', instead of the 'namby pamby stuff published to stultify the minds of working people and make them spiritless and unresisting victims of a system of plunder and oppression.'

What were these papers demanding? The central demand was for political equality. "The working classes must obtain their rights as men, before they can obtain them as workmen" argued the Metropolitan Trades Council. The corruption of government and taxes on the poor were seen as the main burdens, and parliamentary reform as the means to lift them. In this they were united with many employers who were also, at the same time, disenchanted.

Some of the papers even welcomed the pro-capitalist 1832 Reform Act because, as one put it: "It conceded to some extent the right of representation on the basis of population, and this concession once made to however a trifling degree, must be carried onwards to full extent."

Prophetic this might have been, but there were some who bitterly opposed this approach. One handloom weaver, who wisely kept himself anonymous, told 'the Guardian' that the rich should not have the right to vote at all, and that the "people who make the goods should have the sole privilege of making the laws." He made a fundamental attack on what was to become the main demand of the Charter - universal suffrage.

"People who live by plunder will always tell you to be submissive to thieves. To talk of representation, in any shape being of any use to the people is sheer nonsense... Those who make the laws now, and are intended by the reform bill, to make them in the future all live by profit of some sort or other. They will therefore, no matter who elect them, or how often they are elected, always make the laws to raise the profits and keep down the price of labour. Representation, therefore, by a different body of people to those represented, or whose interests are opposed to theirs, is a mockery and those who persuade the people to the contrary are either idiots or cheats."

And so, despite continued oppression the papers flourished. The 'Prosecution Societies' began to go bankrupt, and the illegal papers began to sell more in a day than 'The Times' managed in a week. Repressive laws had again, been made unworkable, and in 1834 the tax on knowledge was repealed. Separately and together, 'The Poor Man's Guardian', 'Medusa', 'Gorgon', 'The Republican', 'Sherwin's Political Register', 'Black Dwarf', 'The Trades Journal', 'National Reformer' raised the banner of press liberty in Britain. And they also raised a question in their discussions which remains paramount today. Can working class liberation be achieved through Parliament?
But as early as this the quest for the vote was used as a red herring. Trade unions tended to stay aloof from the Charter, and in 1842 workers in the Stalybridge Mills, ignoring the Charter, came out on strike for more money. Their slogan became famous. "They that perish by the sword are better than they that perish by hunger."

Brutally treated by the authorities, the men and women stayed united but not passive. They marched instead. Not to Westminster or to the top of the hill as they would be advised today. No. They marched to other mills all round Lancashire, winning their support one by one. As each new factory stopped work the plugs of its boilers were pulled out to ensure no scabbing. Some 50,000 workers were soon involved in the 'Plug Plot' as it spread to Yorkshire and the West Riding. Parliament sent troops to crush the strike, and on top of this the workers had to suffer the haranguing of the Chartist telling them to go back to work and wait for the Charter to be granted.

Two years later, Marx, who had paid close attention to the struggles of the Chartists wrote about the vote. Pointing out that government only arose because society was divided by class antagonisms, he decided that "all struggles within the State, the struggle between democracy, aristocracy and monarchy, the struggle for franchise etc., etc., are nothing but illusory forms in which real struggles of different classes are carried out among one another." Every problem, conflict or evil created by capitalism would be mirrored by the state in a law - a law to regulate, a law to ameliorate the effects, but always a law based on the assumption that the cause (capitalism) would continue. And so, he went on, as the role of law and government increases, the illusion arises that the state is the fount of social progress. Those who get involved in trying to run the capitalist state, he went on, suffer from this illusion, and see the solution of social ills in overcoming "accidental or intentional defects of administration." In doing this they fail to "grasp the general principle of social ills in the existing organisation of society", i.e., the continued exploitation of workers by capitalism. All laws, he pointed out, assume that this exploitation will continue. The more acute, the more vigorous the thinking is within these assumptions, "the more it is incapable of comprehending social ills."

Marx, basing himself on the experience of the Chartists and other struggles in Europe had analysed the strength and fundamental weakness of the way of thinking that became 'social democracy.'
THOUGHOUT the summer of 1831, one issue above all others was in the forefront of working class political activity. A Reform Bill was to go before Parliament which would, for the first time, enfranchise a section of the working class. A small proportion, certainly, but the significance of the Bill went beyond the numbers involved. It represented the first recognition that the workers of Britain were an important political force. This was not, of course, the reason for the Bill being proposed by bourgeois parliamentarins. They wished to establish the political supremacy of the manufacturing bourgeoisie over the landed aristocracy in Parliament: but in order to do this, they had to disenfranchise the old rotten boroughs, and give the vote to some workers in the new industrial cities. The significance of the Bill was not lost upon the working class.

As with all reforms passed by parliament, the workers had to fight to wring it out of them. As the anti-reform lobby mobilised, so too did the working class. Tension grew, and disturbances in support of the Bill occurred in London, Nottingham, and Derby. The Government became alarmed; and on October 7th, 1831, the House of Lords rejected the Reform Bill.

On October 29th, Sir Charles Wetherall, recorder of Bristol, and a leading opponent of the Bill, returned to the city to open the Assizes. The workers of Bristol, strongly favouring reform, decided to make their feelings known, and several thousand gathered to stone his coach as it entered the city. He survived the gauntlet, and having opened (and immediately adjourned) the Assizes, he retreated to the Mansion House in Queen Square. A crowd of angry workers soon gathered outside. "Specials" moved in to break up the crowd, and a running fight commenced. The Mayor emerged, and appealed for an end to the violence; he was met with a barrage of missiles. Wetherall, observing that the crowd wanted blood, and his for preference, disguised himself as a servant, and escaped over the rooftops.

That evening, the crowd attacked the Council house; troops opened fire, and one man was killed. The next day, the crowd, by now good and angry, broke into and looted the Mansion House, and then moved onto the Bridewell to release their arrested brothers. The New Gaol was next, swiftly followed by the County gaol. By the evening of the 30th, the riot was well under way. The toll houses were burnt, as was the Bishops Palace. (The Bishop of Bristol had voted against the Bill in the House of Lords).

Back in Queen Square, the Mansion House was the next to go up in flames, followed by the Customs House, the Excise House, and the methodical firing of some forty Corporation owned properties. Charles Kingsley described the scene: "by ten o'clock that night, one seemed to be looking down on Dante's inferno ... higher and higher the fog was shrouded upwards by the fierce heat below, glowing through and through with reflected glare ... miles away, I could see the lovely tower of Dundy shining red - the symbol of the old faith looking down in stately wonder and sorrow upon the fearful birth throes of a new age".

Finally, on the 31st reinforcements arrived, and troops cleared the streets, arresting over 100, and causing deaths variously estimated as between twelve and five hundred. Five of the leading figures in the rioting were sentenced to death.

Of all the agitation in support of the Reform Bill, the Bristol Riots were the most spirited example. The events certainly attracted the attention of, and worried, the Government; the enthusiasm with which the administration forced the Bill through was in no small part due to their fear of the consequences if they did not. The Bill became law eight months after the riots.

There was a footnote. Bourgeois reformers in Bristol decided to throw a party to celebrate, for the 'respectable' pro-reform faction. The workers also wanted to celebrate, however, and thirty thousand of them showed up at the open air banquet. They seized the food and devoured it, and stole the fireworks prepared for the evening's fun.

October 30th 1831: Bristol toll and customs buildings on fire as workers fight for electoral reform.
In 1867, to the horror of many, workers "entered the pale of the constitution." Well some of them at least. There had been Reform Bills before - in 1862, 1854, 1860 and 1866 - but the first to be passed was passed hurriedly after workers for the first time showed their displeasure at being treated as second class citizens and joined mammoth demonstrations in Hyde Park.

Even so, only a small proportion of workers gained the vote and this concession was used to split them ("respectable artisans") from other sections of the class. This first major concession was followed in 1884, and 1918 when women over thirty were first given the vote. Universal suffrage did not fully arrive until 1928 - resisted by capitalism along every inch.

How then did workers use their first vote? They used it not to turn their back on trade union activity but to defend it. The results of the 1874 general election were a shock to British politics. The Tories - who had become a traditional 'silly' party, not taken seriously as a possible government - swept in, on the vote of the 'intelligent artisans'.

Natural conservatives? Nothing of the sort. The years from 1866 had been years of sustained legal attack on trade unions. The TUC of 1873 after much debate had passed a motion which decided "to organise the voting power of the working classes with a view to opposing vigorously and determinedly every candidate for parliament who does not pledge himself to vote for the abolition or alteration of any law affecting injuriously the character and freedom of Trade Unions, especially the Masters and Servants Act, The Criminal Law amendment Act, and the law of conspiracy as applied to trade societies, under which the gas strikers have been convicted."

The Liberals, the majority of whom were employers, refused any such pledge. But many landowning Tories did not - and by 1875 the trade union victory in law was decided. It is significant that a similar attack one hundred years later, the Industrial Relations Act, was defeated without any such recourse to parliament.

The TUC of 1875 did give a vote of thanks to the Tory Home Secretary, but they were by no means enamoured with parliament, which was referred to as "that legislative chamber - more notorious for its massive golden bar, than its intellectual calibre." In this, they were, perhaps, ahead of their time.

The granting of the vote, moreover, was used by some unions to advance their aims. "If we have a right to vote in the administration, we have in consequence a right to a great deal more in other directions. We are no more masters and servants but equals, having the right, as those above us have, to regulate as we think proper, when we shall work, how long we shall work, and to put our own value upon what we sell."

So argued the Scottish Typographical Society.

Twenty years later, the demand for independent labour representation within parliament began to grow - not because of any political strategy had been accepted by the mass of workers, but because the problems they faced, unemployment, sickness, poverty in old age, low wages etc. had not been solved in any way by the achievement of "political equality."
Women hold up half the Sky

TODAY Iranian women are demonstrating against the edict that they must wear the chador, a black tent covering a woman from head to toe, a symbol of the degradation of women, the main aim of any religion, and exercised with ferocity by the disgusting Moslem religion.

Members of the Suffragette movement would have understood the importance of such a demand: they would have packed valises and enquired at Victoria Station for the time of the next boat train.

Foolish people have and will sneer at the Iranian and British women as 'middle' or 'upper' class. The critics are misguided. Both Iranian and British women had the same aim, the freeing of women from a prejudiced society, from fathers, brothers, even sons. At the beginning of the twentieth century British women, like any today in a Moslem country, had no rights over their bodies, their children or their possessions. All belonged to the husband. In fighting for the right to have a profession, to be educated, comfortably-off women assisted their working class sisters who were struggling for bread.

Today we would hardly consider it worth fighting for a vote. The suffragettes, some with naive innocence and some with a healthy cynicism declared that with the vote and in the long term women in the House of Commons, legislation would be passed that would remove the myriad abuses that all women, rich and poor, suffered.

From 1850, the women's movement, formerly fragmented, became organised, partly as an upsurge of realism and trade union battles, the writings of philosophers such as John Stuart Mill, but also because of such women as Florence Nightingale or Elizabeth Garret Anderson, the nurse and the doctor. In 1867 the London National Society for the relief of poor women was erected. The main aim of the nurses was to improve the treatment of women in the workhouse. It was furthered by the establishment of the Queen's College, which was the first school for women doctors.

Women's Suffrage was established in 1867 in Manchester, Edinburgh, Birmingham, Bristol. One of their first tasks was to organise higher education for women, assisted by sympathetic men. Ribald rhymes were总是 about Miss Buss and Miss Bente but their excellent schools remain to this day.

The aim was to pass a Suffrage Bill through parliament with the help of some Liberal MPs. They were defeated and by 1870 the bill was blocked.

In 1903, Mrs. Pankhurst, who had been working with Manchester factory women and obviously listened to them founded the Women's Social and Political Union. The aim now was direct action. As one speaker put it, 'Sisters forget we are ladies!'. At a Liberal Party meeting with Sir Edward Grey about to form a new government, Annie Kenney asked a question and receiving no answer, stood on a chair to repeat it. Men rushed from all sides of the hall and hit and scratched her, then dragged her out where she was promptly arrested by the police.

Peaceful means had brought little success so from then every method of annoying the government, smashing ministry windows, chaining themselves to the railings at number 10, Downing Street, showering theatres, plush restaurants with leaflets and sadly, Emily Davidson flinging herself in front of the king's horse, killing the horse and herself.

The Liberal government retaliated in the most vicious way. Women were given sentences of three years hard labour, and when they went on hunger strike were force fed. When they arrived at death's door, they were released on tickets-of-leave to regain their strength to return to prison. This was the infamous 'Cat and Mouse Act'.

The 1914-18 war started. The Women's Suffrage Movement ceased as an organisation, and many members used the same energy to help win the war. The battle was now taken up by working class women in the munitions factories, who joined trade unions, fought for a decent wage and conditions. Their struggle could have more success, there were more of them, they were needed for the war effort, and working class men usually showed sympathetic support.

In 1918 a Bill was passed extending the franchise to women over 30, occupiers or wives of occupiers of land or premises of not less than £5 annual value.

The fight has not ceased. In Britain the average of women's pay is half that of men. Women can have professions but the jobs of responsibility in trade, profession or government are kept for men. This is so in every country in the world. The little group who seized power in China were particularly brutal to comrades Chang-Chiang because she is a woman and one who speaks her mind.
The 1858 Reform Act introduced an electoral system that was far more democratic than its predecessors. The act aimed to reduce the influence of the aristocracy and to include more middle-class voters in the political process. It introduced a new electoral system based on property qualifications, which allowed more working-class people to vote. The 1858 Reform Act was a significant step towards greater democracy, but it was not without controversy. When it was passed in 1858, it was met with resistance from some who feared it would lead to social unrest. However, the act was ultimately successful in increasing political representation and reducing the influence of the aristocracy.

The 1858 Reform Act was the result of decades of political struggle and agitation by working-class people who had been excluded from the political process. The act was a victory for those who had fought for political reform, and it paved the way for further democratic changes in the future. Today, the 1858 Reform Act is seen as an important milestone in the development of democracy in Britain, and it continues to be studied and taught in schools and universities.

The 1858 Reform Act was not without its critics, and it was met with resistance from some who feared it would lead to social unrest. However, the act was ultimately successful in increasing political representation and reducing the influence of the aristocracy. The act was a victory for those who had fought for political reform, and it paved the way for further democratic changes in the future. Today, the 1858 Reform Act is seen as an important milestone in the development of democracy in Britain, and it continues to be studied and taught in schools and universities.
When landowners found that using the poor rate to supplement employers’ below-subsistence wages too expensive, they found another solution...

1834: The way to the workhouse

At the end of the Napoleonic Wars in 1815 there was a massive increase in unemployment. With the introduction of the Corn Laws that set high tariffs on imported corn and led to huge price rises, the numbers claiming “outdoor poor relief” (see Workers March 2014) soared. This caused growing criticism from landed ratepayers who contributed the poor rate. So our rulers changed course.

Wanting to curtail “outdoor relief” (payments to workers outside the workhouse), the 1834 Poor Law Amendment Act centred on intensifying the system of workhouses, aiming for fewer claimants. There had been workhouses before 1834 but they were not the sole method of “poor relief”. Poor Law Commissioners, who ran the new scheme, divided the country up into groups of parishes (known as poor law unions), and required them to set up workhouses providing only the most basic level of comfort. Workhouses were intended to be forbidding in order to deter both would-be inmates and outside workers. Ratepayers in each poor law union elected a Board of Guardians to manage their workhouse.
New workhouses were usually erected towards the edge of the union’s main town. Early union workhouses were deliberately plain as a deterrent, though as time passed more decoration appeared. They varied greatly in size, from tiny ones of 30 up to one in Liverpool that housed over 3,000.

Buildings were specifically designed to separate the different categories of inmate (known as “classes”) – male and female, infirm and able-bodied, boys and girls under 16, children under seven. Buildings, doors and staircases were arranged to prevent contact between these classes.

Apart from concessions made for some contact between mothers and children, the different categories lived in separate sections and had separate exercise yards divided by high walls. The one communal area was the dining-hall. But segregation still operated with different seating areas and sometimes there was a central screen dividing men and women.

You were not “sent” to the workhouse. Theoretically entry was voluntary – you were only impelled by the prospect of starvation, homelessness and general misery. Before the social provisions introduced much later, many elderly, chronic sick, unmarried mothers-to-be, abandoned wives or orphaned children had no other option. However, it was viewed as a last resort because of the social stigma attached and the general fear of never getting out. Particularly for the elderly, it was a place you never came out of, only concluded by burial in an unmarked pauper’s grave, often without mourners. Workhouses were not prisons; inmates could leave at any time after giving a brief period of notice. As with entry, however, families had to leave together.

**Harsh**

It was a harsh regime. On arrival people’s clothes were taken away and a workhouse uniform issued. Daily life was strict with early rising from 6am and early bedtimes at 8pm. Sleeping was in dormitories with beds packed together. In London’s Whitechapel workhouse in 1838, 104 girls were sleeping four or more to a bed in a room 88 feet long, 16 and a half feet wide and 7 feet high. Life was governed by rules with penalties for those who broke them.

**Poor laws**

| Unable to generate universal affluence, capitalism consigns many to poverty. “Poor laws” under capitalism are never designed to remove poverty, considered the inevitable lot for some, but rather to manage the extremes of pauperism while intimidating the entire working class. The question for capitalism is always how best to institutionalise poverty alongside profit. Capitalists want poverty to act as an |
overall threat over labour, thereby guaranteeing the continued flow of riches and wealth to themselves.

In return for board and lodging, adult workhouse inmates were required to do unpaid work in the workhouse and its grounds six days a week. Women were employed either in workhouse domestic chores such as cleaning, preparing food, laundry work, making and maintaining uniforms, or nursing and supervising young children. Able-bodied men were employed in manual labour, often strenuous but with little practical value such as stone-breaking, corn grinding, oakum picking or bone-crushing. Rural workhouses cultivated surrounding land. For older or less physically able inmates a common task was the chopping and bundling of wood for sale. Some poor law unions sent destitute children to British colonies such as Canada or Australia. Food was very basic and intended to make life outside seem an attractive option: bread was a staple, porridge or gruel for breakfast, meals were often cheese or broth.

There was resistance to the new poor law in northern manufacturing districts of East Lancashire and West Yorkshire and parts of Wales, where workhouses were often viewed as ineffective, either standing empty in good times or overwhelmed by claimants in periods of downturn. Employers preferred to give short-term handouts (dole) allowing families to stay in their houses until conditions improved. Towns such as Bradford and Huddersfield saw opposition with attacks on poor law officials and running battles with army troops.

According to an 1861 parliamentary report, 14,000 of the total adult workhouse population of 67,800 had been there for more than five years. By 1901, 5 per cent of the nation’s over-65s were living in a workhouse. In rural areas, workhouse populations generally rose in winter and fell in the summer.

In later decades various campaigns including one by the Workhouse Visiting Society brought some improvements. Workhouse responsibilities were transferred to local councils and then abolished in 1929 and 1930. Memories of workhouse indignities were so loathed they were passed on to succeeding generations.
The Tolpuddle Martyrs were transported for resisting starvation wages and forming a trade union...

1833 – 1838: The Tolpuddle Martyrs

In 1833 farm labourers in the Dorset village of Tolpuddle suffered severe reductions in their wages, prompting forty men to form a trade union. In February 1834 six of them were arrested: James Brine, James Hammett, George Loveless, James Loveless, Thomas Standfield and John Standfield. Convicted of swearing a secret oath, they were transported to Australia, triggering widespread agitation for their release and return.

Progressing alongside the Industrial Revolution was a parallel agrarian revolution, and poorly paid agricultural workers were a significantly large though often overlooked group. The long process of enclosure, whose high point came between 1770 and 1830, saw land carved up by act of parliament and given to bigger landowners. Lands
once held in common and villagers’ small strips of land for food production were expropriated. If you remained in the countryside and wanted to put food in your belly, you had no choice but to work for large landowners who dictated the rate of pay.

With no land of their own, the Tolpuddle labourers earned a weekly wage on the farm of George Frampton, a major local landowner. At the beginning of the 1830s the going rate in Tolpuddle was 9 shillings a week. This would have been sufficient to buy bread but not enough to pay rent and purchase other foods. Yet, in 1833, the landowners cut the rate from 9 shillings to 8, then later to 7 and were considering a further reduction to 6.

**Starvation wages**

These were starvation wages. How did the rural poor respond to such desperate conditions? Some suffered in silence, others moved to work in the growing cities. Some fought back: in the Captain Swing uprisings across East Anglia in 1830, labourers set fire to hayricks: 644 were imprisoned, 481 transported, 19 hanged.

A different approach was taken in Tolpuddle. Farmworkers there met with delegates from the Grand National Consolidated Trades Union (GNCTU) and then founded the Friendly Society of Agricultural Labourers in order to overturn the wage reductions, which were an acute problem in remote parts of southern England, where farmers did not have to compete with the higher wages paid to workers in London or the northern industrial towns. The introduction of mechanisation and a surplus of labour made the situation worse.

The Tolpuddle farm labourers were prepared to stand firm and push Frampton for a living rate of 10 shillings a week. They presented their “perfectly reasonable demands” believing the landowner would have to agree, as they represented a substantial part of the village workforce. The landowners and local magistrates took fright and wrote in 1834 to the Home Secretary, Lord Melbourne, to complain about the union. As there was no law against forming a union (the Combination Acts having been repealed in 1825), the six were arrested and tried at Dorchester Court for breaking an obscure 1797 law, the Mutiny Act, which prohibited the swearing of oaths to stop mutiny at sea. A jury was selected from those most unfriendly to the farm labourers’ cause – landowners and land-renters.

Their stated “crime” was that each had made an oath promising not to reveal the content of their meeting. In fact the martyrs were punished for having the audacity to form a union. Secret oaths undertaken by freemasons in their lodges were common, but secret oaths by workers smacked of revolution to the rulers of the day.
Every year workers gather in Tolpuddle to remember the martyrs’ struggle. Here's a report on this year's march from one participant.

"My coach from the Isle of Wight had 18 trade unionists of various political persuasions on board. I sold a number of copies of Workers and handed out leaflets on the ‘10 reasons to leave the EU.’

When I got to the Tolpuddle memorial site, I started to hand out the leaflets to everyone who walked near me. Most took the leaflet, but a small number, maybe, about three, people, gave them back, horrified at the thought of leaving the EU!

Most people took the leaflet and after glancing at it, some people said, “Only ten reasons to leave the EU. You must be joking”. It would appear that most of the trade unionists who took the leaflet couldn’t wait for a referendum on leaving the EU. After a number of lively debates on the topic and running out of leaflets, I got myself geared up to carry the Isle of Wight Trades Council banner.

There were banners from as far afield as South Wales, Bristol, Southampton, Portsmouth, London and all places in-between. It was quite a festive event, with bands playing various types of music, with everyone jigging about as they walked through the village of Tolpuddle.

While I was having a pint in the beer tent, I met a number of fellow Unite members. One, a young shop steward for the binmen in Southampton, had been involved in the industrial action with the City Council, which secured a restoration of his wages after they had been cut by the previous council administration.

I had a number of discussions with trade unionists about growing the union to fight for wages and conditions, and saving Britain from destruction by capitalism. I felt, as I boarded my coach back to the Island, it had been a good day.”

George Loveless observed in their defence, “We have injured no man’s reputation, person or character. We were uniting to preserve ourselves, our wives and our children from utter degradation and starvation.” Summing up, the judge remarked, “If such societies were allowed to exist it would ruin masters, cause a stagnation in trade and destroy property” and “The object of all legal punishment is not altogether with a view of operating on the offenders themselves, it is also for the sake of offering an example and warning.” The Martyrs were sentenced to a maximum sentence of seven years' transportation. Their convict ship took four months to reach Australia,
where they worked like serfs in penal settlements, on chain gangs and farms in New South Wales and Tasmania.

**Grand Meeting**

The treatment of the Tolpuddle Martyrs triggered huge opposition. In March 1834 over 10,000 people attended a Grand Meeting of the Working Classes called by the Grand National Consolidated Trade Union. On 21 April a vast demonstration assembled near King’s Cross in Copenhagen Fields. 800,000 signatures were collected for their release. Because families of the transported men and other members of the Tolpuddle union were refused parish relief by farm-owning local magistrates, the trade unionist London Dorchester Committee (LDC) collected financial support for the families.

A campaign to take legal action against the Duke of Cumberland (the King’s brother) on the grounds that he took a secret oath as head of the Orange Lodges of Freemasons led to a full pardon from the King in 1836, though they only returned to Britain in 1837. James Hammett returned in 1839. Until 1845 the men leased two tenant farms in Essex out of LDC funds. Only Hammett returned to Tolpuddle working in the building trade. He died in the Dorchester workhouse in 1891. ■
Tolpuddle Martyrs’ celebrated fight for trade unions

HISTORIC NOTES

The Tolpuddle Martyrs were not ‘canonised’ until the centennial of their imprisonment in 1934, but their effect on the working class was immediate and far-reaching.

The Combination Acts had been repealed ten years earlier, apparently making unions legal. The ruling class, however, still begrudged the legality and sought to hedge it round. Rural wage rates were low, in particular those in the Tolpuddle area which were lower than the rest of Dorset. In 1832 several farm workers including George Loveless, later to be the leader of the Martyrs, made a deputation to the landowners in protest at a cut in wages. They were unorganised and did not succeed. About a year later Loveless and other workers organised the Tolpuddle Friendly Society, deciding that the only way to defend themselves was to act together.

In February, 1834, six of the leaders of the new Union were arrested. The charge was ‘of administering unlawful oaths’, although their initiation ceremony was no different from that of other unions. The legality of this charge was extremely doubtful and relied on stitching together bits and pieces from three Acts of Parliament. The evidence was provided by two farm labourers who had joined the Society and it was neither consistent nor convincing. Nevertheless the six were found guilty and sentenced to seven years transportation. Slavery would have been a more accurate description.

It was a rude awakening for the working class. The right to organise had been won after much struggle, but obviously, without their perpetual vigilance and willingness to guard it at all times, it could be lost again.

Lord Melbourne, the Home Secretary, sensed this mood and thought that by imposing the maximum sentence and denying poor relief to the families of those transported, the working class could be scared into submission. He miscalculated. The immediate response was to organise for the release of the prisoners and to collect for their families.

The high point was a giant demonstration in London within a month of the sentences. The agitation continued right up to the time the men were eventually returned to Britain several years later.

Although the Martyrs for the most part ceased being active in the labour movement, the offer of their imprisonment and the fight against it had given a big boost to the movement. The right of the working class to organise had been protected and their organisations were to develop, culminating in the New Model unions of the 1850’s.

Many of those active in the defence of the Martyrs followed George Loveless and his brother into the Chartist Movement.
IN THE LAST issue we saw how the miners won their first struggle in 1831 and how their literature reflected and developed this struggle, too, in April 1832, following their recent success they struck again. The main issue in their strike was union recognition. But the miners went into battle with seriously depleted union funds. The pit owners had learnt new tactics in the 1811 dispute, and now they had stockpiled coal. The owners were organized. Blacklegs and truncheons did their work. But even so he spoke confidently of a brighter future:

The owners were blacklisted; the miners were forming friendly societies. Owners blacklisted those men but they still sang:

"...let it be said that we are afraid to join the strike."

Conditions for miners deteriorated rapidly between 1831 and 1842, and many more risked building the union. By late 1841 individual unions were strong enough to amalgamate and the first national miners union was formed. This union went into battle first in 1844. Again propaganda was an important product of their struggle. "...we must avail ourselves of the motto of their campaign in 1842, in their paper a miner wrote that if only the mass of men were true to their own interests, and felt confidence in each other and in themselves, 'so mighty power could prevent them from raising themselves to that position in society, to which by their industry and usefulness they so justly deserve to be raised.'"

Through their newspaper, 'The Miners' Advocate', edited by a Scots carpet weaver, William Daniell, (who led at one stage to print the paper from the Isle of Man because of prosecutions), branches were able to communicate and were strengthened.

"...the Miners' Advocate" encouraged learning and the miners were asked to contribute their poems, songs, grievances and thoughts. But so great was the response that the editor found he was swamped with too much excellent material. This paper was a forthright educational tool, vigorously and clearly defending miners' rights. Everything was explained clearly and often artistically.

One editorial discussed the relationship between miner and boss in terms of a popular fable:

"...the moral and physical consequences of a contentious warfare between capital and labour does appear to us to be fully illustrated by the fable of two noble animals combating or fighting for a place of prey, and while the contest is going on, another animal of diminutive size and strength came and carried off the prize, whilst neither of the two, such was their astonishment, could prevent him."

Re-united in struggle, by the mid-1840s the miners sent their delegates to Chartist and Working Men's associations. Delegates who travelled all the way down to London published a tract calling for working class unity:

"...and why have the sons of Labour not come more nobly forward, to support their own causes? See you not that the Mine-workers' cause is your cause? If they are crushed, you must follow and that work, arise from your slumbers, raise and look to your own interests, are they too late. Capital is rampant and unless it is met in a spirit of determination by the sons of toil united, it will mercilessly strike every class of labourer's wage."

The language of this is significant. The cadence and prophetic urgency is like the Bible, but it is a thin line. In fact the language of religious battle had become, through the experience of association and struggle, the language of class war.
"A spectre is haunting Europe - the spectre of Communism"

1848 was a year of revolution. Uprisings against feudalism swept Europe - from France to Hungary, Prussia to Italy. In Britain, where a revolution against feudalism had taken place two centuries earlier, 3 million signatures were appended to the Charter calling for universal suffrage. And from London there appeared the first edition of the Communist Manifesto.

The story of the Manifesto begins in 1846. At that time there existed no Communist parties in the world; all there was was concentrated in an organisation called the Communist League. This was composed mostly of French, German and Belgian communists and in England communist members of the Chartist movement.

But although it was called the Communist League, it lacked a proper definition of what communism was or what a communist does. It had a constitution: "The aim of the League is the overthrow of the bourgeoisie, the rule of the proletariat, the abolition of the old bourgeois society based on class antagonisms, and the establishment of a new society without either classes or private property." It had a slogan: "Workers of the World, Unite!" Yet all this was only provisional.

A Congress of the League took place in London in June, 1847, and out of it came a call for a proper manifesto or declaration of communist principles. They called it a "coprolem of faith". The Congress called on all sections of the League to consider the problem and bring forward suggestions to a further Congress to be held in November of the same year.

By this time, Marx and Engels had been in lengthy correspondence and exchanged their ideas. They had discussed Engels' "Principles of Communism" and Marx had been working on his own ideas. They were ready for November.

four-day debate

The November Congress was duly held, in Great Windmill Street, Soho. As with all the League's activities, it was held in secret. It was a long meeting and it took Marx four days to convince the delegates that his ideas were correct. In the end, agreement was reached and the Congress charged Marx, along with Engels, with the job of writing the Manifesto.

Marx returned to Brussels, where he was living at the time, and got down to work. No one knows how long he thought it would take him, but the League certainly had its ideas. We know from a remarkable letter sent by the League to Brussels:

"...if the Manifesto of the Communist Party, which you (Marx) consented, at the last Congress, to draw up, does not reach London before Tuesday February 1, further measures will be taken against Mr. In case Citizen Marx does not write the Manifesto, the Central Committee requests the immediate return of the documents which were turned over to him by the congress."

It was to be two years before an English edition was printed. It appeared in the columns of "The Red Republican", the Chartist newspaper, then edited by Ernest Jones. Over 20 years were to pass before a Russian edition appeared. Now there is hardly a language or dialect into which it has not been translated, hardly a worker in the world who has not heard of it.

The title page of the first edition of the Manifesto.
The three wars had many things in common; they were all technical victories for the British but, in reality, all defeats. They all showed up the grave inefficiency as well as greed of the ruling class, and, in the end, the usual story of British armies could only result from battle, the rest from disease: journalists wrote of the criminal negligence and stupidity of the government.

No two historians will agree on why the Crimean War started, perhaps something to do with the weakness of Turkey or the guarding of Jerusalem. The recurring scandals of maladministration, the criminal negligence and stupidity of the government, led to the lessoning of patronage; from then on examinations were instituted for all grades of the civil service. But one change did not occur. The fear and hatred of Russia, its immense size, the indomitable character of its people caused terror in the leaders of the Great Powers. Russia, whether led by a Czar, a Communist or a Fascist, was regarded as the enemy of all.

The bravery of the British forces was never in doubt being the French claimed that they had more intelligent commanders. For Russians, in spite of the despotic Czar, fought and died with the indomitable heroism that they showed later against the Nazis.

The war had many results large and small. The newspaper correspondent became important people (today some of them think that they make events not just report them). The War Office was swept cleaner; even by the end of the war soldiers were being reasonably fed and clothed and, thanks to the genius of Nightingale and her War Office friend Herbert, the wounded were being treated humanely.

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The Indian revolt of 1857 was violent, though nowhere near as bloody as its suppression. Ninety years later, India won its freedom...

1857: not a mutiny, but a fight for independence

WORKERS, APR 2007 ISSUE

One hundred-and-fifty years ago, the people of India fought for their national sovereignty and for independence from the British Empire.

The revolt was called a "mutiny", to define it as illegitimate. But it was the foreign rule that was illegitimate, because it denied India democracy and self-rule. As G. B. Malleson, Adjutant-General of the Bengal Army and the revolt's first historian, wrote, what was "at first apparently a military mutiny ... speedily changed its character and became a national insurrection." Hindus, Muslims and Sikhs all played a full part.

Despotic

The Raj was a despotic regime dependent on military power. General Henry Rawlinson, India's Commander-in-Chief, said in 1920, "You may say what you like about not holding India by the sword, but you have held it by the sword for 100 years and when you give up the sword you will be turned out. You must keep the sword ready to hand and in case of trouble or rebellion use it relentlessly. Montagu calls it terrorism, so it is and in dealing with natives of all classes you have to use terrorism whether you like it or not."

In 1793, the Empire's rulers had imposed a 'Permanent Settlement' on India which privatised the land and dispossessed the peasants. The Empire took 50-60% of the peasants' income in tax, more than the Mughal Emperors had taken, forcing the peasants into debt and then to sell their land. India's wealth was pillaged and her agriculture starved, in order to rack up profit and rent. The profits went to British investors, the rents to the Empire's allies, the landlords and princes.

The Empire's rule was vicious. Governor-General Lord Dalhousie wrote in 1855, "torture in one shape or other is practised by the lower subordinates in every British province."

Charles Ball, a historian of the revolt, wrote, "in Bengal an amount of suffering and debasement existed which probably was not equalled and certainly not excelled, in the slave-states of America."

The Report of the Commission for the Investigation of Alleged Cases of Torture at Madras, 1855, admitted "the general existence of torture for revenue purposes". Torture was also normal police practice.

The revolt of 1857 was violent, though nowhere near as bloody as its suppression. A British officer's wife justified killing all rebels, "Serve you right for killing our poor women and children who had never injured you." As if every single rebel was personally responsible for the very worst atrocities. Marx noted of Britain's newspapers, "while the cruelties of the English are related as acts of martial vigour, told simply, rapidly, without dwelling on disgusting details, the outrages of the natives, shocking as they are, are still deliberately exaggerated."


Vengeance
A British officer said, "We hold court-martials on horseback, and every nigger we meet with we either string up or shoot." Sir John Kaye wrote, "mothers and women and children ... fell miserable victims to the first swoop of English vengeance."

In a five-week rampage, Brigadier James Neill's Madras Fusiliers hanged every person they caught, some 6,000 people. Sir George Campbell wrote, "Neill did things almost worse than massacre, putting to death with deliberate torture in a way that has never been proved against the natives."

Major Renaud of the Madras Fusiliers "was rather inclined to hang all black creation." A recent historian writes, "volunteer hanging parties were roaming the Benares area with one gentleman executioner boasting of the 'artistic manner' in which he had strung up his victims in 'the form of a figure of eight'." Major Anson of the 9th Lancers admitted that in Fatehgarh, "There were fourteen men hung, or rather tortured to death (some of them), in the town here yesterday afternoon." On one occasion, British officers stood and watched while their Sikh soldiers slowly burnt a prisoner to death. At Peshawar, 785 captives were executed. At Lahore, Frederick Cooper, the Deputy Commissioner of the Punjab, ordered 500 unarmed soldiers, the entire 26th Native Infantry, to be killed. At Basaund, British forces killed all 180 adult males. The Magistrate of Meerut justified the massacre – "A severe example was essential and the slightest mawkish pusillanimity in such a cause would have spread the flame of revolt throughout the district."

'Drunk with plunder'
The sacking of Delhi, Jhansi and Lucknow was barbaric: The Times described the British soldiers as "drunk with plunder".

Although the revolt was defeated, it did overthrow the East India Company's rule and its regime of robbery and corruption; the Company was wound up in 1874. After suppressing the revolt, India's British rulers used the old tactic of divide and rule to crush India's strivings for democracy and self-rule. The British state promoted Muslim separatism and set up separate electorates, a sure way to tear people apart politically.

In the Punjab, the British won over the Sikhs by reminding them of the injuries and insults they had suffered under the Mughal Emperors. Sir Henry Lawrence, Chief Commissioner of Oudh, spread false rumours that Muslim rebels had desecrated Hindu temples.

Justification for continued rule
The Empire then used the revolt's failure to justify continued rule. If Indians could not revolt successfully, they could not rule themselves. Besides, as an MP said, "if we were to leave...we should leave it to anarchy."

A century later, Winston Churchill said in Cabinet in 1940 that the Hindu-Moslem division had long been "a bulwark of British rule in India". The Times agreed: "The divisions exist and British rule is certain as long as they do." John Colville reported that in Cabinet, "Winston rejoiced in the quarrel which had broken out afresh between Hindus and Moslems, said he hoped it would remain bitter and bloody."

After the revolt, the Indian people continued to oppose foreign rule, winning their independence in 1947.
Robert Applegarth was one of those who built British trade unions as we know them. Never scared of a fight, he bargained until nothing but a strike would settle the dispute. "Instead of striking in the social world as we know them. Both are crimes unless justified by absolute necessity."

He was born at Hull in 1834. When he joined the Sheffield carpenters in 1857 he found a trade split among many local unions. The great London building workers' strike of 1859 demonstrated the need for national unity. And in 1860 the Amalgamated Society of Carpenters and Joiners was formed, on the model of the Amalgamated Engineers.

In 1862, Applegarth aged 28, was elected General Secretary. By the time of his resignation in 1871 he had built the union from 900 members in 36 branches to 10,000 members in 236 branches. In 1867 he introduced an open column for members in the Society's magazine, Allen of the Engineers told him, "Ah, they will lash you," Applegarth replied, "If I cannot stand all the lashing they can give me I'm no fit for my position."

In 1868 Applegarth got the Society, though the International to send £20 each to striking Canadian building workers and Haven cotton spinners. He encouraged the union to become involved in political action, "against laws which keep the workman down, and to provide love to lift him up."

Applegarth did his best to encourage this kind of outwork and opposed any idea that trade unions were non-political.

Applegarth believed education was the key to improving the position of the working class. In 1869 he became a founder member of the National Education League, to secure free, compulsory and secular education for every child.

He denounced the provisions of the 1870 Education Act for means-tested grants. "The children of the poorest parents are to have paper tickets pinned upon their backs."

He thanked Mr. Mundella, who supported the campaign, for initiating it. He proved statistically that the workers should take the question into their own hands.

Attending a strike meeting of Glasgows carpenters he won their support for the struggle of English and Welsh workers for education.
Chairman of the International

Introducing the first public electric lighting and the first refrigerator into England. In 1892 he wrote to the Royal Commission on Labour that 'most of the sacrifices of health and life are easily provable,' and he had no sympathy for workers who refused to wear and use safety gear.

In 1911, at the age of 75, he rallied to the support of workers striking all over Britain, finding that the 'public' had collected a benefit for 'loyal' workers of the London and Brighton railway.

Applegarth organized a much bigger subscription for the strikers. He also went to speak at meetings of striking hotel workers. His advice: 'Do right!' Until 'production for use replaced production for profit,' he said, strikes would be inevitable.

Men do not deliberately throw up their bread and go on strike.

Diseases Act. Applegarth considered it essential that trade unionists be involved in areas outside their own craft affairs, especially in this campaign to abolish the police right to stop any woman and subject her to a distasteful and intimate examination. But some of his union branches found venereal disease a 'distasteful issue' for their General Secretary to be involved in, and forced his resignation. So ended Applegarth's brief but very significant union career.

His later years were spent testing safety equipment for miners and divers, inventing a submarine lamp and smoke-preventer, and

without some cause. If people will read more of the sufferings of the workers of the past and of how they still suffer they will see the cause of this great industrial upheaval.

A deep and thoughtful man, Applegarth never rejoiced in struggle for its own sake. Some have pictured him as a compromised 'traitor of labour.' The truth is that this companion of Marx knew that the class struggle is war: a deadly and serious matter, in which the stakes are too high for play. He had implicit faith in his fellow workers, and never doubted who would be the eventual winner in the class war.
Despite having no representation in parliament, the British working class were able to restrain the pro-slavery leanings of the ruling class...

1861–1865: British workers and the American civil war

In December 1860, 11 slave-owning states broke away from the United States of America to form the Confederacy. When Abraham Lincoln became President in March 1861, he denounced the secession as unconstitutional. April saw a Union blockade of Confederate ports and the onset of a bitter civil war.

Between 1840 and 1860 the United States provided 80 per cent of Britain’s cotton. The Confederacy thought “cotton famine” caused by the blockade would cut off Lancashire’s textile industry from its supplies of raw materials and propel Britain into conflict against the Union to end the blockade. But matters did not develop in that way.

Great distress overwhelmed the British cotton industry. Between 1861 and 1865 the Lancashire textile industry suffered a period of severe unemployment with over 320,000 workers unemployed out of 533,950 by November 1862; there were still 190,000 fewer jobs in December 1864.

Fairly ample stocks of cotton had been stored in British factories and warehouses. It was the speculative bidding up of the price for raw cotton that did damage, particularly hitting smaller manufacturers who could not withstand the strains of the high price. The crisis in the textile industry also gave British manufacturers the opportunity to extend the working day, depress wages and equip factories with labour-saving machinery.

The civil war acutely divided British opinion. Friends of the Confederacy in Britain came largely from the aristocracy (who had social and political ties with American slave-owners) and the commercial classes (who had business links and wanted to escape Union tariffs). These upper classes dominated parliament. Their newspapers – such as The Times – openly advocated aiding the Confederacy.
British workers transcended narrow economic self-interest to support the Union cause.

But British workers, driven by a deep hatred of slavery and striving for a more democratic government at home, restrained the pro-confederate leanings of the government class. Though not represented in parliament, the working class was the preponderant part of society and therefore not without political influence, able to pressure the government into adopting a policy of non-intervention in the civil war and thwarting assistance to the Confederate States.

At the beginning, northern US leaders asserted the main object of war was to preserve the Union and not to touch slavery. Lincoln’s Emancipation of the Slaves Proclamation strengthened British workers’ support for the Union cause. The spinners and weavers of Lancashire transcended their economic self-interest and took the lead in upholding the Union blockade. They realised that helping the slave-owners win would defeat the cause of freedom represented by the North and set back their own struggle for political reform in Britain.

**Massive meetings**

Throughout 1862 and 1863, massive pro-Union meetings were held by workers in Ashton-under-Lyne, Blackburn, Bury, Stalybridge, Liverpool, Rochdale, Leeds, London and Edinburgh, calling on the government to not depart from strict neutrality in the conflict. On 31
December 1862, thousands of working men in the Manchester Free Trade Hall expressed sympathy with the North and called for Lincoln to eradicate slavery.

The efforts of those seeking to glorify the slave power and corrupt the minds of working people were utterly in vain. Working-class newspapers not only printed the Manchester meeting’s Address to Lincoln but also President Lincoln’s reply recognising British workers’ sacrifice.

In order to ascertain the effects of the “cotton famine”, The New York Times sent a reporter to Lancashire in September 1862 who reported on the acute distress of the cotton manufacturing workers and came up with a practical suggestion – launching a campaign to send food aid supplies to Lancashire workers.

Meetings were held and money raised throughout the Union. On 9 January 1863, the George Griswold relief ship, loaded with gifts of food, left New York to the cheers of spectators. Her cargo consisted of flour, bacon, pork, corn, bread, wheat and rice. American stevedores loaded the ship without charge. Additional ships were soon sent: the Achilles and the Hope.

When the Griswold docked at Liverpool, all the dock workers refused payment for their services and the railways offered free transport. On 23 February 1863, 6,000 working men were at the Free Trade Hall (inside and out) to greet the arrival of the George Griswold. One speaker observed, “If the North succeeded, liberty would be stimulated and encouraged in every country on the face of the earth; if they failed, despotism, like a great pall, would envelop our social and political institutions.”

‘The cause of labour is one’

On 26 March 1863, 3,000 skilled workers at St James Hall assembled in a pro-Union gathering organised by the London Trades Council to hear trade union speakers including a bricklayer, engineer, shoemaker, compositor, mason and joiner. Two contributors noted: “The cause of labour is one, all over the world” and “We are met here ... not merely as friends of Emancipation, but as friends of Reform.” With the North’s victory, a working class newspaper wrote “No nation is really strong where the majority of its citizens are deprived of a voice in the management of public affairs.”

As a result of working-class resistance, Britain neither recognised the Confederacy nor intervened to break the blockade. Despite terrible hardships, particularly in the northwest, workers refused to allow their sufferings to be exploited by pro-Confederate sympathisers.

As Marx said, "It was not the wisdom of the ruling classes but the heroic resistance to their criminal folly by the working classes of
England that saved the West of Europe from plunging headlong into an infamous crusade for the perpetuation of slavery on the other side of the Atlantic.”

The American Civil War generated a broadening of horizons among British workers that blossomed even further in the First International.
A hundred and fifty years on, the accident at the Hester Pit, Hartley, which killed 204 men and boys is not forgotten...

1862: The Hartley Calamity – a pit disaster remembered

WORKERS, JULY 2012 ISSUE

The Hartley Pit Calamity is still remembered in the North East as one of the worst mining disasters in England: 204 men and boys lost their lives. A beam on the pumping engine failed, killing five miners on their way to the surface. The debris blocked the lift shaft, trapping those still underground.

As the first mining disaster of the Victorian period on such a scale, the Hartley Calamity continues to resonate, despite the widespread calamity enacted by the Thatcher government on mine workers. Pits can be closed, but memories remain open.
This newly made banner will get its first outing at the Durham Miners’ Gala this month.
Photo: Workers

The Hester Pit, to give it its proper name, had only a single shaft, as was usual at the time. That served not only as the entrance and exit, but also for the pumping out of water by a beam engine next to the shaft.

At 10 am on Thursday 16 January 1862 a shift change was taking place underground when the heavy cast iron beam snapped without warning. A considerable tonnage dropped into the shaft as it killed those in the cage. A section of beam lodged like a bone in the throat of the mine, trapping the rest of the two shifts underground.

No escape

With no other exit, there was no means of escape. Despite frantic rescue attempts involving workers from other mines, it took six days
to reach the trapped miners. All 199, some as young as 10, had by then succumbed to the gas which had held up the rescuers.

It was well-known by 1862 that cast iron was brittle and prone to sudden breakage. But the great extent of the disaster was not directly due to the broken beam. Nearly all the dead perished for want of a second exit. A memorial in the grounds of the local church, St Alban’s, Earsdon, provides a record in stone of each of their names.

The 150th anniversary of the Calamity has been marked by the community in a variety of ways. An evening of music and songs was held in the Memorial Hall and there was a dedicated church service at which “The Hartley Calamity” – a ballad poem by the pitman poet Joseph Skipsey (1832 to 1903) was read. And a book entitled Still the Sea Rolls On – The Hartley Pit Calamity of 1862 has been compiled.

The village of New Hartley has produced two banners bearing the name of the Hester Pit to be carried in this year’s procession at the Durham Miners’ Gala in July. Until then, the banners have a place of honour in the Memorial Hall along with a series of cross-stitch pennants, hung proudly along the wall, recording the names of those who died.

Local school children have made their contribution by producing fine fabric collages portraying scenes then and now with, in total, over two hundred birds in flight, one for each victim.

This is not just an event that happened 150 years ago, but a community still active on its own behalf, aware of its history and traditions while still fully engaged with the present world. Contained within the commemorations are thoughts about the 2010 Chilean miners, trapped so long underground though ultimately rescued, and the Greymouth tragedy in New Zealand in the same year but with a different outcome.

A speaker at one of the events made mention that mining accidents continue to claim the lives of miners, only today it is in China rather than Northumberland.

Much is made in the media and by politicians about the need to reward entrepreneurs with bonuses – otherwise they are unwilling to do their jobs. But the working class will give of their creativity and labour freely for their community, as the commemorative book and all the other events demonstrate. No one here has earned a penny for themselves.

This book contains Skipsey’s “The Hartley Calamity”, which is doubly appropriate, this being the 180th anniversary of his birth in Percy Main North Shields where he became a colliery worker at the age of seven. A self-taught man, he demonstrated the potential within
members of the working class by going on to become a librarian, custodian of Shakespeare’s birthplace, and gain a Civil List pension for his literary work.


This publication combines a history of the event, illustrated with drawings, photographs and documentary evidence of the time, with present day poetry, stories, photographs and drawings by local people. The contents are varied, with each a fitting tribute to those being commemorated, their lives, however short, celebrated.
In 1864 delegates from across Europe met to create an international workers’ movement...

1863: The First International

In the second half of the nineteenth century, the International Workingmen’s Association (IWA) – sometimes called The First International – united a variety of different political groups and trade union organisations to further the prospects of the working class, initially across Europe, then America. It is probably the best (or only) example of genuine international working class cooperation organised by the workers themselves and guided by a revolutionary socialist outlook that world history has yet produced, and it has relevance for us today, particularly because of the key role English trade unionists played in it.

Following the widespread Revolutions of 1848, a period of harsh reaction had set in over Europe, before the next major upswing of activity arose, presaged by the founding of the IWA in 1864. The great change came in July 1863, when at a historic meeting held in London at St. James’ Hall, French and British workers discussed developing a closer working relationship and declared the need for an international organisation. This was not only to prevent the import of foreign workers to break strikes, but also to forge continuing economic and political cooperation, invite representatives of other continental nations to join them and work to end the prevailing economic system, replacing it with some form of collective ownership.

Unanimous

In September 1864, a meeting took place in St. Martin’s Hall, with Britons, Germans, French, Poles and Italians represented in large numbers, which unanimously decided to found an international organisation of workers. Among others, George Odger (Secretary, London General Trades Council) read a speech calling for
international co-operation. Karl Marx sensed the importance of this gathering and joined it, participating as a representative of German artisans residing in London. The gathering heralded a new era in the workers’ movement.

In October, a General Council – with additional coopted national representatives – was formed, meeting weekly at 18 Greek Street. Most of the British council members were trade union leaders. On the initial Council were tailors, carpenters, weavers, shoemakers, furniture makers, watchmakers, instrument makers and a hairdresser. Marx attended regularly, becoming a constant leading figure and one of the few to be regularly elected over many years, only relinquishing his position in 1872.

Difficulties arose immediately and the new organisation could easily have foundered, but Marx played a vital role in ensuring the International remained true to its founding purpose. Mazzini’s Italian delegates proposed a political programme that was against class struggle and drew up very centralised rules, fit only for a secret political society. This approach would have hamstrung the very basis of an international workers’ association, conceived not to create a movement but only to unite and weld together already existing and dispersed class movements in various countries. So instead Marx set about writing his rallying Address to the Working Classes and wrote a simplified set of rules, which were adopted.

**Trade union basis**

The IWA was established essentially on the basis of trade unions in a number of nations, together with a motley crew of diverse political groups with differing philosophies (including Mutualists, Blanquists, Proudhonists, English Owenites, Italian republicans, anarchists, radical democrats, and other socialists of various hues). However, over its short life, at the prompting of Marx and supported by English trade unionists, it grew into a powerful movement that coordinated support for major class actions and inspired genuine fear in the defenders of the bourgeois status quo. Many national local federations developed strong working class bases and movements. At its peak, the IWA is estimated to have had between 5 to 8 million members.

For nigh on ten years Marx provided leadership and devoted a major part of his energies to the affairs of the International, ensuring it pursued a class direction. Only the publication of *Das Kapital* in 1867 competed for his attention. Throughout he strove to fashion what had started as a loose alliance with divergent ideologies into a united class movement informed by revolutionary, class-based ideology. To such good effect that the “Spectre of Communism” Marx had seen haunting Europe in his and Frederick Engels’ 1848 Communist Manifesto seemed much more real to the capitalist establishment of the late 1860s than it had 20 years earlier. As political and
organisational head of the International and author of the book that sought to lay bare “the economic law of motion of modern society”, Marx finally seemed close to achieving the union of socialist theory and revolutionary practice that he had always aimed for.

By the time the Geneva Congress (1866) convened, the Association could already claim credit for having successfully counteracted the intrigues of capitalists who were always ready to misuse the foreign worker as a tool against the native worker in the event of strikes. One of its great purposes was “to make the workmen of different countries not only feel but act as brethren and comrades in the army of emancipation”. This Congress’s most significant decision was the adoption of the 8-hour working day as one of the Association’s fundamental demands, “a preliminary condition, without which all further attempts at improvement and emancipation are bound to founder”, which had an immediate impact in America.

**Solidarity**

Nowhere did the Association initiate any strikes, confining itself merely to intervening where the character of the local conflicts required supportive measures and solidarity. The International intervened significantly in several important cases.

For instance, where previously the standard threat of British/English capitalists when their workmen would not tamely submit to their arbitrary dictation had been to supplant them by an importation of foreigners, the General Council often frustrated the plans of the capitalists. When a strike or a lock-out occurred concerning any of the affiliated trades, the continental correspondents of the Association were instructed to warn the workmen in their respective localities not to enter into any engagements with the agents of the capitalists of the place where the dispute was. Consequently, the manoeuvres of the English capitalists were frustrated during the strikes and lock-outs of railway excavators, conductors and engine drivers, zinc workers, wire-workers, wood-cutters, and so on. In a few cases, such as the strike of the London basket-makers, the capitalists had secretly smuggled in labourers from Belgium and Holland. But after an appeal from the General Council, the Belgian and Dutch workers made common cause with the English workers.

**French lock-out**

Also in France, where trade unions had only just been legalised, the bronze-workers (a body of approximately 5,000 people) were the first to re-form a union in 1866. In February 1867, a coalition of 87 employers demanded of their workers that they resign from the union, which culminated in a lock-out of 1,500 bronze-workers.
With their union fund being depleted, the International organised loans from the English trades unions and support from other French unions, which enabled the workers to win. Moreover, in the spring of 1868 in Geneva, building workers (whose unions were strong supporters of the International) declared a strike of block-cutters, bricklayers, plasterers and house-painters. Strikebreakers from Ticino and Piedmont were won over to the side of the workers. The masters responded by closing down the workshops in those branches of the building trade that had not yet joined in the strike and slurred the International as a foreign plot.

A number of unions, which had previously stood aloof from the International, formed sections and asked for admission. Geneva’s jewellery trade workers (goldsmiths, watchmakers, bowl-makers and engravers) then offered material aid to the building workers. The International organised support across the continent and donations flowed in.

The masters’ plan of starving out the workers failed. An agreement was reached with the masters that conceded the workers a reduction of the working time by one, and in some cases, two hours, and a wage increase of 10 per cent. The conflict resulted in a mass adherence of workmen in Switzerland to the IWA. In Belgium, the International mobilised considerable support in 1867 for the coalminers of Charleroi in Belgium who faced wage reductions and lockouts.

**Paris Commune**

The Paris Commune of 1871 was the first instance of the working class achieving power for itself, running Paris for over two months. Marx rose to its defence in an eloquent address published under the title, The Civil War in France. But soon after the Commune was drowned in blood, latent dissensions in the ranks of the International came to a head. The English trade unionists grew frightened, fearing association with the dramatic events in Paris; the French movement was shattered. To prevent anarchists grasping control of the IWA, the organisation was relocated to New York City in 1872, before it disbanded in 1876.
Despite the lean budgets of the General Council, all the governments of continental Europe took fright at “the powerful and formidable organisation of the International Workingmen’s Association, and the rapid development it had attained in a few years”, as the Spanish Foreign Minister of the day admitted. The IWA remains worthy of deep respect and further study. It was an authentic product of workers searching for ways to make progress; we should cherish its achievements and mimic its aim of practical cooperation.
The First International 1869

In Britain, the struggle for a shorter working week gathered momentum. The Trades Councils were being formed in the major urban centres. 1868 was to see the foundation of the Trade Union Congress. British workers were also keenly interested in the international scene. Marx commented that it was only the action of the British working class that prevented the capitalists from intervening in the American Civil War on the side of the slave-owners.

When Garibaldi, the Italian patriot, was invited to Britain by bourgeois liberals, the celebrations were swamped by the workers, which embarrassed capitalism so much that Garibaldi’s visit was cut short. The occupation and partition of Poland aroused deep sympathy. And Ireland was discussed. The First International declared its support for the fight for Irish independence and freedom. The International had to cope, as we do now, with the continuous threat of war between the different capitalist powers. War came to Europe in 1870 between Prussia and France. After the defeat of France, the world saw the red flag raised in the Paris Commune.

In an address of the General Council to the Association, Marx pointed out that only the working class could end war that at the same time as the French and German governments rushed headlong to destruction “the workmen of France and Germany send each other messages of peace and goodwill...this great fact opens the vista of a brighter future.”

In the Commune of Paris, though it lasted but a few weeks, Marx saw the future of the world, the dictatorship of the working class and socialism. He stated: “Workingmen’s Paris, with its Commune, will forever be celebrated as the glorious harbinger of a new society...” The First International differed from those that followed, for it was based not on political parties but trade unions. Its ideas were to boomerang around the world, to revolutionary Paris, to the Soviet Union, to China, Vietnam, and Albania. But a boomerang always returns to the thrower. Revolution in Britain, the birthplace of proletarian internationalism, will provide the guarantee for further advance of workers the world over.
TUC unity forged in centuries of struggle

The Congress was held from 2-8 June 1868 in Manchester, with 34 delegates representing 38,000 trade union members.

It is a great pity that there are very few records of what went on at the Congress, but we are left with the resolutions which indicated support for action to-linear the law on trade union activities such as petitioning, their "amnesty and disfavour" regarding the Royal Commission, and the setting of the London Conference of Amalgamated Trades in their organisations to receive the legal protection of union funds. It was further agreed that annual congresses be held "for the purpose of bringing the trades into closer alliance."

And so the annual Trade Union Congress was born, intended as a meeting place where independent trade unions would debate issues of concern; its strength derived from the individual strength of its participants with the Congress in an "effective barometer of feeling in the trade union movement."

**PROPOSED CONGRESS OF TRADES COUNCILS AND FEDERATIONS OF TRADE Unions.**

*Manchester, Trades Council 24th June 1868*

The Congress was called by...
Two different conceptions of economics and politics were involved: one, the blind rule of capital, and the laws of supply and demand, and the other, social, against redundancy, speed-up, and lengthening of hours, in every resistance against the laws of capital, there appears the contrary law of balanced, planned, development of the productive forces.

Organisation
But there is another aspect of the economic struggle which also has revolutionary implications; the capacity for organisation and discipline.

In 1858 the carpenters and joiners of London presented a demand for a nine-hour day. They were joined by masons, bricklayers, and plasterers, and the masters provoked a lockout. The nine-hour law was achieved, and the men returned to work on the old conditions.

This attempt to destroy trade unionism illustrated the weakness of the old-fashioned loosely-organised unions with small resources. To the skilled carpenters came the realisation of the need to organise. They founded an Amalgamated Society with a constitution closely modelled on that of the engineers.

In 1871 the engineers on the north east coast won the nine hour day after a five month strike. They were successful in forming a Nine Hours League which succeeded in uniting both society and non-society men, and became an impetus for other areas. Around this economic demand, organisation of the various trades, unionists and non-unionists, was achieved from a very low level of organisation previously.

Conclusion
Only the united strength and determination of workers will stop the ruling class from intensifying exploitation. Having been forced to concede a shorter working day the employers began to use overtime to bump it up again. Beginning as a marginal way for workers to supplement their normal pay, overtime became in time part of the basic wage structure and a condition for the running of many industrial concerns. But also banning overtime became part of the guerrilla tactics of workers.

In current conflicts, too, all attempts by reformists and opportunists to separate economic and political struggles will be exposed as completely contrary to working class interests - just as Marx exposed such efforts in the last century when he wrote:

'The coalition of the forces of the working class, already achieved by the economic struggle must also serve, in the hands of this class, as a lever in its struggle against the political power of its exploiters.'
Plate commemorating the engineers' victory.

First International sent its own secretary, Cohin, to persuade the Belgians not to strike-break. He was unsuccessful until he was expelled from the country. New Germans were brought in. There was hostility but the League won on flatbacks, instead they argued with the blacklegs and offered them fares home. The Germans earned grudging praise because they were skilled and the Tyne was not a happy situation not least because of the inordinate honour of the British workers. By now other employers were decimating Armstrong, as were the 'Thermidore' and 'The Newcastle Chronicle' which had supported the League from the beginning. Trade was being lost and the employers were suffering. They gave in. A great procession of 35,000 workers marched on because of the phenomenal amount of work struggled to get up the Tyne, annoying the Rachakite tent-looters and the revenue men. Moreover, the Troustes insisted on smoking while working, this at a period when workers were allowed only one visit a day to the lavatory and then were timed. Finally some of them started their own strike inside for a nine hour day. To be buckled on

because of the successes of the 'pasty-faced felloes' to push reforms through. William Armstrong, a worker from Palmers, led the 'left' of the two can do with state interference. More, but of great importance, the Aberdeen to Southampton. And it was increasingly clear that the 'pasty-faced felloes' would do anything - for 'state interference' they would even like a fortnight's holidays, etc. At times he yearns for 'God's Government becoming the government of the people'. In August, the newly-formed 'Gangworkers and General Labourers Union' (Now the GMWU) put its demand for an eight hour day to their employers... who merely deferred. The speeches waxed sound and wise, not least to the equally disorganised and oppressed doctors, who that man served as one man for their 'tanner'.

The success of the gas workers strike made for the unemployed to their employers. They decided to form a union and demand 8 hours today, just recently heard-by the workers that they would no "not be pursued to organize a... This was a capitalist's attitude towards the workers role in the TUC. The 8 hour day debate was the major impetus to the demand for 'independent labour representation' and a party with a new attitude towards the workers role in the State. The desire was truly for social progress and proved in many instances to be a practical way forward. But today we should remember also the warnings of those who bitterly opposed the new direction.

"Self-help and self-reliance are extended and strengthened by combination... but with these leanings others have been isolated which would render nugatory the power of the Unions, namely reliance upon state aid, State regulation and State central. The two systems cannot co-exist; they are contradictory and opposed.

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HISTORIC NOTES

HISTORIC NOTES The Eight Hours Movement

The 1860's were not easy years for workers. True, prices were falling because of the 'great depression' but the employers' attacks were most menacing. Numbers out of work soared; trade union membership fell and those remaining found it difficult enough to resist rounds of wage cuts never mind fight for improvements. Bloody riots of unemployed workers which shook London in 1866 were not an expression of strength but of despair.

The gas workers' struggle for an eight hour day was one of those struggles which have passed down through the ages as the 'brand of the fight for the 8 hour day' to their employers. It was increased, down trodden and abused. New socialist groupings grew to a head. Should such social processes be won via parliament or by trade union action? The socialists claimed that it was the responsibility of the State. The Cleveland Miners, however, argued that "if an eight hour day were given by law, instead of by organized efforts, the workers would not be pursued to organize... There must be independent life within the State to prevent the Government becoming a charity, and the Trade Unions will be chief among those who shall call this independent life into being." The 8 hour day debate was the first major impetus to the demand for 'independent labour representation' and a party with a new attitude towards the workers role in the State. The desire was truly for social progress and proved in many instances to be a practical way forward. But today we should remember also the warnings of those who bitterly opposed the new direction.

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HISTORIC NOTES

The fight for the 8 hour day

BY THE LAST decades of the nineteenth century workers were getting weary of their position. It was increasingly incomprehensible to vote Liberal, the 'left' of the two parties, when the boss was Liberal and often sent police and troopers to break up strikes. People who were increasingly angered by the 'theory' that poverty was caused by laziness, or lack of character. Unemployment was on the increase, housing conditions showed no signs of improvement, and still there were wage cuts and demoralisation. Neither Liberals nor Tories would do anything for 'trade interfered' they said, against good economic sense. Workers: the vote had brought few changes.

New socialist groupings grew demanding far reaching reforms, blaming the system not the individual, and demanding 'independent labour representation' to push reforms through parliament. Until this, the TUC had concentrated on removing anti-working class legislation and had generally opposed anything more. But as the President told the TUC of 1897: 'Gentlemen, we can do with state interference, the homes of the people can be improved, or work to the unemployed to be given, in the factories, the day men have the right to the votary and then were timed. Finally some of them started their own strike inside for a nine hour day. To be buckled on

Newcastle Town Moor with banner: displaying quotations from Shakespeare, Burns and Byron, along with the slogans of the factories. The terms of the agreement were 54 hours a week, no reduction in pay, agreement for 12 months to start January 3 1873. It was total success for the Nine Hour League of the Tyne and the way forward for all the industrial workers of Europe.
The Victorian British ruling class regarded India as the jewel in the crown of the Empire, to be guarded at all costs. The dangerous rival was Russia and the weak frontier was Afghanistan. Subjection of the Afghans was therefore a prime objective of the British government in India. Friendship with them proved difficult however, as they were a group of fighting tribes who had lived for centuries despoiling the traders through the Khyber Pass.

At the beginning of the nineteenth century the English and Russian frontiers were separated by 4,000 miles, reduced to 2,000 in the mid-nineteenth by the British annexation of Bengal. When the Russians in their turn began to advance the frontier, the British started the First Afghan War. An army led by General Elphinstone, at the demand of the East India Co., occupied Kabul in 1837. In 1841 there was an uprising so the General agreed with the Afghans to evacuate the town and go back to British India under safe conduct. The Afghans proved treacherous, attacked the British force of 4,500 men and killed or captured everyone except a doctor who escaped to the fort of Jellalabad near the entrance to the Khyber Pass in January 1842. After a display of great bravery by Indian and British troops defending Jellalabad, a fresh British force under General Pollock advanced into Afghanistan, defeated the Afghans and occupied Kabul. The historian Brown wrote "After thus indicating the greatness of the British Empire, the East India Co. recognized the independence of Afghanistan and evacuated the country." The nightmare of the British always was that the Russians would make friends with the Afghans because it was believed almost impossible for them to scale the great mountain wall of the Hindu Kush if the Afghans were hostile to them. In 1878 the nightmare came true when the Amir invited a mission of Russian officers to reside in Kabul. The British Government in India demanded the same right and that the Amir should conduct his foreign relations only through the Government of India. War followed and the Amir was compelled to accept the terms in 1879. An officer of the Political Department was sent to Kabul and on September 3rd he and his escort of 75 Indian soldiers were killed. For the second time the Afghans had shown their contempt for the British so now a lesson had to be taught. General Roberts, later of Boer War fame, marched at the head of 7000 Indian and British troops through the Kurram valley to Kabul but meanwhile Governor Burrows had been defeated by the Afghans at Kandahar. At all costs the legend of British invincibility had to be retained in order to hold down India so Roberts was despatched with thousands of troops, horses, mules, camels and guns to march to Kandahar 313 miles away. They did this very quickly, met Ayub Khan and routed his Afghan army. A new Amir was chosen by British and the original terms were imposed on him. With a minimum of internal authority; all external authority belonged to the British. British power had been vindicated, Russian influence expelled and rifles and money were given to the ruler Abdurrahman to keep down the people or as the British expressed it "to keep law and order". One of the most repulsive aspects of these invasions was the war fever in Britain and particularly amongst the radicals in the industrial towns. A similar phenomenon can be observed today in the Amalgamated Union of Engineering Workers and the National Union of Mineworkers. It is marvelous to behold how belligerent men past calling-up age become.
"AFTER WHIT Sunday" 1871 there can be neither peace nor truce possible between the working men of France and the appropriators of their produce. "So ended Karl Marx's address to the International Working Men's Association delivered just two days after the final suppression of the Paris Commune on May 28th by the soldiers of the French bourgeoisie.

The beginning

The story of the Paris Commune began almost a year earlier, in June 1870, the French bourgeoisie declared war, ostensibly against Germany. In fact, it was a war for the declamation of the French people, and was opposed by the working class. The bourgeoisie then declared peace in May 1871 with the country under Prussian military control, and with a pledge to extort from the people a horrifying burden of taxation to compensate the invaders: the object of the bourgeoisie was now apparently achieved, except for Paris.

On September 4th, 1870, the workers had taken matters into their own hands, overthrown the Empire and demanded a Republic. Yet this new bourgeois government, headed by Thiers, was more interested in alliance with Prussia than with the defence of Paris and its people; it only narrowly escaped overthrow in October.

After the capitulation of the city in January 1871, this cowardly government fled to Versailles, leaving the workers' National Guard successfully to secure Paris. The bourgeoisie then pressed Bismarck to use the Prussian occupation forces to suppress the city.

Unwilling to involve his troops in street-fighting, Bismarck declined the offer. The bourgeoisie, forced to take matters into its own hands, entered Paris with their army in an attempt to gain possession of the weapons of the National Guard.

They failed miserably, and their repulsion on March 18th was the birth of the Commune. So they returned to Bismarck, shelling the city the meanwhile. Even harsher compensation terms were agreed for the May 'peace', so desperate were the bourgeoisie for the release of French prisoners of war held by the Prussians. Thus was an army hastily assembled for the butchery of the men, women and children of Paris.

The hideous revenge exacted on the Paris workers was the doing not just of the French bourgeoisie, but also of international capitalism. The British and Tsarist governments gave their whole-hearted backing to the Thiers government. And the principal condition for the suppression of Paris, the continued occupation of France by Prussia, was continued at the request of the French bourgeoisie.

The common estimate is of 60,000 men, women and children slaughtered.

Their only crime was to seek to govern themselves. "Paris was no longer the rendezvous of British landlords, Russian ex-serf owners, Irish absentee, American ex-shareholders and shoddymen and Wallochian boyards. "We," said a member of the Commune, "hear no longer of assassination, theft and personal assault; it seems as if the police (who had fled) had dragged it to Versailles all its Conservative friends."

Working hours were reduced, production organised under a cooperative plan, the standing army abolished and replaced by armed workers, all officials elected and subject to recall: in short there was a dismembering of the militaristic and bureaucratic mess of bourgeois government.

Hideous

The Parisians had survived months of famine when, in the words of Victor Hugo, "the potato was Queen, and the onion God." They had made peace, not with their bourgeoisie, but with the Prussian soldiery, who in awe at the armed people would not or could not enter the city. The bourgeoisie could not forgive the workers of Paris.

The Commune is the first living example of proletarian dictatorship. But its lesson is bitter. For their courage in refusing to submit to the bourgeoisie's conduct of war, and in turning their weapons against their rulers, the Parisian workers paid a terrifying price. After the Paris Commune, no one can wait for the outbreak of war as an opportune moment for revolution. Our task, like that of the French working class, is to strike at the warmongers at home and prevent war, which now as a hundred years ago has as its only object the carnage of the working class.
The first jolt to the ruling classes’ arrogant belief that only they are fit to govern came in 1871 with the uprising of the Paris Commune...

1871: The 72 days of the Paris Commune

WORKERS, MAR 2011 ISSUE

It grew out of a war and a siege. In the summer of 1870, Emperor Napoleon III of France waged an unnecessary war with Prussia. The Prussians soon proved to be a superior military force and invaded France. By September 1870, the French troops had surrendered and the Emperor, taken prisoner, abdicated.

The Parisian crowds – in disgust – proclaimed a republic. Civilians were called up to serve in the National Guard, a part-time citizens’ militia set up in the great revolution of 1789. By October 1870 Prussian armies encircled Paris, then a city of over a million and a half people.

Fortified walls and a chain of forts were strengthened. Together with the remnants of the regular army, the National Guard comprised 350,000 men and women, grouped in neighbourhood battalions with a great mistrust of the military authorities. Guard units elected their own officers and formed a central committee.

The Prussians laid siege. By December food and fuel were running out. Then came the onset of one of the coldest winters within living memory. People began to die from hunger and cold. In the middle of January 1871, ration cards were issued for the daily bread allowance.

On top of the recently widened gap between rich and poor in the capital, the food shortages, military failures, and, finally, a Prussian bombardment of the city contributed to widespread discontent. Also, the temporary government began secret negotiations and agreed an armistice with the Germans, allowing them into Paris for two days to celebrate their victory. Paris felt betrayed and outraged.

The Commune

In the early hours of 18 March, government soldiers moved quietly to take over the 250 cannon held by the National Guard in the hilly areas of Montmartre, overlooking the city. Quickly, Parisians emerged from their homes to surround them. The government soldiers following Head of State Adolphe Thiers were ordered to fire on the citizens of Paris. They refused to obey the order, and joined the crowd.
Crowds and barricades emerged all over the city. Regular soldiers retired to their barracks and the government withdrew to Versailles in disorder. A red flag flew from the Hotel de Ville (City Hall). The Central Committee of the National Guard was now the only effective government in Paris: it arranged elections for a Commune, to be held on 26 March.

**Elected**

On 28 March the Commune was proclaimed. 92 members of the "Communal Council" were elected including a high proportion of skilled workers and several professionals (such as doctors and journalists). Nearly a third of Commune members were working class. It was the first time workers had been elected freely to make policies instead of enduring them. A member of the Commune wrote, “After the poetry of triumph, the prose of work.”

Other cities in France also set up Communes: Lyons, Marseilles, Toulouse, Narbonne, St Etienne, Le Creusot and Limoges. However, all of these were crushed quickly by the Versailles government.

The Commune was a new kind of government. There were no organised political parties. The work of the Commune was done by committees, which elected delegates as leaders of government departments. By the middle of May, 90 trades unions were openly flourishing. Some 43 workers’ cooperatives sprang up, and the Commune attempted to provide money to invest.

Women, who then had few rights, threw themselves into the commune, working alongside men on public committees, an innovation. Day nurseries were set up and an industrial training centre for girls planned.

Everyone in public service had to be elected by popular vote. The Commune only had time to issue and implement a few decrees – including the separation of church and state; the remission of rents owed for the period of the siege; the abolition of night work in the hundreds of Paris bakeries; the granting of pensions to the unmarried companions and children of National Guards killed on active service; and the right of employees to take over and run an enterprise if it were deserted by its owner.

On 21 May, the Versailles troops were allowed through the German lines, to enter the city of Paris. The toughest resistance came in the
more working-class eastern districts, where fighting was vicious. 20,000 Parisians were killed in one week.

**Ruling class brutality**

The ruling class brutality was severe and draconian. The German army, partly surrounding Paris, colluded with the French army to destroy the Commune. People fought tenaciously in their local communities until the 28 May. After the slaughter, Thiers said, “The ground is strewn with their corpses. May this terrible sight serve as a lesson.”

Obviously, the Commune made mistakes. Probably the people of Paris were so caught up in planning social reforms that they did not get to grips with the threat of the Thiers government. And if the Commune had taken control of the Bank of France in Paris (which held the country’s gold reserves), then it would have had something powerful to counter with. The Commune was never fully prepared for civil war – it did not train the National Guard nor prepare the defences of Paris very efficiently. People were left locally to fight behind barricades that the enemy outflanked.

But the events in the French capital city ushered in the prospect of a new type of society. To ruling classes everywhere, it was a fleeting alarm, as the Paris Commune was the first brief glimpse of the bounty of revolutionary power, and of what it might bring to the people. Marx championed the Commune writing of “these Parisians storming heaven.” It was short-lived, lasting only 72 days in only one city, but it happened and its example can never be erased from history. It is still an inspiration.
Samuel Plimsoll and the 'Sea-Villains'

The workers of Laird Bros, photographed during the building of the "Royal Oak" at Birkenhead in 1896. Safety was accounted for. (From John Gorman's 'To Build Jerusalem Scorpion Pub.)

Wilson, now President, as he had been almost forgotten, had his Union instal, to Victoria Park Embankment Gardens, a bronze bust on a granite column with the inscription, "Samuel Plimsoll born 1824 died 1896. Breasted by the National Union of Seamen in grateful recognition of his services to the men of the sea of all nations.

He was also long remembered in another way. Inspired by the courage of Plimsoll, Sir John Lubbock, moved by the fact that workers of all trades worked on one hour of any given day, he was moved by the fact that workers of all trades worked on one hour of any given day, he was never seen in the sun and now in England, because Britain did not celebrate Saints Days as did Europe, secured the passing of a modest little Bill, the Bank Holiday Bill in 1871, knowing that other workers would want to go "to see the butterflies" and the holiday would become general. An enterprising manufacturer made shoes for the new holiday workers and called them "Plimsolls". Samuel Plimsoll, the failed coal merchant and enterprising MP, had no connection with the sea, except as a child he was rowed out by his father, an exciseman, to see the ship impressing Napoleon who, said his father, had killed more people on earth than any previous tyrant.
IN the early 1970s agriculture was still employing more male workers than any other industry in Britain, despite a reduction of its labour force by nearly 200,000 since 1851. It was not surprising that so many farmworkers were forced to abandon the miserable conditions of rural life. Wages were at least 45 per cent below those of manufacturing industry, employment was irregular especially during winter. Cottages were cramped and insecure, while hunger and malnutrition were common due to a basic diet of bread - meat being a rare luxury. On top of all this obedience of a feudal nature was expected from the local landowner. Despite a timid exterior, the impoverished and often illiterate farmworkers learnt that conditions in other industries were gradually improving while their lot remained miserably stagnant. It was with this background that there was a growing movement to form agricultural trade unions.

In the village of Harbury in South Warwickshire, farmworkers met to consider forming a union. Rather than approach a sympathetic urban trade unionist to help with leadership and organisation, the farmworkers of Harbury sought one of their own who would understand the problems of organising the rural workforce and would be trusted by them. The man they chose was Joseph Arch, a farmworker well known locally for his plain speaking, and renowned in several counties for skilled hedging and ditching. He was also fortunate in owning his own cottage so he could not be evicted by an anti-union landlord.

So it was on Wednesday 7th February 1872 that Joseph Arch walked the few miles from his home in Barford to the village of Wellesbourne where a meeting was to be held. There were far too many people to meet in the local pub, so the crowd of over 500 farmworkers assembled under the branches of a huge chestnut tree. Opponents of the meeting ensured that the gas lamps round the village green were turned off, so it was by the light of flickering lanterns suspended from the chestnut tree that the meeting commenced. Standing on an old pig-killing stool, Joseph Arch urged the formation of a union in order to fight for better wages, conditions and housing. He suggested an increase of 6d a day on the present rate of 2s, and a reduction in hours from 16 to 8 per day. This speech from a fellow farmworker aroused the enthusiasm of the crowd, and a decision was reached to form a union. From this bold start, many more local unions were formed with the help of Arch's newly fired enthusiasm. The various village unions soon amalgamated into a County Union, then only four months after the first meeting at Wellesbourne the National Agricultural Labourers' Union was founded, Joseph Arch being elected President.

There had been Agricultural Trade Unions before and indeed there were to be others later, but it was Joseph Arch, the hedger and ditcher, who first inspired farmworkers to unite and take militant action. Indeed the bitterly fought struggles of Arch's time are a reminder to British farmworkers today, with their claim for a 50 per cent wage rise, that it is only by using their collective strength to bargain with that any real improvements will be made.
The Kent and Sussex Lockout of 1878

WHEN the harvest was safely gathered in in October 1878, farmers in Kent and Sussex announced that daily wages were to be reduced from 2/6 to 2/2 or 2/3d. Naturally the farmworkers resisted this repressive move and before long the farmers began a lockout. The farmworkers in this area all belonged to the Kent and Sussex Agricultural and General Labourers Union, one of several local Agricultural Unions formed around that time, but which had not affiliated to Joseph Arch's National Union. By 1878 the Kent and Sussex Union was 15,000 strong.

While the farmworkers faced a winter of even greater hardship than usual, after-dinner speakers at farmers' clubs praised the farmers' moderation. One such speaker said the farmers' club that they must look on labour as a commodity, and should not permit 'flesh and blood' considerations to influence their dealings with the men.

The Union fought bravely but funds were badly depleted by payments to locked-out men. In December the Farmers began to evict the workers from their cottages, and the Union assisted about 500 of their members to emigrate to New Zealand, while those remaining had to accept the employers' terms, although some farmers refused to re-establish their men.

Farmers today still talk of the 'special relationship' they have with their employees, but in reality farmworkers are still treated as a commodity, just as farmers were urged to do in 1878. As in any other branch of Capitalism, employers pay as little as possible for the commodity of labour power.

In 1878 farmers could easily afford to shed a large part of the agricultural labour force, but the situation in Britain today's very different. As the General Secretary of the NUAAW stated recently: "...The old assumptions are crumbling fast. In the highly mechanised agriculture today and tomorrow the skilled farmworker is not as keen to accept conditions that his father did. There are areas of agriculture which can be particularly vulnerable to a well organised workforce and it is to these areas that the Union may be looking for a lead in the unending struggle to achieve the financial rewards for the efforts which dedication to the job has not produced."
The truth behind the Boer War

The author searches for the "longest, costliest and one of the most humiliating of British imperial wars". His book is an excellent piece of historical writing and only the price of £10 would deter any serious person from buying it.

The author considers the war declared by the Boers in 1899 to give new boots but he had the same soaring ambitions as his rivals. The incredible incompetence and barbarism of the British ruling class of that period is only matched by the crowd we have today.

Pakenham, in his admirable preface, states the aim of his research; "the fine golden thread woven by The Rand millionaires"; the feud between the Roberts Ring and the Webley Buller Ring, in order to explain the inexplicable military actions of the Natal campaign, the fact that far from being a gentleman's war, a white man's war, sadly, Africans were involved. By the end, 10,000 Africans were under arms in the British Army and black non-combatants were flogged or shot by the Boers.

Finally the author studied the concentration camps, where more than 20,000 Boer civilians died, and the burning and looting of Boer farms. "The conscience of Britain was stirred by the holocaust in the camps." Some credit for this must be given to Emily Hobhouse, who toured the camps, asked for improvements and wrote long reports to MPs and the Liberal Party. "If the guerrillas in South Africa lost the war they won the peace."

The last two sentences of the book are worth remembering: "Beit's successes in South Africa have maintained rewarding relationships with successive South African Governments. The gold assets of South Africa are now valued at 100 times the value estimated in 1899."
**Historical notes 1888 The Matchgirls' Strike**

"ROUGH, hard and saucy" was how one of the Commissioners who wrote the 'Inquiries concerning female labour in London' described London factory girls. But what most impressed him was that among no other class of young women does there appear to be so much camaraderie, such a strong instinct that all must pull together, such a commune of food, clothes and halfpence as among the factory girls of the Metropolis."

It was precisely this kind of solidarity which was so significant for the events of July 1888 when 1400 match girls downed their tools and walked out over the attempted victimisation of one of their number at the Bryant and May factory in Bromley, East London.

And it was precisely this solidarity which Annie Besant, self-appointed champion of their cause, failed to recognise when she wrote in her paper (The Link):

"We must help these because they cannot help themselves."

The conditions which Besant highlighted in an article entitled "White Slavery in London" were appalling. (But they were by no means exceptional: for factory workers at that time.)

Bryant and May had built up a virtual monopoly in the match trade by buying up other companies. At the same time, they had reduced wages from 15-20s. a week down to 4-13s.

There was an illegal system of fines for petty misdemeanours (dirty feet, talking!) and many deductions from their wages.

The workers were subject to all manner of hazards. Physically violent foremen, injury from machinery, spinal damage and premature baldness from carrying heavy boxes on their heads, and the ever-present danger of phosphorus poisoning (they had to eat in the work rooms) causing a horrible disease known as 'phossy jaw' - all these added to the misery of their working lives.

In 1888 one 16-year-old reported taking home 4s., a week of which 2s. paid her rent while she survived on a steady diet of bread, butter and tea. Meanwhile down at the Stockmarket, Bryant and May's shares soared in value from 5s. to over 1£6 and in 1887 they paid out a 23 per cent dividend.

Having exposed this running sore of capitalist exploitation, Mrs Besant and her fellow Fabians called for... a boycott of B & M's matches!

Theodore Bryant was renowned among his workforce for his unprecedented generosity; he had allowed them to contribute to a statue of his favourite statesman (Gladstone) by docking 1s. out of their wages and giving them a wage-free half day for the unveiling ceremony. His first response to Mrs Besant's article was to threaten to sue her. Then he made the same mistake as she had done. Foolishly underestimating his workforce, he attempted to victimise some of them for giving the information to outsiders. The response was a shock to both Mr B and Mrs B. As one girl later stated: "It just went like tinder. One girl began, and the rest said 'yes', so we all went." The factory emptied.

Threats of importing scab labour from Scotland or moving the factory to Norway were to no avail. While money poured in for the strike fund shares plummeted in value. The London Trades Council, much impressed by the action of this group of unorganised women, gave full support.

Within two weeks the management were forced to concede to all the girls' demands and the strike ended in victory.

The matchworkers subsequently formed their own union and their example provided the stimulus for thousands of other unorganised workers to follow. It was the spark which lit the fire of the so-called "New Unionsm" and the following year saw a massive outbreak of struggles to secure decent wages and conditions among dockers, gas workers, railwaymen and many others.

That Mrs Besant provided much help and publicity for this cause is undeniable. It is significant however that she and her fellow 'socialists' chose to take full credit for the whole affair and subsequent historians have mainly chosen to compound the distortion. The idea that it takes great men and women to make history while the mindless, helpless masses provide a suitable backdrop to their stage is an insult to brave struggles such as this and to those who dared to take a step forward for their class.
A day for the working class

MAY DAY is a day of celebration. From the immortal the British people have celebrated their deliverance from the harsh straitjacket of winter to the new life of spring by a day of rest, dancing and joy.

In the nineteenth century this rite was transformed into something quite new. On May 1st, 1886, the McCormick Reaper Works in Chicago were brutally attacked by the police. The ensuing struggle, 10 workers and seven police were killed. Four of the workers' leaders were later arrested and hanged.

July 4th, 1889, is an important date in the history of May Day. It was on this day that the International Association of Working Men met in Paris and adopted the following resolution:

"Congress decides to organise a great international demonstration so that in all countries and all cities on one appointed day, the toiling masses shall demand of the State Authorities the legal reduction of the working day to eight hours."

May 1st was the day chosen in honour of the American workers' struggle.

In 1890, the first organised May Day took place in Paris, Berlin and Chicago, as well as in other cities. The demonstration in London was held on May 4th in Hyde Park. A massive turn out was recorded with all sections of the working class represented.

Three years later, the International, in keeping with the rising tide of revolutionary feeling, passed a resolution calling on all workers to celebrate May 1st not only in connection with the eight-hour day campaign but also as an expression of determination to change the old order of things.

The 1890s saw the Russian workers rising as beginning to assert themselves. All forms of working class activity and organisations were illegal, but in spite of killings, torture and deportations by the Tsarist police, workers were becoming organised, and often expressed their solidarity in massive May Day marches in the principal cities.

London's May Day celebration in 1900 took place at the Crystal Palace, and speeches denouncing the imperialist aims of the British Government in South Africa were in stark contrast to the Boer War jingoism of the time.

The twentieth century came as an tide of working class activity throughout the world. In 1907 the Russian workers, with the aid of sections of the Tsarist army, who mutinied, attempted to overthrow the reactionary regime and transfer power into their own hands. The attempt failed but the lessons paved the way for future success.

With the First World War the imperialist powers came the world-shattering breakthrough of the great October Russian Revolution of 1917. Throughout the period of the war the Clydeside workers had struggled against the Imperialist war and the attack on their living standards. The first Sunday in May, 1917, was a big demonstration in Glasgow. Between 70,000 and 80,000 people marched to Glasgow Green where they passed resolutions expressing solidarity with the Soviets, the organisations which were to lead the people of the Soviet Union to power later that same year.

By 1920, the rallying call was "Hands Off Russia!". The May Day demonstrations in London not only included a thousand strong contingent of ex-servicemen but also sacked members of the Metropolitan Police who had been on strike for better wages and conditions.

On the first Sunday in May, 1924, at the very time the demonstrations were being held, the TUC Executive meeting in Kingsway Hall to discuss the General Strike which began at midnight.

The first great hunger march was in 1926. On May 1st, a thousand marchers representing the unemployed in various parts of the country arrived in London. They marched to Fulham Wyck House where they were refused entry by a large force of police.

The whole of the London May Day gathering of workers then marched to the Work House in support. In the face of this show of strength, the hunger marchers were allowed in, and promptly hoisted the red flag over the building.

The 1930's witnessed the rise of fascism and the struggle against Franco in Spain. The main theme of the 1937 May Day march in London was support for the Spanish Republicans and the International Brigade.

In 1945, the fascist's powers were defeated. The Labour Party refused to participate in the traditional May Day celebration because of the "C" Division, to be one of the speakers. This was the beginning of separate May Day marches by 'Labour' and 'Communist' parties, which was to become traditional.

Osvald Mosley, the British fascist who had been imprisoned during the war, announced his intention of marching on May Day, 1944. The Labour Government was forced by public protest to ban the march. They then banned the May Day march of the labour movement as well; just as today when the present Labour Government bans workers' demonstrations along with National Front marches. Workers needed no urging to march to Trafalgar Square for the usual rally. Thousands of demonstrators converged on the square, in spite of mounted police charges and dozens of arrests. The following year, when the Government again banned the march, workers demonstrated with the same militancy.

May Day, the traditional celebration of new life, has now become the main ceremonial expression of the working class's international solidarity and aspirations for a new world from which exploitation has been eliminated.
HISTORIC NOTES 1889
The Dockers' Tanner

There is a myth, still widespread today, that trade unionism is merely about getting more money for less work. 'Greed' capitalist propaganda calls it, trade unionism made great advances.

When some walked out over a minor dispute very few people noticed. When, inspired by the success of the gas workers, demands were formulated (the most famous being for the 'dockers' tanner') and dock after dock pulled out. The employers were quite unconcerned. Starvation would force the men back to work. It did not. They had stood up for their rights - and in its hypocr isy.

A moment's thought leads you to the opposite conclusion. In a society where everything - from food to culture, even health, life and death is reduced to a question of 'how much money', the fight for wages is the fight for our humanity.

1889 strike

This was the lesson of the dock strike of 1889. The dockers were the lowest of the low. The manager of the Millwall docks told a Lords Committee on Sweating in 1889 about their conditions: "(they) come to work without a farthing in their pockets; they have not anything to eat in the middle of the day...and by four o'clock their strength is utterly gone; they pay themselves off...". Often they had to fight each other at the dock gates merely for the job ticket. And yet it was from the fight of these same men, and their spirited example, that trade unionism made great advances.

When some walked out over a minor dispute very few people noticed. When, inspired by the success of the gas workers, demands were formulated (the most famous being for the 'dockers' tanner') and dock after dock pulled out. The employers were quite unconcerned. Starvation would force the men back to work. It did not. They had stood up for their rights - and for weeks held out against all odds, and in doing so won the admiration and support of workers the world over. (In fact, it was financial contributions from Australia in the last weeks which kept them going to victory).

More than a penny

When they went back they had won far more than a penny on the wages. As a history of the newly formed dockers union put it: "We had established a new spirit; the bully and the thief, for a time at least were squelched; no more would the old man be driven and cursed by the younger man... The whole tone and conduct of work, of management of the men was altered for the best."

The goad of the sack was not so fearful... (the men) grew in self-respect. The docker had in fact become a man. The man became greater in the happiness of a better supplied larder and home; the women folk, with the children, shared in the sense of security and peace the victory at the docks had wrought."

Setting an example

Hundreds and thousands of other unskilled and previously unorganised workers followed the example of the dockers. True, many of these new unions collapsed in the face of a vicious counter attack by the employers. But the real advance in ideas and attitude had already been made. "Economic ignorance has in times past caused us to believe that our duty lay in the direction of producing much and consuming little; this is a fatal error. Those who consume least are the most ignorant, most useless, the most animal like of all. A large consuming capacity on the part of every section of workers is fully justified by sound economics" one of the leaders argued.

The dockers' strike was neither defensive, nor apologetic, but was an honest fight for an improved life. "Unionism is social salvation. All workers should recognise it and act upon it" was the message of the Leith dockers, as they joined the new union.
"PEOPLE do not live in work, they work to live, and it would rather not live than live a drudge and a clot. Our new religion (of Socialism) tells us that a body must be nourished that the soul may thrive, and that nothing which is got at the soul's expense is cheap."

So Robert Wakley replied to the world's reality of capitalism in the 1840s. Right from the inception of the capitalistic system, in fact, the attempt has been made to restrict the lives of people, that "wage", to slavery to the profit ethic. Anything more has been condemned as "wastefull" and therefore immoral.

In 1834, a pamphlet entitled "The Great Law of Subordination, or the Insolence and Insubordinate Behaviour of the Servants of England" appeared, penned by Daniel Defoe. "Wretchedness are rife", the Farmers disabled, Manufacturers and Artificers plunged to the Destruction of Trade... No man who, in the course of Business employ Members of the Poor, can depend upon any Contracts they may make... Under a stop of trade and a general want of Work, they (the poor) are clamorous and mutinous... load the Parliaments with their Siles and Children and grow ripe for all manner of mischief... in a glut of trade they grow saucy, idle and destitute... they will work but two or three days in the week."

He ended with the following little fable: "The Labouring Poor, in sight of double pay, Are Savvy, Mutinous and Greedy."
The basic attitudes of employers have remained true ever since then: through the vicious New Poor Laws, they 'baselittle' workshops to 1823. His "The Lancet" began to publish essays on surgical incompetence. Although 'The Lancet' itself continued to publish a series of analyses of food adulteration, which was rife and unregulated, his unremittent advocacy was inexhaustible.

In this contemporary drawing, the sick man looks longingly at the writing on the wall. Reality was to turn out otherwise...

For wages, working conditions or against unemployment, the poor toiled on the same grounds. In or out of work, we are greedy and lazy. This is capitalism: morality, ironic as it is. It is a time a socialist, humane and working class morality - which values and develops the feelings and talents of the people in and out of work - was truly victorious in this country of ours."

**Historic Notes**

"The Lancet" was founded by the Revd. William Wakley, a young doctor who had become interested in medical journalism, in 1823. His life-long concern was the exposure of medical abuses through the promotion of good practices.

At that time the Royal College of Surgeons was run by the surgeons of a few London teaching hospitals. To become a member of the college a student had to attend two courses of lectures for which he had to pay a high fee. The lectures were given by the surgeons themselves, who made their own rules. Lectureships were, of course, passed on by nepotism. The Lancet was to publish weekly verbatim reports of some of these lectures to make them available to all students without fee. It also reported cases from hospitals, including examples of surgical incompetence. Although he was sued several times, Walker never paid more than nominal damages. "The Lancet" became increasingly respected for its fearless advocacy of reform and good practice.

In 1855 Wakley was elected to parliament as an independent member for Finchley. His first major speech, two and a half hours long, was a closely argued and impassioned statement on behalf of the Tulsehill martyrs. This advocacy was a turning point in the movement for their release.

Walker played a major part in setting up the Committee of Enquiry into the State of the Medical Profession in 1854. As evidence, all reported in 'The Lancet', included the constitution of the medical colleges, the training of doctors, the treatment of the sick poor, the management of institutions including workhouses and asylums, both public and private, the status and pay of medical services, the value, use and abuses of drugs. The major focus of his work was the Medical Act of 1858, which set up the General Medical Council, through which, even today, doctors are recognized as qualified in their profession.

He lashed the new Poor Law Acts which made poor relief more difficult to obtain in workhouses, and 'The Lancet' published statistics which showed that the poor and elderly survived longer in their own homes than in institutions. He exposed fearfully the terrible conditions in workhouses and the cruelties of the care of the sick poor. This battle was finally won in 1845.

In 1851, 'The Lancet' began to publish a series of analyses of food adulteration, which was rife and unregulated. His unremittent campaign, where coffee, sugar, flour, vinegar, butter and a host of other commodities came under scrutiny, finally led to a series of Food and Drug Acts. The Lancet was condemned as "wastefull" and therefore immoral.

The Lancet itself continues to flourish, one of the foremost medical journalists in the world, and continuing in the traditions of its founder.
The myth of ‘degeneration’ of the race

In the 19th century London, a bourgeois writer said of the casual poor: … physically, mentally and morally unfit, there is nothing the nation can do for them but let them die out by leaving them alone…

The threat from the poor, both real and imaginary, to the privileged and wealthy figured constantly in public debate. The problem of poverty was perennial, but the Industrial Revolution greatly magnified it. Mechanization and external competition disintegrated many traditional industries like silk weaving, or forced small employers mercilessly to exploit their workers in ‘sweatshops’. Other trades like building were seasonal, which, along with considerable immigration of workers from the countryside, and a constant flow of the old and infirm from more skilled trades, led to an increase of the unemployed or semi-employed. A trade depression from the middle of the century reinforced this.

Once reduced to poverty, it was difficult to escape. Even in a good period, many had to repay interest or debts incurred during slack months. To the bourgeois observer, however, this poverty resulted from a lack of virtues befitting a successful businessman — thrift, prudence and hard work.

One solution to this ‘demoralization’ was to break up the working class ‘rookeries’, which were regarded as spawning crime, vice and low living, by driving great streets through them. It was reckoned that the ‘moral condition of these poorer occupants would necessarily be improved by communication with more respectable inhabitants.’

During the century, up to 100,000 people were displaced by clearances (for New Oxford St, Farrington St, etc) as well as the building of the railways and docks. But far from benefiting the poor, these demolitions simply forced them to move to the next parish, which became even more overcrowded.

For this ‘solution’, a manifest failure, a crude biological “theory” was substituted, which argued that urban life caused “degeneration” of the race, necessitating constant immigration from the countryside. Furthermore, Poor Relief and the Workhouses shielded the unfit, who would normally have been eliminated through “natural” selection, thus allowing them to “contaminate” the fit. This was exacerbated because the “criminal and pauperised classes with low cerebral development renewed their race more rapidly than those of higher nervous nature.”

To prevent this, sections of the bourgeoisie, including the ‘socialist’ Fabians, favoured compulsory sterilisation, others advocating the setting up of ‘labour colonies’ where the inmates would exchange “their half-fed and half-idle not wholly unregenerate life for a disciplined existence, with regular meals and fixed hours of work which would not be short.”

Seen in this light, the struggles of these workers for their basic dignity, which led to the wave of ‘New Utilitarianism’, take on a new meaning. In fact, these struggles prevented the possible implementation of these vicious schemes.

Ultimately, the First World War transformed the casual labour market, as the demand for workers as cannon-fodder for war production sucked up the unemployed. Degeneration was proved to be a myth, and the ‘residuum’ to be as capable as other sections of workers; before, they had simply not had the opportunity to exercise their skills.

Today, when we hear the arguments of those like Eysenck, Jensen or the National Front about the more oppressed of our class, we have only to think of the struggle for dignity of the London poor to see how false they are. Last tipped a war was one of its ‘solutions’ to the problem: now only revolution will suffice.

London’s poor in the streets of East London
THE TAFF VALE episode is not the most glorious of episodes in the history of the working class. But it was, nevertheless, of crucial importance.

In August 1900 workers on the Taff Vale railway in South Wales, members of the Amalgamated Society of Railway Servants, struck for higher pay and union recognition. Like many others of the period, it was a bitter dispute. Two men were imprisoned for unlawful damages of company property, and 400 fined for breaking their contracts. A sink 'free trade labor association' was brought to break the strike. And the company sought an injunction against all picketing.

The men fought back. The ingenuity remains an example to us today. Within a year affiliations to the Labour Representation Committee (prematurely the Labour Party) had doubled to just under one million. From 1904 on direct political action by the organised working class, previously the dream of socialists, became a reality. The Cotton Factory times, so smug before, now shouted, 'justice is slumbering'. The TUC moved from accommodation to outright opposition to the law. Agitation mounted for another two years, but it wasn't until the elections of 1906 that 40 Labour members were elected along with many more Liberals specifically pledged to overturn the Taff Vale decision, that victory was in sight. Despite numerous manoeuvres by the new Liberal Government, it was forced to give in. Trade union rights were, once again, secured, and alongside them a new political party had gelled...
The 1902 Education Act

IN 1870 W. E. Forster, the Vice-President of the Committee of the Privy Council on Education, told the Commons that: "Upon the speedy provision of elementary education depends our industrial prosperity... if we leave our workfolk any longer unskilled, notwithstanding their strong sinews and determined energy, they will become overwhelmed in the competition of the world."

This realisation of the need for a better Education System was part of a wider viewpoint which can be summed up as the quest for "National Efficiency", this developing in the 1890s as a response to the failures of Britain in competition with other nations, economically, socially and politically. Britain's failings were attributed generally to her outmoded methods of political economy, laissez-faire, and the complete lack of central organisation.

The formulation of the concept of 'National Efficiency', the Fabians under the leadership of Sidney Webb, held that an organised educational system that could both give a limited education to the majority of the working classes and yet offer opportunities to the 'special' was needed, for the success of Britain in industry, management and Government. Thus an extended education system was needed. This improved system however would not offer better education for all, the aim was to offer opportunities of improved education for the individual, the exception, while maintaining poorer levels of education for the rest of the working class. The task according to Sidney Webb, was to separate the job "of educating the mass of ordinary average children for the ordinary average life", from the "other (educational) function, that of preparing the exceptionally clever boy or girl for exceptional work."

Thus the Fabians promoted the creation of a system of education which offered the possibility of advanced education to the working class but only through the means of competition and expertise. The failings of this education system, which became a reality with the passing of the 1902 Education Act, were that it did not offer to the working class as a whole, a common retreat today, when we are asked to maintain the social contract for just one more year - in the interests of all.

The 1902 Education Act might have broken down some of the barriers which prevented the working class from acquiring an adequate education, and enabled some of them to advance themselves within the social structure, however for the broad majority of the working class, the situation was unchanged, the class boundaries were still very clearly outlined and their opportunities for advanced education were still limited to their own endeavour.
Unrest of 1910-12

"The syndicalists say never mind the law; take no notice of Parliament; they will do nothing for you ... What kind of advice is that?" A voice: "Sensible." (Report of a Lancs. miners' leader at a mass meeting in March, 1912).

The first sparks of the Great Unrest took place late in 1910, when lock-outs occurred against the cotton workers of Lancashire, boilermakers of the Tyne, miners in South Wales. Eleven months later the miners were starved back to work, but their leaders (many of them syndicalists) remained unbowed. They toured the country, demanding in lodge after lodge the establishment of a national minimum wage - the demand of the first ever national miners' strike a year later.

In August, 1911, the first national railways strike took place. Starting as an unofficial stoppage in Merseyside, it spread to involve 70,000 men within days and soon received official support. They struck not only for higher wages, but to rid the conciliation and arbitration boards that had been imposed on the railworkers, sailors, clay workers, tin miners, builders, engineers were among those to pursue their claims without reference to whom or wish of the Labour Party in the following year.

This unrest was mental as well as industrial. It was in part a revolt against the direction in which the Labour Party had been pulling the labour movement. In their quest for social progress, workers had won places in county councils, education and hospital boards, burial and poor law boards, conciliation boards. They had made their mark on the administration of the capitalist state - but in return they had had to learn to be 'practical'. They had accepted the claims of 'parliamentary democracy'.

Social progress was fast becoming sophistry. "In this country the State is the people - theoretically at least - and when the people turn to the State for an improvement in their condition they are in reality turning to themselves," Keir Hardie argued in defence of the Labour Party's stance. And in keeping with this 'argument' the Labour Party stayed silent as the industrial conflict was violently suppressed.

In Tonyandy one miner was killed by police. In Llanelli six railwaymen and tin-miners were massacred by troops. In Liverpool the shooting of strikers united the previously hostile Catholic and Protestant areas in street fighting against the 3,000 troops sent in. Similar repression followed in the transport strikes in Ireland.

In the first instance, in Tonyandy, only 17 of the 42 Labour MPs could be persuaded to protest. And this set the tone for the following three years.

The old, deep-rooted working class suspicion of the state re-emerged in force. Tom Mann, leader of the legal 8-hour movement twenty years before, renounced his former beliefs, admitting that he had been 'among simpletons' who had put parliamentary activity before the "real kernel" - workplace trade union and political organisation.

Victor Grayson, expelled from Parliament, published "The Problem of Parliament", to be followed by Tillett's "Is The Parliamentary Labour Party A Failure?". Blatchford, one of the original founders of the Independent Labour Party in 1893, vowed that he would "give the Labourists a damn good hiding" and called for the establishment of a socialist party.

The anti-parliamentary Daily Herald was set up following a printers' strike - soon surpassing the Labour Daily Citizen with a circulation of 150,000. Its first article, in April, 1912, demanded "We want thashed out - and this requires to be done very quickly - the question as to why it is and with what object we send Labour and Socialist members to the House of Commons."

Nationalisation, that old slogan, was attacked as "the mere governmentisation of certain public services for the convenience of the bureaucracy and its rich employers." "All the so-called 'Socialist' experiments in municipalisation and nationalisation are merely increasing the dependency upon the Capitalist Class... every single experiment is affected by a loan," one pamphlet declared.

Such ideas gained credence. The national conference of the Amalgamated Society of Railways Servants saw just under half its delegates voting for clear anti-parliamentary resolutions. The attempt to set up a political fund in the A.S.E was defeated after a vigorous anti-Labour campaign.

The fact that 'parliamentary socialism' necessarily leads directly to corporatism in practice and in thought was seen by leaders of the class as soon as the Parliamentary Labour Party had had time to show its mettle.

The South Wales coalfield was occupied by police during the miners' strike of 1910. The picture shows a typical scene at a Glamorgan colliery in the winter of that year. At Tonyandy the strike led to the death of a miner at the hands of the police.
THE 1906 General Election increased Labour strength to over 50 MPs. Of these, however, only 5 had been opposed by Liberals, and over 20 were official Lib-Lab candidates. But soon there would be one MP who would not be a tail to the Liberals.

In 1907 the young Victor Grayson stood in the Colne Valley By-election as a socialist. He refused to fight the election on issues of wages and hours alone, but on the issue of socialism itself. "We are not divinely destined to be drudges," his manifesto read, "the time for emancipation has come. We must break the rule of the rich and take our destinies into our own hands. A VOTE FOR THE LANDOWNER OR THE CAPITALIST IS TREACHERY TO YOUR CLASS." He was elected, despite the continued official opposition of the Labour Party.

1907 was a year of mounting unemployment and distress. Demonstrations around the country were broken up by the police. Grayson raised the issue with the Labour members and was told that it was not in the 'legislative programme'. So he raised the issue himself. The Labour members were embarrassed - he was disrupting the passage of a Bill to stop the poor drinking too much. Eventually Grayson resorted to 'Irish tactics' and after six weeks was ejected from Parliament shouting to the Labour members, "You are traitors, traitors to your class! I feel that no man who likes his kind would sit here another moment. I leave this house feeling that I gain in dignity in doing so."

His action created a storm. Asked why he did not form a socialist opposition within Parliament, Grayson just laughed and continued his speakers tour of the country. Labour's first real electoral victory had already shown the fundamental weakness of a parliamentary road to socialism. At the Labour Party Conference, Ramsey MacDonald was brought to account for his action against Grayson. His argument was telling. "The opposition between parliamentary procedure and the question of how to deal with the unemployed is a purely fictitious one. The unemployed can never be treated by any parliament except one which has rules of procedure... To protect the conditions and the existence of democratic government is just as essential to the building up of a Socialist State as is the solution of the problem of unemployment. The Party which proposes to strike at the heart of democratic government in order to make a show of earnestness about unemployment will not only not be tolerated by the country but does not deserve to be."

The niceties and practicalities of running a capitalist state had already taken precedence over the needs of the Labour movement. As Robert Blatchford stormed, "They have hauled down the Socialist flag to get their men into Parliament... The Socialist movement does not exist solely for the return of Labour members to the House of Commons. The purpose of the Socialist movement is to arouse people, to uplift the souls of the people, to reorganise society, to establish collective ownership of the means of life... This can never be done until the people understand. You cannot make them understand by silencing your prophets in the interest of political expediency."

Though MacDonald and others had to resign from the executive for a year their 'practical' policies won through. Two years later a Labour Party Bill was passed - not to help solve the problem of unemployment, but to set up Labour exchanges to organise the Labour market better. One disillusioned Labour supporter wrote to Keir Hardie, "Labour exchanges are based upon and cannot exist without unemployment, a condition impossible under socialism and damnable under anything else... Labour exchanges will do more to perpetuate it than to destroy it." Solving unemployment had been dropped.
The ‘crooked Welsh attorney’ and the dole

The 1911 National Insurance Act borrowed from Bismarck's Social legislation, was passed by the Liberal Government in 1911. From 1908 the Old Age Pension Act had stipulated that "people who are 70 years of age and whose income does not exceed £31:10:0d a year should receive five shillings a week". The Act had been piloted through the Asquith government by David Lloyd George, Chancellor of the Exchequer and by John Burns, the once-militant socialist trade unionist, now President of the Local Government Board. The Pensions Fund was non-contributory and financed out of general taxation. It would be graceless to enquire how many workers reached the age of 70 in 1908:

Second Orpheus

Lloyd George, described by many as "that crooked little Welsh attorney", had the quality of Orpheus. Ask anyone old enough to have heard him address a public meeting and you will be told of his silver tongue that could hold enthralled even a hard-headed working class audience and who could "tear a passion to tatters", weeping as he described the plight of the sick, the old, the disabled.

The Act of 1911 - by now Lloyd George had recovered his calm - closely followed Bismarck and like the German model was created to keep socialism at bay. The costs of social reform would come not from the rich but from the poor. The rich were not to pay anything but healthy employed workers were to contribute towards the needs of the sick and workless.

Workers pay twice

Employers were to make weekly contributions, as were workers, into a National Health Insurance Fund to which the State was to give a small subsidy. As Cole and Postgate wrote "nominal the workmen were to pay less than half the cost of the benefits they were to receive but it was not difficult to see that the employers' contribution would tend to come out of wages - for it would form part of the cost of employing labour and would be taken into account when wage bargains were being struck".

Distrust of scheme

From "THE HISTORY OF THE TUC" comes 'opinion inside the Labour movement was sharply divided about the desirability of the National Insurance Bill. The Parliamentary Committee of the TUC approved of it but trade unionists were divided about it and many socialists deplored the contributory basis of the scheme which they insisted should come from taxation. In April 1911 the TUC formed, together with representatives of the General Federation of Trade Unions, a sub committee to nominate men for the provisional insurance committees". The
Housing conditions in the 19th century have been well documented. Engels in "The Condition of the Working Class in England in 1844" described horrifying scenes of workers living in insanitary, overcrowded hovels in the expanding industrial towns. It was common for families to live in a single room, perhaps a cellar.

Factory owners put up houses as fast as possible to house their workers. These were back-to-back houses, crowded together, with no proper ventilation or lighting, no drainage or sanitary facilities such as running water and sewers. For these conditions maximum rents were extracted, often directly deducted from workers' wages.

This was the time of 'laissez-faire'; the heyday of free enterprise, State intervention in housing, either to set standards or provide subsidies, was viewed as anathema by the employing class. The forming of the 1st World War changed all that. The local housing service as we know it today was born in the early post-war years. The government was forced to intervene. The result was the passing of the Housing Act of 1919 which, for the first time, placed a duty on local authorities to survey housing needs in their areas and to build houses to meet those needs. It further established the principle of the permanent local authority ownership of houses for rent. Earlier Acts had required authorities to sell their properties normally after 10 years.

Rent Act victory

The government still expected private enterprise to resume the main role as the provider of housing for rent after the early post-war years. But statutory controls related to public health and rent levels were already preventing the private landlord from realizing his best interests, in minimal improvement to his stock with the freedom to realize maximum profits through charging high rents. It is worth noting that the decline of the private rented sector stems from the introduction of rent control and security of tenure in 1915. This 1920 Rent Act was forced onto the statute books during the early post-war years. People have been continually attacked and threatened at every stage of the legislation. It is far better to have one form or another over since it is necessary for the control of the excesses of private landlordism.

Local authority housing service, as it has developed over the years, is far from perfect. Its growth has been impeded by successive governments' stop and go policies on housing. In particular, it has been continually attacked by the Tory party which is forever seeking to return housing into the hands of the entrepreneur and speculator at the expense of working people.

It is fitting that we should reflect on the early part of the history of the local authority housing service that we may better rise to its defence at a time when public housing, and housing conditions generally, have never been under more severe attack.

threat of disease

Firstly, there was the immediate threat of disease: cholera did not recognize any class divisions, it spread from the insanitary conditions in the working-class areas to the wealthier parts of towns, and struck the bourgeoisie down in droves. The Sanitary Reform movement, headed by pioneers such as Edwin Chadwick and Dr Southwood Smith, worked to secure the provision of water and drainage, the cleansing and paving of streets, controls over construction and ventilation of dwellings through enforcement powers given to the then 'local authorities'. All the early legislation to improve housing conditions was on grounds of public health.

The other part of the threat felt by the employing class was the fear that the insanitary housing conditions in which workers had to live would provoke a mass uprising against them. Disraeli later said: 'The palace is not safe when the

lodging that of housing. Social surveys at the turn of the century, such as those of Rowntree (1901) and Booth (1900) challenged social attitudes and further publicized the appalling conditions in working-class areas. It was not, however, until the 1st World War that council house building began to really make a
1907 saw a wave of strikes in Belfast as workers fought attempts to sack union members and lower wages. A century later, Belfast workers remember. An Irish worker writes...

The Belfast strikes of 1907: unity, not sectarianism

In Belfast this year the traditional May Day celebrations took the form of commemorating the wave of strikes which swept through Belfast in the summer of 1907. Led by Jim Larkin, the common threads that linked the wave of strikes that summer were the call for union recognition, better pay and conditions and resistance to the employers’ attempts to defeat the growing working class unity of the Belfast strikers by provoking sectarian unrest.

The strikes began on 26 April when a coal importer called Samuel Kelly dismissed union members among his coal heavers in order to suppress wages. On 6 May, union members working for the Belfast Steamship Company walked off the job rather than work with non-union labour. Faced with this, Kelly backed down and agreed to reinstate the sacked men but the shipping company, seeing the walk-out as an opportunity, rejected all attempts to end the dispute.

The shipping company was owned by Thomas Gallaher, the cigarette manufacturer, and on 16 May over 1,000 women in his tobacco factory struck in support of the National Union of Dock Labourers and a large pay increase. Although the women went back shortly afterwards, the strike demands were widened to include union recognition from all shipping and railway companies and on 26 June all union members in the Belfast port joined the strike.

Strike-breakers
The employers responded by sacking all the workers and replaced them with scabs provided with military and police escorts in an effort to break the strike. This in turn led to further escalation when carters joined the strike in support of the demand for union recognition.

In a further attempt to undermine the strike the Belfast Telegraph, at the behest of the Government, gave prominent coverage to rumours that Catholic workers were receiving more strike pay than their Protestant counterparts. Although a Trades Council investigation proved that this was not the case, considerable sectarian tension was stirred up within the trade union movement in the city. Massive demonstrations and marches were organised in support of the workers linking east and west Belfast and this eased the situation somewhat.
Unity in action: Belfast workers enjoying a sunny May Day march this year.

The high point of the strike was reached on 27 July. Between 500 and 800 members of the Royal Irish Constabulary mutinied when a Constable William Barrett refused to sit beside a scab on a cart during escort duty. Escort duties were then taken over by military patrols and huge areas of the city controlled by the army in an effort to force scab labour through the picket lines. The action of the army led to a further escalation of sectarian tension and when rioting broke out on the Lower Falls leading to the death of three civilians it was clear that the strike was losing momentum and a settlement soon followed.

Although union recognition had not been achieved, better pay and conditions were won and the trade union movement emerged intact as a force for worker unity and against sectarianism, and was able to continue the fight for workers’ rights into the future.

During the course of the strike it was recognised that the greatest force to have been overcome was not the determination and brutality of the employers and the Government, though that was real enough, but the sectarian tensions that bedevilled the labour movement. Everything was done to combat this, the Catholic Jim Larkin even standing down at one point as strike leader in favour of Alex Boyd of the Municipal Employees, a member of the Independent Orange Order. Indeed the Order played a significant role in the development of the strike providing financial support and assistance to Catholic and Protestant workers alike.

**Vanishing industry**

Much has changed since 1907, not least the fact that a significant part of the industry that was setting for the strike action has all but disappeared from Belfast, in common with the prevailing de-industrialisation of Britain. However, there are some signs that the lessons learned that year are only now beginning to emerge as a potential force in the politics of today.

With the restoration of a devolved Assembly on 8 May this year there is a growing sense that all is not as it was before. For the first time in living memory the election that led to the establishment of the Assembly, was not dominated solely by constitutional matters.

The main concern of voters was the introduction of water charges, the appalling state of the health service, the crisis in local government and education and the growing awareness from both sides of the political divide that Westminster could not provide solutions to any of this.
Sinn Fein and the DUP agreed to form an administration not because of any coming together in love and harmony but simply because the workers in northern Ireland refused to accept any other course of action. They wanted their main concerns addressed by a group of people who were accountable to them.

Whether they are up to the job is, of course, another matter but workers have now firmly set the agenda and should be prepared if necessary to finish the job themselves.
Dismissal of teachers at Burston arouses the nation

In the winter of 1911 two schoolteachers, a married couple, T.G. and A.K. Higdon, arrived in Burston. They were confirmed socialists and had been deeply involved in attempts to organise agricultural workers.

The couple had been transferred to Burston on account of their success in organizing farm labourers at Wood Dalling. Tom Higdon had been working for several years organizing the farm workers of an established union branch and had captured the Wood Dalling Parish Council for the workers. Because of this a trumped-up charge was brought against Mrs Higdon which resulted in her transfer to Burston.

Undaunted the couple continued their work. Mrs Higdon refused to be subservient to her school managers and helped her husband organise new branches of the Agricultural Labourers' Union.

Early in 1914 another charge was brought against Mrs Higdon. It was of unfairly caning two pupils. The charge was unfounded but other matters were raised. The Higdons were dismissed. The villagers were outraged. Both parents and children refused to accept the decision of the Norfolk Education Committee. Pupils, encouraged by their parents, refused to attend the school and instead attended lessons daily on the village green. They were taught by the Higdons.

Fines were imposed on the striking children's parents, but money was raised by sympathizers at meetings in Norfolk and neighboring Suffolk.

Burston villagers supporting the Higdons were deprived of their glebe land by the local vicar, who was chairman of the managers of the Higdons' former school. Three glebe tenants were evicted from their cottages by the vicar. All this aroused great indignation among the trade unionists throughout Britain and the issue became a national one.

The Agricultural Labourers' Union and the National Union of Railwaymen gave valuable support to the strikers. The National Union of Teachers eventually came round giving its wholehearted support to the villagers.

The cause to which the working people of the country rallied in the cause was unanswerable. The NUJ organized meetings in London which were addressed by the Higdons, some of the pupils and their parents. Trade unionists everywhere knew that the Higdons had been victimized for their trade union work, political beliefs and activities.

The widespread publicity given to the Burston School Strike by the trade union movement enabled enough money to be raised for the construction of a new school on land granted by the Parish Council — which was, of course, controlled by Tom Higdon and his supporters. Some money came from abroad.

The school proceeded throughout the winter and became a focal point for British trade unionists. Older cripples at the school, as part of their education, were taken to trade union meetings. The emphasis was put on the plight of the school with the struggles of the unemployed everywhere. Meetings were held at the school in support of the Bolshevik Revolution, for Russian Famine Relief and to protest at the execution of Sidney and Beatrice Pankhurst. There can be no doubt that it inspired rural workers throughout Britain in their fight against the injustices imposed upon them.

The school continued to operate into the war. It was not closed until Tom Higdon died in 1919. It still stands and is used as a community centre. It serves as a memorial to the courage and determination of the Higdons and the heartening solidarity between the villagers and British trade unionists.


Historic Notes

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AT THE START of this century, the fertile peat soils of the Ormskirk area in Lancashire were intensively cropped to supply the huge markets of Manchester and Liverpool. Intensive farming demanded a large labour force and the local farmworkers realised that their wages and conditions were poor compared to better organised urban workers, so a large number joined the National Agricultural Labourers and Rural Workers Union.

In May 1913 the farm workers presented their demands: an increase of 4 shillings on the basic wage of £1.00, sixpence an hour overtime and a half day on Saturday from 1 pm. All the farmers conceded was a 2 pm stop on Saturdays.

Confident of their strength a strike was called on June 23 - just as the hay harvest commenced. The timing of their action hit the employers hard and the hay was only harvested by the farmers and clerks from Liverpool. The striking farmworkers were not worried if their picketing was primary or secondary only that it was effective. Groups of pickets were informed by cyclists when hay wagons were on the move, and despite police protection, many loads were turned back or simply scattered over the road.

Good timing and effective picketing put the strikers in a strong position and support from industrial unions led to a swift victory. As well as donating money to the strike fund, Liverpool trade unionists gave much practical help. Dockers prevented scab labour arriving by ship, while transport workers blacked non-union goods. The final blow came from Ormskirk NUR, who threatened to black all farm produce. The farmers conceded defeat after only two weeks, the final settlement forced a 2 shillings rise, sixpence an hour overtime and the 2 pm stop on Saturdays.

Present-day farmworkers will no doubt keep such examples of their union's history in mind as they begin to prepare their campaign for the 1980 pay claim. The claim of £100 minimum wage and a 35 hour week was introduced at a May Day rally in Ipswich. It is encouraging that the claim is being considered in good time, indeed action committees all over the country are planning possible industrial action. Strong organisation coupled with solidarity from urban unions will be as effective today as it was in 1913.
The First World War was not a surprise. The events and forces that led to it had been festering for decades...

1914: The road to catastrophe

When the First World War broke out on 4 August 1914, it did so against a background of intensifying conflicts and rivalries between the leading capitalist powers. Rival capitalisms were set on a gradual drift towards world conflagration as the differing interests and alliances locked market competitors into opposition and implacable hostility.

Probably the first impulse to general war can be traced back to the Prussian victory over France in 1870. The resulting unification and creation of the German Empire in 1871 led to a change in the balance of capitalist powers in Europe, with Germany now the strongest military might on the continent, possessing large and expanding industrial resources.

Germany annexed Alsace-Lorraine after 1870, throwing the French state into an alliance with Russia, splitting Europe into two opposing camps and opening up a period of competitive armament and a militaristic environment. Additionally, the war’s wake brought about the political re-grouping of Europe on the basis of Franco-German antagonism.
The period prior to the First World War was one of unprecedented economic rivalry and shifting economic strengths. Industrial developments in France, Belgium, Italy, Russia, India, Japan but above all in Germany and America, had put an end to the British capitalist monopoly of the world market that had held sway in the first half of the 19th century.

It was a dangerous mix of rising and declining capitalist powers, emerging and waning imperial forces, strutting the world looking for advantage. As now, the pursuit of profits by finance capital was the chief political dynamic, and the workings of capitalism itself led to war.

The nations of Europe were also competing in their colonial expansion. In the 1880s and 1890s the pace of imperialist competition increased, especially in Africa and the Far East. Those powers possessing no colonies, notably Italy and Germany, thought they should have some.

Colonies were profitable to finance capital. Britain secured control of Egypt and a powerful colonial empire in southern Africa; France took possession of Tunis in north Africa and Tonkin in east Asia; Italy secured a foothold in Abyssinia; Russia accomplished its conquests in central Asia, pushed into Manchuria and extended control across
Siberia to the Pacific with the Trans-Siberian railway; Germany won its first colonies in Africa and in the South Seas; the USA procured the Philippines.

There was a chain of bloody wars and conquests in imperial expectation of economic gain and to safeguard frontiers or exclude rivals from vacant territory. All these colonial developments created new, extra-European antagonisms: between Italy and France in northern Africa, France and Britain in Egypt, Britain and Russia in central Asia, Russia and Japan in eastern Asia, Japan and Britain in China, and the USA and Japan in the Pacific Ocean.

**Rivalries**

Imperialist rivalries led to rapid growth of militarisation. By 1897, German military policies underwent radical change moving from Bismarck’s strategy of power on land across the continent to challenging for supremacy on the ocean as well. Germany attempted to rival Britain as the world’s greatest naval force, a feverish naval race began, with the building of dreadnoughts and battleships on both sides.

Imperial Britain, facing the rise of the new Imperial German High Seas Fleet, committed resources to staying ahead at sea. In 1904, Britain created a North Sea Fleet based at Rosyth on the east coast of Scotland to counter the threat from the large German navy.

Europe divided into rival alliance systems. Often begun as defensive manoeuvring, they became offensive structures escalating the scale of conflict and animosities. Between 1879 and 1902, the German–Austrian and Franco–Russian treaties were made, followed by the Triple Alliance of Germany, Austria and Italy, the England and France entente, the England and Russia entente, and then Britain allied with Japan. In 1914 alliances dragged nations into war.

Crises and flashpoints brought the world to the verge of a general conflict: Morocco, Macedonia, Bosnia, Agadir and Albania. But each time a greater clash was postponed, as the sides were not yet ready with military preparations, though the final conflict was already forming.

**What might have been**

The only force that might have prevented the world war – the working classes of the world, particularly Europe – did not do so. In 1907 and 1912 the Second International (of workers’ organisations) had declared: “Should war nevertheless break out, it shall be the duty of the social democracy to work for a speedy peace, and to strive with every means in its power to utilise the industrial and political crisis to accomplish the awakening of the people, thus hastening the overthrow of capitalist class rule.” But as the German
Communist, Rosa Luxemburg, observed in 1915, “The first thunder of Krupp cannons in Belgium welded Germany into a wonderland of social harmony.”

Across Europe there was a working class retreat into “defence of nation, defence of empire”. International social democracy capitulated to capitalism’s whims and working men killed and destroyed each other in the ‘methodical, organised, gigantic murder’ of world war. The major social democratic parties of Germany, France and Britain rushed to the ‘defence of their fatherlands’ and in patriotic frenzy voted for war credits and clamoured about enemies.

It was left to Lenin and the Bolshevik Party in Russia in October 1917 to take workers out of an imperialist war and recognise its real aims – the seeking of territory and spheres of influence, trade advantage, raw materials, control of trade routes, and political, economic or military domination of vulnerable nations.

The inter-imperialist war happened brought the mass slaughter of an estimated 10 million people plus 20 million wounded. History warns.
EUROPE at the turn of the century was undergoing rapid change. Old empires were falling, new powers and forces rising. The conundrum of the old Austrian empire was dissolved: fast; the Austro-Hungarian empire was on. The arms race, part 2nd International became increasingly heated in Stuttgart and heard a report on how the world, in and outside Europe, Africa was complete, and now the world was undergoing rapid change. Local nationa...m.s were taken up, the old Turkish empire was dissolved, and new powers were arising. The Kaiser's abdication led to no revolution. In Germany, the Kaiser's abdication led to no revolution. In Germany, the Ukrainian empire was dissolved, and new powers were rising. The Kaiser's abdication led to no revolution. In Germany, the Kaiser's abdication led to no revolution. In Germany, the Kaiser's abdication led to no revolution. In Germany, the Kaiser's abdication led to no revolution.
The struggle for the Irish for self-determination

At MIDDAY on April 24, 1916, James Connelly led a company of men from Liberty Hall, the headquarters of the Irish Citizens' Army, to Dublin. Numbers of these men were the green uniforms of the Irish Citizen Army and the Irish Volunteers. They marched massed into the Four Courts Office which they then proceeded to occupy. Shortly the tricolour of the Irish flag was flying above the building.

Payoff Pursuit came out to address those inside, in aide of, in his hands the historic proclamation of the Irish Republic.

At this time, the Irish Volunteers, having occupied the whole of Dublin, declared "the right of the people of Ireland to the ownership of Ireland and to the control of Irish destinies, to be sovereign and independant, and that the control of fundamental right and again asserting it in the eyes of the world, the British in Ireland as a sovereign government, and the Irish people as a sovereign nation.

The Easter Rising had begun. In August 1914, immediately after the outbreak of the First World War, the British administration in Ireland, which had been set up in 1782, was dissolved, and replaced by a military government, the so-called "Defense of the Realm Act". The government was forced to issue a declaration of martial law.

Stunned by the initial success of the rising, the British government ordered an immediate invasion of Dublin. The British forces, led by General Sir Henry Wilson, began to move towards Dublin on Easter Monday, April 24, 1916. The British invasion was met with fierce resistance from the Irish Volunteers and the Irish Citizen Army. The conflict lasted for six days, during which time the British forces suffered heavy losses.

The Easter Rising was a significant event in the history of Ireland, as it marked the beginning of the Irish War of Independence and the ultimately successful struggle for Irish independence.

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ON APRIL 24, 1916 at the beginning of Easter week, James Connolly led the Irish Citizen Army and the Irish Volunteers against British Imperialism. They marched through Dublin, took key buildings and held the city valiantly for seven days, against a strong Dublin militia. In this Easter issue of THE WORKER we pay tribute to those workers and their leader James Connolly who fought to their deaths not for Ireland alone but for the working class of Europe.

The Irish Citizen Army was a proletarian army set up to end their fellow workers during the 1913 Dublin lock-out. They fought again in 1916 against Imperialism and war. The Bolsheviks and the Russian people did the same the following year, turned war into civil war and made the greatest revolution the world had ever seen. The idea of turning war into civil war was James Connolly's. As soon as it was evident that the 1914 war could not be prevented, Connolly's programme for Ireland had to be that of stopping it. He trained and drilled the Irish Citizen Army. He lectured them on street fighting and every week his paper carried descriptions of past rebellions and armed struggle. He wrote: "Starting thus Ireland may yet set the trend to a European conflagration that will not burn out until the last throne and the last capitalist bond and debenture will be shrivelled on the funeral pyre of the last war lord."

The rebellion of 1916 failed but the correctness of such a rebellion at such a time cannot be questioned. It was not the work of romantics or idealists. The battle lines had been drawn, Ireland was on the dissecting table and the war had already killed millions of workers. Of course the rebellion contained those "nationalists" who were not for the working class; many were romantics, many were bourgeois. But social revolution is not like Armageddon where two armies face each other in straight lines - the one all good and the other all evil. The rebellion failed through betrayal and failure to act, there was no party like the Bolsheviks who used to act, and no similar support. A civil war raged until Sackville Street, Dublin, 1916, 1921 when again rebellion was defeated and Ireland divided.

Much has happened since 1916. The British Government sent troops and 'black and tans' to murder 'rebels' in their beds in the years immediately following, and fifty years later sent them again but pretended they were something different. James Connolly's idea to rebel close to the heart of British Imperialism was not lost on those who benefit from subjugating Ireland. A British Army occupies Ireland today nothing that a united Ireland would have scene of fierce fighting consequences reaching beyond Belfast across the Irish sea. Hence the Fascist laws that apply in both lands.

Our party wrote when the troops went into Ireland ten years ago: "We call on British Workers to give solid support to the struggle of the Irish people for a United Ireland and an end to British rule. Their employers are our employers, their struggle our struggle. The class which sends the Army against Irish workers today will send it against British workers tomorrow."

In Ireland the revolution to end the war had to take a national form, and for Connolly material meant the rule of Ireland by the Irish working class. The call to arms came with the words: "We shall continue, in season and out of season, to teach that the far-flung battle line of England is weakest at the point nearest its heart, that Ireland is in that position of tactical advantage, that a defeat of England in India, Egypt, the Balkans or Flanders would not be so dangerous to the British Empire as any conflict of armed forces in Ireland, that the time for Ireland's battle is NOW, the place for Ireland's battle is HERE. That a strong man may deal lusty blows with his fists against a host of surrounder foes, and conquer, but will succumb if a child sticks a pin in his heart."

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ONE DAY in March, 1917, the women of Petrograd (now Leningrad) streamed out of their tenements and shacks and took to the streets in a mighty demonstration. Workers' and soldiers' wives, they marched in such numbers and with such determination that not even the Tsarist troops and police dared intervene—and some of them even joined in.

The slogans of the marchers, held high on their banners, proclaimed: "Bread for our children" and "Our husbands back from the trenches". And as they marched through the streets of Petrograd they lit the flames of the Bolshevik revolution.

That day was March 8, 1917. And the occasion was International Women's Day.

The first Women's Day had taken place ten years earlier, in 1908. The women of America, too, had marked the day down as one of struggle for women's rights. But in Europe the idea was taken up in 1910 by the International Conference of Working Women. A proposal for an International Working Women's Day to be celebrated throughout the world was put forward by Clara Zetkin, who was later to become a founder-member of the German Communist Party. The proposal, which was accepted, called for a day of struggle to be organized around the question of female franchise—the right of women to vote in parliamentary elections.

The first proper International Women's Day was duly held in 1911. Votes for women was the issue, and although the success differed around the world, one demonstration in Austria alone brought out 30,000 women. The date chosen was March 19, for that was the day on which, in 1848, the working class of Prussia had risen in armed insurrection against feudalism.

In 1913 International Women's Day, now changed to its present date in the calendar of March 8, was held for the first time in Russia. The slogan was "Votes for working women" and even then it was clear that such a demand was becoming a revolutionary one against the Tsarist autocracy. The meetings were illegal; they were held in secret; and they were raided by the police and speakers hauled off to prison. The same happened in 1914.

Then came the First World War. The barbarous massacres in the trenches were equalled by savage repression on the home front, and only in Norway could a meeting be held in 1915. In Germany and other countries the socialist-democrats, who supported this war for imperialism, collaborated with the ruling classes to ensure that no meetings were held. They knew that such meetings would become rallying points against the war.

And the social-democrats and ruling classes of Europe foresaw the effects of March 8 in Russia. In 1917, they would surely have made even more strenuous efforts at repression. For by then what was at issue was not the vote, not any longer.

March 8 in Petrograd began a series of strikes and demonstrations which were to continue until October, when the Russian working class seized power and established the dictatorship of the proletariat. The tone of International Women's Day had been set, for the Russian women had begun that day the march into a new world, the world of Socialism.

From then on, it could never more be just a struggle for the vote. The era of proletarian revolution had arrived.
Britain in the world - our task is revolution

In conclusion the speaker said we should look forward to the day when the government can no longer govern, the governed will no longer be governed, and we have a strong Marxist-Leninist party at our head. We are still only weak, but we should not deride either pacifists or pacifism, and we have achieved much - so much in Ireland, on the two-class line, so much in the trade unions, and put the working class they are defeated. But the point at issue now is that they do not believe in social democracy, nor - as yet - in revolution, unless it be somewhere overseas. Of them as a party is to exploit the myth that there is not a way, and to show that it is now a question of survival. We are already well on the way to being the builders of Europe through and into the USSR and all the other capitalist countries.

While the Dutch, the Belgians, the Germans and the Americans busy themselves in Wales and Cornwall, some say Britain, of course, and not Liverpool should be devolved since they have some similar heritage.

In conclusion the speaker said: we should look forward to the day when the government can no longer govern, the governed will no longer be governed, and we have a strong Marxist-Leninist party at our head.

The speaker then went on to say that there was now not a question of the working class not being strong, but we should not deride either pacifists or pacifism, and we have achieved much - so much in Ireland, on the two-class line, so much in the trade unions, and put the working class they are defeated. But the point at issue now is that they do not believe in social democracy, nor - as yet - in revolution, unless it be somewhere overseas. Of them as a party is to exploit the myth that there is not a way, and to show that it is now a question of survival. We are already well on the way to being the builders of Europe through and into the USSR and all the other capitalist countries.
October revolution is still an inspiration

THE GREAT October Revolution is 63 years old this month but the passage of time has done nothing to diminish its historical significance. Indeed, as capitalism begins to show its true colours, the working class in a country once proud and effectively held in power, has never been more important. Faced with an unprecedented attack on everything they have struggled for over two hundred years, the British working class today must look to revolution as the only way forward to peace and prosperity.

The Soviet working class were the inheritors of a long history of political dissent under Tsarism, but the advent of capitalism in Russia widened the scope of this dissent into a formidable weapon. Grouped together into huge factories the Putilov works in Petrograd employed more than 50,000 people, the Russian workers saw the importance of organisation. The daily struggle for a better existence led to the repeated outbreak of strikes which were never purely economic and which led to the understanding that the root of all discontent lay within the country itself. The working class itself is a very large one, and the Russian workers had the example of their predecessors in the West to go before them, must look into the past and see the importance of organisational leadership which turned general discontent into revolution to overthrow capitalism and seize power for the working class.

The Putilov workers' strike was the first of a million Petrograd workers who soon transformed into the big-city and factory-based working class. Led by women workers, workers, the cry of "More bread" were transformed into "Down with the Tsar!". In the February Revolution, mass disaffection from the troops spilled over into the big cities and factories by the hostile capitalist. The working class, the mainstay of the revolution, always surrounded and supported by women textile workers, became the revolutionary nucleus of the working class. Led by women workers, the cry of "More bread" was transformed into "Down with the Tsar!". In the February Revolution, mass disaffection from the troops spilled over into the big cities and factories by the hostile capitalist. The working class, the mainstay of the revolution, always surrounded and supported by women textile workers, became the revolutionary nucleus of the working class.
The day the Army was sent to the streets of Glasgow

WORKERS, MARCH 2010 ISSUE

NINETY YEARS ago in the aftermath of years of capitalist crisis and the “War to end all Wars”, the British government had the military on alert to deal with a working class response it feared. Organised workers had forged strong links between centres of heavy industry, particularly in Sheffield, Newcastle and Glasgow.

The ties were strongest among those working in engineering and shipbuilding. Even in the midst of the First World War, those workers had resisted the imposition of the Munitions Act, the Dilution of Labour Act and Defence of the Realm Act, all giving government draconian powers to negate long-fought-for pay rates and conditions for skilled work, and to crack down on opposition.

Social unrest grew too, with well organised campaigns such as the Glasgow Rent Strike of 1916. One of the leaders was suffragette and communist Helen Crawfurd, who helped forge close links between the Clyde Workers Committee (CWC) and the Glasgow Women’s Housing Association.

Organisation

Organisation was key, too, in the growth of the CWC itself, bringing together shop stewards, delegates and the Trades Union Councils. Its strength was demonstrated by the chasing off stage of the Prime Minister of the day, Lloyd George, at a showcase rally at Christmas, 1915, intended to promote the need for his various draconian Acts. The 3000 shop stewards and union delegates then took over the meeting.

The only newspaper to report this, FORWARD (with a circulation of over 30,000), was suppressed by the military. The smaller VANGUARD, inspired by Bolshevism, was also closed. Copies of FORWARD were even confiscated from newsagents and regular readers’ homes. However, only a week later, the CWC launched its own journal THE WORKER – ORGAN OF WORKERS’ COMMITTEES OF SCOTLAND. It ran to five issues before the editorial team and printer were arrested and most jailed for a year. It had featured the defiant statement:

“The British authorities having adopted the methods of Russian despotism, British workers may have to understudy Russian revolutionary methods of evasion... but here is THE WORKER once
again, symbolical of the fact that the cause of Labour can never be suppressed. It may be and has been bamboozled, hoodwinked, side-tracked and misled; it may be browbeaten, persecuted and driven underground, but it cannot be killed; and just when its enemies think they have finally subdued and made an end of it, it emerges more virile and vigorous than ever."

Workers organising was nothing new — the weavers of Glasgow’s Calton district were strong enough to engage in a long and bitter dispute over wages and basic justice in 1787, only ending when several were killed by government forces. An insurrection in 1820 had ended in death and deportation, and Glasgow Trades Union Council was one of the earliest in Britain over 150 years ago.

By 1918, the combination of people’s high expectations of peacetime and demands of the returning troops and sailors gave the government a dread of the influence of the world-changing actions carried out by workers in other lands.

Particularly on their minds were the 1916 uprising in Ireland, the Bolshevik Revolution of 1917 in Russia and the build up to what was an almost successful revolution in Germany in 1919.

Hence the reasonable demand for a 40-hour working week led to what became known as Black Friday, 5 February 1919. That day months of CWC agitation culminated in a mass demonstration of over 35,000 workers at the City Chambers in George Square in Glasgow city centre. It was attacked viciously by police and serious rioting ensued.

**Tanks and troops**

Its Britain-wide implications were made clear by the actions of Churchill and his Cabinet in ordering tanks and troops into the city. Local soldiers were confined to barracks, while the troops brought in
were from well outwith the area. Machinegun nests on rooftops and even howitzers were positioned around the city centre.

However, although well organised and with a popular following, the workers committees were from a defensive tradition, of a trade union nature. They were coping with appalling conditions and the fear of looming mass unemployment. And there was nothing in the form of a Bolshevik or communist party in Britain at that time to inspire the struggle to go to a more ambitious stage.

It was perhaps no accident that diversions into nationalism and separatism – aimed at smashing the necessary British class unity – were concocted at this time. 1920 saw the formation of the Scots National League, John MacLean entering the cul-de-sac of Scottish republicanism and poet Hugh MacDiarmid writing his PLEA FOR A SCOTTISH FASCISM calling for socialism to develop “a fascist rather than a Bolshevik spirit”.

Others, including speakers at the 1915 and 1919 rallies, walked off into benign parliamentary social democracy. Kirkwood became Baron Bearsden; Mitchell hardly spoke in parliament; Maxton faded with the Independent Labour Party and Gallagher was an isolated communist voice at Westminster.

Helen Crawfurd went on to play a leading role in the Workers International Relief Organisation, set up to defend the Russian Revolution, having met Lenin in 1920. She was politically active until her death in 1954, being elected as a communist to the town council in Dunoon, Argyllshire, in 1946.
THE NEWS of the overthrow of
Tsarism by the workers and
peasants of Russia in 1917 evoked
a tremendous response among
the whole working class of this
country.

For two years prior to the
"Jolly George" strike, agitation
against the armed intervention
by the Imperialist countries,
including British, against Soviet
Russia had been growing.
Lord's "Appeal To The Tilling
Masses" helped to this, and
had been distributed in the
docks. Vigilance against munitions
being sent to Poland, the major imperi-
alist base for the offensive
against Soviet Russia became.

While Bonar Law was empha-
sically denying in Parliament
that any munitions were being
sent to Poland, rates of
armament and guns marked
"CHIMS munitions for Poland"
appeared at the East India Docks
in London, and loaded onto
the Polish ship the Neptune. The
crew refused to sail, as did the
crew of the London docks, who
beached the ship. The workers
and the government were forced
to admit this.

In July 1919, a resolution was
passed at the TUC, calling for
a "great" offensive against Russia
in the next few years, and
"Jollies" and other munitions
were unloaded in the docks.

News of the Jollies soon
spreads to the industrial borough
of Poplar. This May Day had
been marked by the Nela, and
the Jollies had been called up
for "support and develop the war.
Also in May, cargoes arrived at
the London docks for a ship
called the Jolly George. The
cargo was once again marked
"CHIMS munitions for Poland".
Would the dockers now follow
the Jollies example?

They soon showed they would
not waver, receiving assurances
of support from the Workers
Union of the action they took.

The London dockers struck on May
19th, 1920. The violentp\nactions of the strikers were used
to stifle the Jolly George
strike.

The strike was met with great
support throughout the Labour
movement. As was said at the
time, "the strike against Russia's
movement, which had already been
formed in 1919, the offensive against
Russia goes on, but the counter-
offensive for Russia gathers
momentum."

On May 19th the munitions
were unloaded back onto the
dockside. All across the coun-
try, Councils of Action against
the war were set up. An emer-
gency conference of the TUC was
held. Adhering to August 25th,
1920, a resolution which stated in
part that the TUC "fervently
wants the Government to use
the whole industrial power of the
organisation and other workers
will be used to make the war.
"(That is, the war on Russia).

Faced with the threat of strike
actions at home and with munitions
abroad of British soldiers re-
jecting to be sent to fight Russia,
the government was forced to
abandon its more obvious attempts
to smash the workers' strike.

Lloyd George made a speech in the House of Commons
on November 19th, condemning an
attack on Bolsheviks with an
acknowledgement that there were
no means to fight it.

The "Jolly George" strike had
been an important spark in con-
ting against British intervention
against Russia, but it did not
arise from nothing. The strike
had been preceded by years of
anti-war agitation. It also shows
the importance of the whole work-
ing class supporting workers
when they take such a stand.
The main capitalist political parties all agree that there must be massive cuts in public spending. Their common demand in 2010 echoes unmistakably what happened in the public spending debt crises of 1921 and 1931...

The same old refrain: attack the working class

WORKERS, JULY 2010 ISSUE

Working class families suffered terrible hardship and suffering during the 1920s and 1930s, and especially now we must examine this part of our past to see what happened last time the political parties imposed such policies. Otherwise we will be condemned to repeat history endlessly.

The Geddes Axe 1921

During and after the First World War, government expenditure in Britain rocketed and the national debt rose rapidly. Also, 1920 had seen a prodigious boom and speculative mania. However, boom quickly turned to slump and the banks were left holding debts that could not be repaid. Unemployment soared and fluctuated in 1921 between 1,664,000 and over 2,500,000.

The owner of the Daily Mail, Lord Rothermere, created the Anti-Waste League which between February and June 1921 started winning by-elections on a manifesto of attacking ‘excessive’ public spending.

Whereas in 1913–14 the Civil Services and Revenue Departments cost £81.3 million, by 1920-21 they cost £523.3 million, and in 1921–22, £590.7 million. Before the war, the Armed Forces cost around £77 million but approached £190 million in 1921–22. The National Debt and other Consolidated Fund Services had increased dramatically over the same time too.
In August 1921, the Liberal Prime Minister, Lloyd George, appointed a businessman, Sir Eric Geddes, as head of the Committee on National Expenditure to find where “economies” could be found in various government departments for 1922–23. His Committee recommended a severe retrenchment in government expenditure, which advocated cutbacks totalling £87 million and became known as the "Geddes Axe". Total defence expenditure fell from £189.5 million in 1921–22 to £111 million in 1922–23; total social spending (education, health, housing, pensions, unemployment) fell from £205.8 million in 1920–21 to £182.1 million in 1922–23.

Most controversial were the cuts in social services. Lloyd George had promised the First World War soldiers “a land fit for heroes” but then cut back on those promises. The blade of Geddes Axe fell primarily on education and social housing. More workers became unemployed and there was a general attack on wages. Unemployment benefits were reduced. Distress was widespread.

**The May Commission 1931**

The economy never recovered during the 1920s. Instead there was a further economic slump and depression from 1929. Unemployment rose to two and a half million. The cost of unemployment benefit rose from £12 million in 1928 to £125 million in 1931. There was a collapse of European banks and a balance of payments crisis. A loan was negotiated from international bankers who stipulated public expenditure cuts.

In February 1931 the Labour Chancellor, Snowden, set up a Committee on National Expenditure chaired by Sir George May and other industrialists, which reported at the end of July 1931. Its conclusions were decided on the say-so of the majority, the 4 Conservative and Liberal nominees. The report calculated that the deficit for 1932-3 would be £120 million. They recommended that the deficit be “cured” by retrenchment in public expenditure, arguing that such expenditure was “definitely restrictive of industrial enterprise and employment”. They argued for wage cuts for the police, teachers and sections of the armed forces. Most cutbacks were to be made in the social services and public schemes of work. The attitude was that all public expenditure was wasteful. The total cutbacks amounted to £96.5 million; the largest individual cutback was unemployment insurance; there was also additional taxation.
The Labour Cabinet appointed an economy committee. There was a run on the pound (surprise, surprise) to pressurise a decision. When a consensus could not be reached on cutting unemployment benefits, a National Coalition Government headed by Ramsay MacDonald was formed to enact the cutbacks, splitting the Labour Party.

Much can be learned from the experience of these two previous exercises in cutting public expenditure. Interestingly, just as now, then there was a massive degree of unity between the Liberal, Conservative and Labour parties on cutting public expenditure in the 1920s and 1930s.

There was wholesale cooperation and connivance with these political attacks on our class by finance capital and big business in a deliberate attempt to shift the balance of power and protect their profit-making regime. Informal or formal party coalitions against the interests of the people were the norm.

Again, just as now, the excuse was that there were to be only “economies” or “removal of waste” or other sickening weasel expressions, no acknowledgement that what was being imposed were actual cutbacks of jobs, skills and services essential to a working class and its quality of life.

**Attack on public sector**

Crucially, the public sector workers laid off (or whose pay was cut) spent less on goods and services, no longer paid taxes and claimed unemployment benefits, which in turn deepened the recession and actually worsened the public expenditure finances. If allowed to happen today, the same things will recur.

The British economy remained in the doldrums for two whole inter-war decades: unemployment remained at least at one million and was often more than double that for nigh on twenty years. Capitalism’s economic recipe was a disaster for British workers; but the bankers and industrialists who had caused the crises lived well.

In essence, the government attacks on public expenditure in 1921 and 1931 helped sustain a permanent slump with millions either out of work or on low pay, and those conditions only ended in 1939 with the emergence of a nationally state-directed economy in a world war: a chilling reflection on and indictment of the workings of capitalism.
ONE INCIDENT out of British working class history which deserves our recollection, especially at this time when Heseltine is preparing to bring out the guns and penalties against local councils who carry out their mandates, is the imprisonment of the entire Poplar Council in 1921. A 1 of the Councillors were jailed for refusing to raise the rates. While they were in prison children from one of the local poor schools in Hutton, Essex sent letters of encouragement to the councillors who, from their cells wrote the following reply.

Brixton Prison. Sept. 25th, 1921.

My Dear Boys and Girls,

We have received your kind and most welcome letters and thank you all for thinking of us; we are all as pleased with your remembrance as with the remembrance of our best friends. We are very glad you all understand why we are here, we have not done anything we are ashamed of, our action was to resist rate increase against bad wicked laws and all good men and women should protest and refuse to obey laws which are unjust and bad.

John Hampden, who your teachers have told you about refused to pay unjust taxes and commenced a revolution which took off the head of King Charles. George Washington and his friends would not pay taxes which they considered wrong and this resulted in the establishment of the great Republic of America......

We are in prison because our people in Poplar are poor and cannot pay the rates and taxes and we shall not do what the Judges told us we must do until Poplar gets money from the rich to help the poor.

We want you to grow up strong active loving men and women, we want you to be contented while there is one single man or woman starving. Do not believe anyone who tells you that God made the rich and also made large numbers of people poor. God and Nature made men and women. It is the selfishness and greed of people that make poverty.

When you leave school join a Trade Union, do not rush into the Army or Navy, none of you need to do so unless you like even if you are in the Band, the girls are not obliged to go to domestic service either they can choose other trades and occupations, though often service is best at the moment. When you have joined your Trade Union go to branch meetings, learn all you can about the Labour Movement, when you have done this you will soon understand that working people, whether they work in an office, a school, in a mine or on a railway, in a factory or on a ship, that all of them together create all the wealth of the world. Labour is the only source of all wealth whether it is labour by hand or brain, it is the workers who should enjoy leisure, pleasure, holidays and all the good things of life and as you grow up keep steadily in your minds the fact that everybody rich or poor that gets something without themselves working, get it at the expense of those who do work. We hope all you boys and girls will live to see the day when there will be no rich or poor paurers and millionaires, because you and your fellow men and women will join together to work for each other and by so doing make possible the establishment of Christ's kingdom on earth......

We have asked that this letter shall be read in each standard and of all of you who are 10 years of age and over shall have a copy. Here's our love and lots and lots of good wishes from

Yours Truly,

S. March, Mayor of Poplar.


Edgar Lansbury. A. Baker.

J. A. Jones. T. S. Kelly.


E. E. Williams. B. Fleming.

A. Partidge. Wm. Farr.

J. Xusall. C. E. Sumner.

T. J. Goodway. J. E. Oakes.

C. Parkhouse. John Scour.

Minnie Lansbury. Julia Silver.

Georgie Lansbury. J. J. Burgess.

Susan Lawrence. J. T. O'Callaghan.

J. H. Banks.

A. Partridge.

J. Russell.

T. J. Goodway.

C. Pethertck.

Minnie Lansbury.

George Lansbury.

Susan Lawrence.

J. T. O'Callaghan.

J. H. Banks.
The detested Poor Law Act of 1834 was not just a feature of the Victorian era. It was still in use well into the 20th century...

**1921: The ‘Poplarism’ struggle**

**WORKERS, JUNE 2014 ISSUE**

The aim of the Poor Law was always to punish the poor with the threat of the workhouse, or “indoor relief”, but by the start of the 20th century that policy was beginning to erode. The Boards of Guardians who administered the Poor Law increasingly used “outdoor relief” to keep the poor out of workhouses. It was cheaper to give out a sack of coal or a voucher for boots than to put a whole family into the workhouse. But it took working class resistance to finish them off.

Mural in Hale Street, Poplar, depicting the rates rebellion. Painted by local resident Mark Francis in 1990, it was recently restored.

After World War 1 the British economy was shattered and unemployment rose. Ex-servicemen had priority for jobs, often replacing women who in wartime had done those jobs to keep their families. In the East End of London many men had worked on the Docks throughout the war, but in the post-war period markets collapsed and dock work slumped. During 1921 and 1922 fewer than
half of registered dockers had work on any one day and other local firms were laying off workers too.

Unemployed ex-servicemen were entitled to a small stipend, but dockers got nothing. Poverty affected many London boroughs, but was particularly acute in dock areas like Poplar. Men tramped the streets looking for work; their families went without food.

**Election**

In 1919 a hitherto unknown kind of council was elected in Poplar, east London. For the first time it reflected the local electorate. The Municipal Alliance (Liberals, Tories and Coalitionists) was soundly defeated; 39 of 42 seats went to Labour. Industrial workers and trade unionists made up most of the council and Board of Guardians.

This council’s actions on local poverty became known as Poplarism. Two policies in particular put them on a collision course with the London County Council (LCC) and central government: the level of outdoor relief set to keep the destitute out of the workhouse and the rates to pay for that. In the words of Poplar mayor George Lansbury their aim was to “use the poor law machinery to the utmost extent to maintain in decency and comfort the sick and the aged, the orphaned children and the able-bodied unemployed – in fact, all who for one reason or another were unable to maintain themselves”.

The council also refused to pay starvation wages to workers they directly employed. London local authorities had agreed to recommend a minimum wage of £3 10s 6d (£3.52p) weekly in 1920. Poplar decided on £4 as a minimum, applicable equally to men and women. In practice this meant a 25 per cent rise for men, and nearly 70 per cent for women. A scheme of public works on roads and sewerage was planned to provide local jobs.

The Poplar Board of Guardians introduced a more generous system of outdoor relief, including extra allowances for unemployed families with children. It rejected the household means test that used the income of wider family members to determine relief. There were some government grants and subsidies, but most of these costs had to be borne by the rates.

This caused a huge problem in Poplar. The amount collected for each penny on the rates was much lower than most other London boroughs. That was due to widespread poverty, higher unemployment and poor quality housing with low rateable values. A further disparity was that all London boroughs had to pay the same central precept for water, Poor Law hospitals and the police. The council would have had to put rents up by 3s a week to collect enough rates to relieve the poor and pay the precept. They knew people could not afford that.
Poplar councillors protested to the LCC that this was grossly out of date and unfair: “the poor had to keep the poor”. As their protests fell on deaf ears, Poplar council voted to take action. It would refuse to pay the precept – an illegal action that councillors knew could lead to prison. It did.

The government was reluctant to imprison the councillors, but the Labour-dominated LCC refused to back down in their legal claim for the full precept. In the face of massive local support, the councillors marched to court on 29 July 1921 holding banners which said “Poplar Borough Council marching to the High Court and possibly to prison”.

Conditions were harsh for the 31 imprisoned councillors, but they did not back down despite the health of some councillors suffering badly. This became a huge embarrassment to the government. The rates protest was gathering massive public support and spreading to other boroughs. The ruling class feared increasing working class action only a few years after the Bolshevik revolution.

**Refusal**

Attempts to get the prisoners to agree to face-saving compromises met a united refusal to leave prison. Eventually the government found a way around the law. It freed the Poplar councillors after three months’ imprisonment and their convictions were quashed. A conference called to discuss a more equitable way of paying for services agreed a rebate mechanism for cross-London services.

The councillors had won. They marched out of prison triumphantly to the cheering of huge crowds. The Labour party was irritated by George Lansbury and by like-minded councils and trade unions who made decisions without waiting for the word from above.

Much later many of Poplar’s policies became the norm. The Beveridge Report of 1942 accepted the principle of full maintenance for the unemployed. The Family Allowances Act of 1946 recognised that families with children needed extra allowances whether working or not. The hated household means test ended in 1941. The Equal Pay Act 1970 prohibited paying women less than men for the same job, although this law, like the others, has only been as good as the strength of workers fighting to enforce it.
It is obvious that unless teachers are prepared to accept a pitifully small increase this year then they will have a struggle on their hands. They would do well to examine their history as they prepare for the forthcoming battle.

TEACHERS organised in the NUT have a proud record of struggle to improve conditions in education. Successful campaigns have been fought not only on salaries but on many aspects of education in the country.

One outstanding example of the courage, discipline and determination of NUT members in conducting a campaign is that of the Lowestoft schools strike in 1923.

In 1922 a special conference of the NUT reluctantly accepted a 5 per cent cut in salaries for teachers. This was immediately challenged by the NUT. The education committee started to sack teachers. Acting as one, 167 members of the NUT withdrew their labour. The authority brought in replacement teachers but were astounded when the parents of 1600 pupils refused to send their children to school as a gesture of support for the strikers.

The authority reacted by issuing summonses on the parents and threatening to withdraw financial assistance from scholarship holders.

In the meantime the strikers opened classes in community halls for those pupils not attending schools. Against great hostility the teachers persisted until eventually the Board of Education had to intervene. After inspecting the 'official' and 'unofficial' schools the Board withdrew financial aid from the Lowestoft authority. The 'official' schools were found to be so bad that the Board would not tolerate them.

The Lowestoft education committee quickly approached the NUT and negotiations began. An agreement which was highly favourable to the teachers was reached. Thus after 11 months of struggle the NUT members emerged triumphant.

Lowestoft was not an isolated case. Southampton, Tyne-side and teachers in South Wales took on their employers in similar struggles.
General Strike in Brighton

OUTSIDERS may see Brighton as a sleepy sea-side town full of elegant Regency houses, but behind that facade lies a chronic housing problem, massive unemployment, literally hundreds of unorganised sweat shops paying starvation wages. And a large industrial base with a proud tradition of organisation by its workforce. Nowhere was this organisation more in evidence than in 1926, during the General Strike.

The Organisation for the Maintenance of Supplies (the strike-breaking apparatus under the leadership of Winston Churchill) was established in the town and given prominence by the local press. Notwithstanding this a mass meeting of AEU members was held on Monday 3 May, 1926 and carried without dissent: "That this meeting of AEU members, having followed the negotiations between the Government, the Mineowners, the Miners and the General Council of the TUC approve of the last body's resistance to any reduction of wages or increase of hours for miners, and pledges its support to the General Council's resistance to this attack on the workers." A strike committee was set up and pickets arranged.

Meanwhile other trade unionists in the district were also preparing for action. The railwaymen, the transport workers, the builders and the printers had all met and made their plans. These, with the engineers, were the key industrial workers in the area and they were all represented on the Council of Action, set up to assume overall control of the strike locally.

The General Strike descended with full force in Brighton and Hove on the Tuesday. It came suddenly and relentlessly. When the inhabitants of the two towns awoke, there were no trains, no trams, no buses and no newspapers. It was an unfamiliar world and Brighton was solid.

The Organisation for the Maintenance of Supplies was hard at it, trying to undermine the effects of the strike. There were many clashes, and after one when an unsuccessful attempt was made to run the trams, many workers were sentenced to jail terms.

Morale was high and the effects of the strike still snowballing, when it was called off, by the TUC. The men who had sacrificed so much to prove their solidarity with the miners were completely bewildered when it was realised that their heroic stand had brought them so little. And of course the employers were vicious in their attempts to press home their advantage.

Employers tried to resist taking back the active strike leaders. A desperate rearguard action was taken by the workers, and virtually everyone got their jobs back and the unions remained intact.

Though they were busy at the time resisting the attacks by the employers, the miners were still not forgotten. The local work force may have been destitute but they still raised over £1500 for the alleviation of distress in the mining areas. Clothes were also collected and forwarded to necessitous districts. In addition, over fifty children were brought from mining towns and villages and found homes among the Brighton trade unionists.

And when it was all over and Mondism (the collaboration between the TUC and the Mond group of employers) ruled the day, the workers of Brighton still stood, bloody but unbowed, capable of fighting another day.
At a time when some are calling for a General Strike we need to get clearer about what happened last time there was one in Britain...

1926: The General Strike, and why it should not be mindlessly imitated

WORKERS, NOV 2011 ISSUE

In trade union history 4 May 1926 is a special date – the day the General Strike took place in Britain. Given all the myths that have sprung up and the siren calls for similar action often heard now, it’s particularly important to recognise what actually happened.

In fact, the impetus for the General Strike resides in much earlier events which unfortunately led to our working class drifting into a tactically inept, inflexible form of combat totally unsuited for an ongoing, largely economic battle against a fully prepared, stronger class enemy.

In 1914, to strengthen their bargaining hand, the miners had sponsored the formation of a Triple Industrial Alliance with railway and transport workers as a tactic to press wage agreements and settle hours of work. The idea that trade unions should be revolutionary organisations – called syndicalism – was popular before the war and part of the background to this move.

In 1919, when the miners threatened to strike for more money and shorter hours, the other members of the Alliance declared support. To deflect this, the government set up the Sankey Commission, which duly reported almost wholly in favour of the miners, recommending wage increases, a seven- instead of an eight-hour day and a system of public ownership for the coal industry. Mines had been taken under direct government control during the 1914–18 War and remained so for a few peacetime years. With strike notices withdrawn, miners got their shorter day and some wage increases, but nationalisation was rejected.

At the end of March 1921 the mines were returned to private ownership. The coal owners refused to modernise the industry but immediately announced sweeping wage reductions, imposing a lockout of union members at all collieries. Again, the railway and transport unions threatened a Triple Alliance strike.

This time Lloyd George’s government responded with a State of Emergency, called reservists to colours, had machine-guns posted at pitheads and sent troops in battle order to working class areas. Last-minute negotiations petered out in confusion and the Triple Alliance
strike action was withdrawn, earning the event the derogatory name Black Friday.

In this episode an obvious weakness was that the transport and railway workers had no demands of their own but were placing their own livelihoods in danger simply for the sake of the miners. The miners resumed work on the owners’ terms.

The 1923 boom in mining allowed negotiation of higher wages, but collapse soon followed and by 1925 with a return to the Gold Standard came calls for a reduction in wages. The newly formed TUC General Council, in an attempt to displace the Alliance, supported the miners. Realising conditions were not sufficiently in their favour, the government bought time in negotiations and brokered a deceptive peace in the mines with a nine-month coal subsidy. Tempt the gullible with temporary solace. The trade unions, swollen-headed by the effectiveness of their mere threat to strike, thought Prime Minister Baldwin had capitulated, and called the day Red Friday. Whereas the government – knowing it wasn’t ready – had allowed an armistice in order to gain time for a later assault.

**Government preparations**

At once the government took preparatory action in a strategic, class-conscious fashion. In September 1925, Organisation for the Maintenance of Supplies Committees were formed in the metropolitan boroughs. Also registration of potential volunteers began, leading to a pool of 100,000 blacklegs by the time of the conflict, many of them British fascists. 226,000 special policemen were created. An Emergency Committee on Supply and Transport was established, meeting weekly to work out a scheme to keep food and transport services running. England and Wales were divided into ten divisions, each under a Civil Commissioner with Coal, Finance and Food Officers beneath them. In the event of a stoppage they were charged together with local authorities to control road transport, food and fuel supplies. By the spring of 1926, stockpiles of food, coal and fuel had been built up.
May 1926: An armoured car escorts a food convoy down the East India Dock Road, east London.

Meanwhile after Red Friday, trade union leaders acted as if trouble could be averted, and during the nine months of coal subsidy, to avoid being provocative, made no strike preparations or battle plans. Although the trade unions had declared war and rhetoric still flourished, union leaders and most of the membership had not apparently really meant it. No preparations for a national strike on the trade union side were made until the 27 April when two trade union leaders met. There was unreasoning faith in the prospect of a settlement crossed with a lack of enthusiasm for action among the majority of the General Council. Most had pinned their hopes on the Samuel Commission which reported unfavourably for miners in March 1926 on the key issues of hours and wages. The miners refused to accept it.

**Vain hope**

Three weeks of futile negotiation followed in April 1926. Unlike in 1925 the government, prepared for eventualities, was not interested in making concessions or obtaining a settlement. The trade unions still remained ridiculously hopeful of a settlement. But in the very final negotiations on Friday 29 April, the mine owners offered a wage cut on worse terms than the Samuel Commission and the government refused to interfere or continue with negotiations. An Emergency Powers Act was signed. On 30 April – the day on which
the subsidy ran out – mine owners posted notices in most pits and a million miners were locked out.

On 1 May the various unions declared they were prepared to hand over their autonomy to the General Council during the dispute (never a wise course of action) and voted to join a National Strike on 3 May. The General Council now deemed the conduct of the dispute to be completely in its hands, either to organise a strike or – increasingly from day one – to arrange a climb-down and call it off.

The “General Strike” was not quite a general, all-embracing strike; it was a partial national strike of some elements. Only one section of the labour movement was called out: railway workers, transport workers, iron and steel workers, builders, printers, dockers. The number of strikers was between 1.5 and 1.75 million. Other trades and occupations were kept back: engineers, electricians, woodworkers, shipyard workers, post office and telephone workers. More critical, the trade unions went into battle unready and with divided leadership.

Government departments sent out detailed instructions, troop movements were announced including two battalions of infantry that marched through Liverpool. All army and navy leave was cancelled. Hyde Park was closed to serve as a food depot.

The response to the strike call was overwhelming. Its completeness surprised everyone including the TUC and the Labour Party which feared by association of losing “bourgeois” respectability. Public transport was mightily affected, especially the trains, and the trams in London stopped running for the duration of the dispute. Despite much publicity, the volunteers on buses and elsewhere had a minimal effect, but government plans to use road haulage lorries worked as goods were transported around the country by non-unionised labour.

The TUC General Council called off the strike on 12 May. It had obtained no terms for the miners or for the other workers who had struck in sympathy with them. The miners continued on strike alone for six months and eventually were forced back to work on regional settlements, longer hours and lower wages with an ever-present pool of unemployed miners to undermine their efforts.

In many other trades and occupations employers sought to inflict setback and sack trade union leaders. Within a year the Trades Disputes and Trade Unions Act of 1927 was introduced forbidding sympathetic strikes and mass picketing. TUC membership fell from 5.5 million in 1925 to 3.75 million in 1930.

Tactics and strategy are the lifeblood of our class. Properly understood, a general strike is a political weapon reserved for the most propitious circumstances when a working class is ready to move to the revolutionary seizure of power; a measure to be deployed only
when a class wants to overthrow the exploiters’ system and seize the levers of power. Unless such a level of understanding is there, a general strike should not be broached; other more irregular tactics should apply.
FOURTY YEARS AGO, the socialist Soviet Union stood in mortal danger of attack from a combination of imperialist powers. In May 1939 Japanese forces invaded the Mongolian Peoples’ Republic, threatening the eastern borders of the USSR. On May 22 the governments of Germany and Italy, flushed with their victories in Spain, concluded the “Pact of Steel”, a blatantly predatory military alliance.

The invasion of Prague in March 1939 had been the direct consequence of the Anglo-French appeasers’ attempts to divert the German threat at the Munich Conference in September 1938. The fascist governments of Poland and Hungary had joined Germany in the carve-up of Czechoslovakia. Poland and Rumania stood poised to join the counter-revolutionary onslaught on socialism.

The British and French governments dispatched a military mission to Moscow with orders to procrastinate and not tie themselves down to any detailed commitments. The western imperialists had no interest in concluding an alliance with the USSR, only in appearing to do so in response to their own peoples’ desire for peace, and in order to put diplomatic pressure on Germany.

The Soviet Union was isolated. It was vital to take advantage of the contradictions between the imperialist powers.

The German-Soviet non-aggression pact signed in August 1939 has ever since brought forth hysterical condemnation from the enemies of socialism, being diverted to their desire for a Nazi-Soviet conflict to achieve the “elimination of Bolshevism” and the sapping of Germany’s military strength.

Those who applauded wildly at the Anglo-French betrayal of Czechoslovakia now viciously assailed the USSR for “stabbing Poland in the back”, ignoring the fact that the territories occupied by the Soviet Army had been seized by Poland in the early 1920s, egged on by the Anglo-French Entente. Regardless of the national composition of the actual population, it had been justified only by the property deeds of absentee Polish landowners.

The events of the summer of 1939 should serve as an expose of the blatant hypocrisy of the British and French bourgeoisie.

Serious only in their enthusiasm to see the forces of socialism crushed, they had no real desire to challenge the rising imperialism of Germany and Italy, only to divert it elsewhere, to find a temporary accommodation with the Axis powers.

There are some who make facile comparisons between 1939 and the present situation in the world, casting the Russian imperialists in the role of the German Nazis. We reject utterly such simplistic theories. We know that our major enemy now is our own British imperialism, linked with its Common Market partners in a New Order. It may no longer be a lion among empires, but who could possibly claim that a pack of scavenging jackals is a progressive force in world history?

...and soon after Nazi troops march into the castle in Prague.
The Nazi - Soviet non-aggression pact of 1939

The Nazi-Soviet non-aggression pact of 1939 was a secret treaty signed by Germany and the Soviet Union on August 23, 1939, which committed both countries not to assist each other's enemies in the event of war and limited both to a sphere of influence in China. The treaty was signed by German Foreign Minister Joachim von Ribbentrop and Soviet Foreign Minister Vyacheslav Molotov.

The pact was widely criticized for its secret nature and the lack of consultation with other nations. It was seen as a significant step towards the outbreak of World War II, as it allowed both countries to expand their influence in Eastern Europe with less fear of military retaliation.

The treaty was an important moment in history, as it marked a turning point in the relationship between Germany and the Soviet Union, leading to the invasion of Poland and the onset of World War II. The consequences of this pact were far-reaching, and its legacy is still felt today.

In summary, the Nazi-Soviet non-aggression pact of 1939 was a significant event in world history, with far-reaching consequences for both countries and the world as a whole.
HISTORIC NOTES 1939-1940

THE FIGHT AT SWIFT SCALES
SEVEN AGAINST THE STATE

In the wake of Hitler’s arrival and the summary execution of German-occupied workers and trade unionists, the 1939-1940 struggle at Swift Scales became an important event in the history of trade unionism in Britain.

The Swift Scales factory, located in London, was a major employer of skilled workers in the engineering industry. The company, like many others, was under pressure to cut costs and reduce wages in the face of growing unemployment.

The工厂 had a long history of conflict with the trade unions, particularly the AEU and the GMB. The Swift Scales strike of 1939-1940 was one of the most significant conflicts between employers and workers in the UK.

The strike was led by a group of skilled workers who were determined to protect their jobs and improve working conditions. They were supported by the AEU and the GMB, as well as other trade unions and trade unionists across the country.

The strike lasted for several months, with a series of peaceful and violent actions taken by the workers. The police and the employers used force to try to break the strike, but the workers remained determined to win.

The strike ended in a victory for the workers, who were able to negotiate a better deal with the employers. The strike was a significant victory for trade unionism in Britain, and it set a precedent for future struggles.

The Swift Scales strike was a turning point in the history of trade unionism in Britain. It showed the power of trade unionists to stand up for their rights and to fight for a better future for all workers.

Reg Birch, who undertook his own defence at the trial, is seen here. The trial took place in a London court and was covered extensively by the media.

The trial lasted for several months, with a series of hearings and arguments. The workers were represented by the AEU and the GMB, and they were able to present their case effectively.

The workers were found not guilty, and the employers were forced to negotiate a better deal with the workers. The strike was a significant victory for trade unionism in Britain, and it set a precedent for future struggles.

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The story of skilled workers’ struggle at Swift Scales became an important part of the history of trade unionism in Britain. It is a reminder of the power of workers to stand up for their rights and to defend their jobs.

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WHEN IS A STRIKE NOT A STRIKE?
When it is a stoppage of work. During the Second World War, strikes were officially outlawed. Some intervention into collective bargaining came in the form of the Statutory Regulation and Order, 1305. Order 1305 was introduced by the government in May, 1941. It declared both strikes and lockouts illegal. Significantly, only 2 employers were ever prosecuted under the order as against over 600 workers.

In December 1941, the Betteshanger Colliery in Kent provided the setting for the testing of the practicability of prosecuting large numbers of men for going on strike illegally. The initial struggle concerned allowances for work in a difficult seam where working conditions were changed almost weekly. The dispute was referred to the compulsory arbitration court, the National Arbitration Tribunal. The arbitrators awarded in favour of the management. The men rejected the award, walked out, and 4000 were on strike. Although the strike was illegal, it had the backing of the local union officials.

The Secretary for the Mines, a former miners’ leader, took action with Cabinet backing. The first step was to select 100 underground workers for black-listing. However, charges against 1000 workers could only be handled satisfactorily if the men pleaded guilty, because if each man pleaded not guilty the proceedings would last for months. So the Union was asked if they would instruct their members to plead guilty and accept a decision on a few test cases which they obligingly did.

Three union officials were sent to prison. The Branch Secretary was sentenced to two months with hard labour; the local President and a member of the local executive each received one month with hard labour; 25 men were each fined £5 or six months’ imprisonment; and nearly 1000 were fined £5 or fourteen days. Yet the strike continued.

Protests from the working class came against the severity of the sentences, particularly against the jailing of three union officials. Many of the miners in the area were in the Home Guard and Kent was on the front line. There was talk of sympathetic strikes - not only those men who could call off the strike work was in jail. So the Secretary of Mines went down to Kent accompanied by the President of the National Federation of Mine Workers. After 7 days of re-opened negotiations, an agreement was signed to restart the coal industry and the Kent Miners Union.

Apart from a few face-saving words, the agreement gave the miners what they wanted. The official who refereed all 12 day imprisonment. And the mines re-opened in the first week back the normal output of coal nearly trebled.

The lessons learnt from this miners’ victory were that the government could only prosecute on a large scale if everyone cooperated. It had transitorily weakened the authority of Order 1305.

Of the men who were fined, only actually 1400. The county jail could only accommodate four at a time, and it would have taken several years to work through the list. The Clerk of Justices asked for guidance — and the company offered to pay the fines since the cost to them would be so much less profits tax. But the government informed them that on no account should they do this. Instead, the Court was advised not to invoke the fines. (In 1950 the NUM formally asked that the fines paid should be returned. They were told in the appropriate civil service manner to forget it.)
Stalin - an anti-fascist revolutionary leader

Twenty-five years ago, on March 5, 1953, Joseph Stalin died. The man in whom, not just the international working class, but the whole world could see such a tremendous force the leader of the forces playing the major role in achieving the present of fascist aggression has confirmed to this day to attract, as the leader of the first successful socialist state and society, the veneration of all members of the working class.

The name of Stalin has become a foundation for testing the true political intentions of many who profess to be sympathetic to the working class and its historic mission of liberating mankind from exploitation, reactionaries, exploiters and social demagogues, less than capitalists and exploiters of the people the world over, expose themselves by their hatred of the great socialist and defender of Marxism-Leninism, the ideology of the working class.

Let us remember Stalin's historic mission of liberating mankind from exploitation, reactionaries, exploiters and social demagogues, less than capitalists and exploiters of the people the world over, expose themselves by their hatred of the great socialist and defender of Marxism-Leninism, the ideology of the working class.

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Stalin - Architect of socialism. Born 21 Dec 1879

Stalin, as well as the Russian people in their struggle for national sovereignty, led the whole world in the fight against fascism and saved the world from the Nazis during the Second World War. Throughout his long life, from 1879 to 1953, he never lost faith in the abilities of his people.

Stalin rose to leadership in Russia at a time of devastating change. Millions of Russian workers and peasants had been killed and millions had been conscripted for the First World War. When it ended, Imperial Germany robbed the country of a third of its population and of the richest industrial and agricultural territories. The Revolution, in which Stalin played a vital role, was followed by civil war and mass starvation. The very name summons up the names of the heroes of the civil war: Trotsky, Bukharin, Smirnov, Kirov, Horvath, etc.

He led the Russian people in their struggle for national sovereignty, declared that socialism could not be sustained, unless the countries of Europe lost no time removing the Nazis of their day. Lord Rothermere of the Daily Mail put it simply in 1935: "The sturdy old Nazis of Germany are Europe's gardeners against the communist danger..." Germany must have elbow room... Once Germany has acquired the additional room she needs in Western Russia, the German economy will be able to support the Russian people in a civilised existence, and perhaps turn the tide of world trade once more towards prosperity..." This is why the capitalist world, which Stalin had declared a monster, would be eager to see for the working class.

The newspaper reported: "Los Angeles, 15 August 1953. At the Russian Embassy in Moscow, a local cinema was opened, the audience, bolstered by Stalin's death, cheered loudly only once - when Stalin appeared on the screen. He must have enjoyed popular support of the ordinary people here, for people didn't cheer in the dark unless they really felt like it. No wonder!" 1953 was a year of the struggle of the Soviets. Hitler and the Nazis were about to conquer, but we, the workers of Britain, would not allow the Nazis to become the rulers of Europe.

STALIN! Even today, 14 years after his birth and over a quarter of a century since his death, the very name summons up the names of the heroes of the civil war: Trotsky, Bukharin, Smirnov, Kirov, Horvath, etc.

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**HISTORIC NOTES**

**Victory at Stalingrad**

The battle that saved the world

HITLER invaded Russia on 22nd June, 1941, almost to the day the anniversary of Napoleon's attempt. He met with the same end, with the difference only that Hitler ruled long, his Reich founded at Stalingrad.

Whatever tactical reasons — inability to subdue the British among them — determined Hitler's turn East, anti-Bolshevism had always been at the core of Nazi tenacity. The Russians had to be forced back, step by step, and they even counter-attacked as soon as December 1941 to safeguard Moscow which Stalins refused to abandon. Yet despite the initial swiftness of the Nazi advance, and the losses they inflicted, the Russians extricated the bulk of their armies from the planned encirclement. The Invaders found themselves pressed ever deeper into inhospitable hostile territory, and even impossible lines of retreat and above all from the implacable hatred of a once-proud army. 

In August, 1942, they turned East toward Stalingrad. The aim was to cut off the USSR from the planned invasions. The invaders found themselves pressed ever deeper into inhospitable hostile territory, and even impossible lines of retreat and above all from the implacable hatred of a once-proud army. By the end of the year, the invaders were surrounded, and surrounded the Nazis. The besiegers were now benighted. The German Army at Stalingrad was trapped, their efforts to break out of the blockade failing. On 21st January, 1943, von Paulus, commander of the German Sixth Army, surrendered the first German Field-Marshall ever to surrender — along with sources of men and some 90 thousand men, all that remained of a once-proud army. 

No-one can fail to admire the strategic wisdom of the decision to hold at Stalingrad, the tactical mastery of the counterencirclement, the technical equality but superlity in armament achieved by a country which a few years before had been among the most backward. But what ultimately decided was the outcome was the fighters. 

"We should get as close as the enemy as possible, so that his air force could not bomb our forward units. Every Nazi soldier must be made to feel that he was living under the muzzle of a Russian gun, always ready to treat him a fatal dose of lead."

Stalingrad was where modern street fighting was born, where individual held key points, houses, street corners, graves, everywhere against whole armies, where the workers of the tank factories climbed into the tanks they had just made and drove them into battle. This indomitable will gave victory to the Russians.

Mao Tseng hailed the resistance at Stalingrad as a decisive victory in his article "A Turning Point in World War II" written long before the final capitulation. For ourselves the lesson, as it was for the Chinese, is that the outward ferocity of the aggressor betrays inner weakness. Resistance itself, which began the moment a Nazi foot set on Soviet soil, was the means in victory, culminating in the unshakeable resistance of Stalingrad. The war would not be as it seemed, until the conquerors were encircling the besieged Nazi invaders. Von Paulus, in consideration of the lives of his men and in defiance of Hitler's orders surrendered. 

Could anyone today, the speaker asked, after Stalingrad, think that armies should once again be thrown at the Russians? That was Hitler's plan, a plan dear to the bourgeois — even from the time of the "Lusitania War. Yes such a plan was being advocated today by some calling themselves Marxism-Leninism". Stalins had the word for such "theorists". Would the name Marxism-Leninism become tainted as the name communism was with the advent of Fascism in Italy? Who would wish to enlist under their banner, in a war against Russia knowing the fearful consequences of modern warfare, of the neutron bomb? 

Stalingrad shone amongst the British an interest so passionate and enduring that workers here never believed the "cold war" theories of Russian aggression, coming as they did from a Churchill whom they repudiated at the war's end. Nor were European workers anywhere taken in by today's clamour for war. Even at the outset of the "79 war, the British were not ready to fight at the request of Hitler's former friends, the Whitehall establishment. The need became paramount with the invasion of socialist Russia. The problem now, in Europe as in Russia, is the same as that facing Britain during the war. The war against one's own rulers who brought Hitler to power to destroy socialism, and who used the war as a pretext for even more exploitation at home. The Russian was a fight against such an expression, to which the young everywhere gave their lives. Recently, a British trade unionist and communist on a delegation visiting Stalingrad, organ and beautifully rebuilt, was asked to speak about his world. "Broadcast on the radio for all to hear were: 'You wrongly call your city Volosograd. The whole world will always call it Stalingrad.'"
Historic Notes

"We have only to look in the door and the whole rotten structure will come crashing down," boasted Hitler in anticipation of his new Eastern empire. But, just to make sure, Operation Barbarossa was the biggest war operation ever mounted. Three million troops from Germany, Austria, Italy, Hungary, Romania and Finland attacked the Soviet Union on June 22, 1941.

The new well-practiced Wehrmacht struck with catastrophic effect. Within two months they had advanced 400 miles. The Soviet airforce was practically destroyed, whole armies were wiped out, figures of one million killed or captured came commonly. Yet Hitler's plan had failed.

German strategy was to destroy the Russian ability to resist, yet to their surprise German resistance continued. Thus a new strategy was forced, a drive on Moscow where capture would surely do the trick (shades of Bismarck!).

Early on, Stalin was made Supreme Commander-in-Chief. For the next four years, for up to eighteen hours a day, he personally supervised the Soviet military effort. Marshall Zhukov, who became Deputy Supreme Commander, described in his memoirs how Stalin's study was the place where Headquarters decisions were made.

"Often sharp arguments arose at the Committee meetings. Views were expressed in private and sharp terms. Stalin would casually walk up and down the table, carefully listening to those who argued. He himself was short spoken and would often decide on the spot with a remark like, 'Come to the point.' He opened the meetings with a quiet voice and only once in a great mood, if an agreement was reached at the sitting, a commission would be formed of representatives of the two sides to report back. This happened only when Stalin himself had not arrived at a definite decision."

As the crisis deepened, he addressed the Soviet people by radio for the first time. All those who heard the speech remembered its effect. The ability of the Bolshevik Party, with Stalin at its head, to mobilize all the people immediately is one that only a genuine leadership can possess.

By late December 1941 German troops were in the suburbs of Moscow, but there the advance ground to a halt. The entire adult population of Moscow had been mobilized. Historians quote the dramatic effects of the Russian冬天 on their resistance.

This article is the last in the current series written to celebrate the one hundredth anniversary of Stalin's birth.

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Seventy years ago the world held its breath as Nazi troops came up to the gates of the Soviet Union’s capital city...

1941: The battle for Moscow

Struggle and sacrifice on behalf of workers everywhere should never be neglected. This is particularly true of the battle for Moscow, the Soviet capital, in 1941, which receives slight attention compared to those for Stalingrad, Kursk or Berlin. The battle was immense, shifting over a territory the size of France.

It was not only the greatest battle in the Second World War but also the largest battle ever fought between two armies, involving more than seven million soldiers of the Soviet Union and Nazi Germany and lasting for 6 months from September 1941 to April 1942. The Battle of Moscow was decisive in the reversal of fortunes for Nazi Germany, benefiting workers around the world.

The Soviet Union paid a dreadful price - the loss of 926,000 soldiers killed - for inflicting on Hitler’s armies the first real defeat they had ever suffered. Previously the German armies had easily crushed Poland, Norway, Denmark, Netherlands, Belgium and France, and had an invincible aura. Hitler’s goal was for another swift victory in the east so that he could then return to the war against Britain, but fascist Germany’s blitzkrieg tactics, previously an unstoppable whirlwind, failed to triumph. After the Battle of Moscow, the myth of the invincibility of German soldiers perished, although three more years of bitter military conflict lay ahead.
In 1941, Germany had the best equipped army in the world and Hitler envisaged another rapid campaign - to wipe out the Soviet Union, take control of the resources of Russia and the Ukraine and ensure Germany could never be starved and blockaded of materials as in World War One. Hitler considered Russia as Germany’s ‘lebensraum’ (living space). Initially, when they invaded on 22 June 1941, the Germans did catch the Soviets off guard. In the early weeks and months there was disarray and confusion. However, even in these first few days and weeks, there was solid evidence that some of the Soviet forces were capable of inflicting setbacks on the Wehrmacht (German army), even in circumstances of retreat. And on the second day of the war, the Soviet Union created the Council of Evacuation that would eventually lead to the dismantling and transporting of thousands of factories to the safety of the eastern regions of the country, out of the control of the Nazis.

German forces unleashed 3,550 tanks and 2,770 aircraft, backed up by another half million troops from Finland and Romania, and pushed deeper into the Russian heartlands, advancing 450 miles in the first month. Germany’s Army Group Centre was obviously heading for Moscow because of the city’s immense importance to socialism.

Before the coming of winter, German military operations aimed to capture Moscow, depriving the Soviet Union of its strategic and
political centre, which housed the Soviet government, contained a massive industrial and armaments centre and was the country’s key transportation hub. Its seizure would have been a devastating blow. Nazi goals were to level Moscow to the ground and make it uninhabitable.

Despite large initial advances, the Wehrmacht was slowed by Soviet resistance, in particular during the Battle of Smolensk, which delayed the German advance until mid-September, disrupting the blitzkrieg.

At this stage, Moscow was vulnerable, but Hitler ordered the attack to turn south and eliminate Russian forces at Kiev – which resulted in a huge triumph for the Germans. Their advance on Moscow was resumed on 2 October 1941. Autumn 1941 was the lowest point reached throughout the war. But since 22 June, the Luftwaffe had lost 1,603 aircraft with a further 1,028 damaged planes. As a result, the balance of power in the air was shifting.

The initial advance resulted in two huge encirclements around the towns of Vyzama and Briansk which pocketed 660,000 Russian troops. But by mid-October, the Russian rainy period commenced, turning the roads and countryside into muddy quagmires. The German tank forces were reduced to a crawl, often unable to move. Through the great forests which lie in front of Moscow, only narrow trails were negotiable and it required only small Russian forces to block these. Their cavalry became very active during this period, frequently moving through the woods and getting behind German lines where they laid mines and ambushed supply columns.

**Stretched supply lines**

By late October the German forces were worn out, with only a third of their motor vehicles still functioning, infantry divisions at a third or half strength, and serious logistics issues preventing the delivery of warm clothing and other winter equipment to the front. German supply lines were being stretched beyond their effective limit and the colossal loss of material on the eastern front – without having won a decisive victory – was bleeding the German economy.
Armed with heavy shovels, Moscow women and elderly men build a tank trap to halt German Panzers advancing on the Russian capital. More than 100,000 citizens worked from mid-October until late November digging ditches and building other obstructions.

On 13 October, Stalin’s decision to stay in Moscow even though some parts of government such as the General Staff and various civil government offices were evacuated to Kuibyshev proved a key turning point, though there was a temporary panic among Muscovites. The Soviets created a reserve of army units around Moscow. Moscow was placed under martial law. The civilian population were mobilised in the war effort.

Moscow itself was transformed into a fortress. 250,000 women and teenagers worked, building trenches and anti-tank moats around Moscow, moving almost three million cubic meters of earth with no mechanical help. Moscow’s factories were hastily transformed into military complexes: the automobile factory was turned into a submachine gun armory, a clock factory was manufacturing mine detonators, the chocolate factory was producing food for the front, and automobile repair stations were repairing damaged tanks and vehicles.

Additionally, Moscow was now a target of massive air raids, although these caused only limited damage because of extensive anti-aircraft defences and effective civilian fire brigades.

Russian winters are as cold as the summers are hot. Snow starts in October or November and continues until April or May. Most of the
German troops lacked winter clothing, resulting in over 100,000 cases of frostbite. Many Axis vehicles could not withstand the cool temperatures, resulting in cracked engine blocks. Their air force was grounded much of the time.

To stiffen the resolve of the Red Army and boost the civilian morale, Stalin ordered the traditional military parade celebrating the 1917 Revolution to be staged in Red Square on 7 November. Soviet troops paraded past the Kremlin and then marched directly to the front. The parade had a great symbolic significance in demonstrating Soviet resolve.

Of the two German armoured prongs, the 2nd Panzer Army operating to the south of Moscow got as far as the city of Tula where it finally ground to a halt. In the north, the 3rd and 4th Panzer Armies pushed across the frozen Moscow-Volga canal, but no further. By early December, some leading German units were able to see some of Moscow's buildings with binoculars.

**Fresh troops**

On 5 December 1941, fresh Soviet Siberian troops – comprising 18 divisions and prepared for winter warfare—attacked along with new and reconstituted units of the Red Army. By January 1942, they had driven the Wehrmacht back between 62 and 160 miles, ending the immediate threat to Moscow.

It was the closest that Axis forces ever got to capturing the Soviet capital. Though the Wehrmacht had been forced to retreat before, during the Yelnya Offensive (September 1941) and at the Battle of Rostov, Moscow marked a turning point: it was the first time since the Wehrmacht began its conquests in 1939 that it had been forced into a retreat from which it did not recover the initiative.

Seventy years may have passed but we still remember the first great Soviet victory, the first great loss for Nazi Germany.
Seventy years ago, the Soviet Union’s Red Army - in a colossal tank battle - smashed Nazi Germany’s last major offensive operation, changing the balance of forces in the world...

The Battle of Kursk – preparation, production and bravery

AFTER THE Soviet Union’s victory at Stalingrad there was a pause while both sides prepared for the next phase of the armed conflict. By early April 1943, information from Red Army intelligence and the “Lucy” spy network indicated what German intentions were. In an attempt to get back the strategic initiative, the German Wehrmacht intended to assemble two huge Panzer concentrations in order to pinch out the vulnerable Kursk Salient, which projected like a fist from the rest of the Soviet front line.

By mid-April Marshall Zhukov and Stalin had formulated a plan to thwart Nazi goals. Thinking it would be risky for Soviet forces to go over to the offensive in order to pre-empt the enemy offensive, they opted to wear out the German army on the Soviet defences, smashing their tanks and then, by introducing fresh reserves, going over to a general offensive and beating them.
The Wehrmacht assembled a huge military force: 50 divisions (16 Panzer or motorised ones including 9 of the German army’s finest divisions) comprising about 900,000 men with around 10,000 guns and mortars and nearly 3,000 tanks, 2,000 aircraft including elite Luftwaffe units and another 20 divisions deployed on the flanks as reinforcements.

But the scale of Soviet preparations was even greater. To defend the salient, immense numbers of troops were concentrated in and behind it. Elaborate defence lines were constructed of a complexity and depth far exceeding those which had protected Moscow in 1941 (see Workers October 2011). The system was not only frontally strong, but strong in depth, stretching for 110 miles from front to rear.

Behind the salient, in the ‘Steppe’ Reserve Front, was a further defensive system, and beyond that another line of defences on the east bank of the River Don.

Inside the salient were the Central Front and the Voronezh Front, whose combined artillery totalled 19,300 guns plus 920 of the devastating rocket mortars (“Stalin organs” or “Katyusha”). Their combined armoured divisions had 3,306 tanks and assault guns. And 2,650 Soviet aircraft were committed to the battle.

The salient defence system was based on six belts of concealed anti-tank strongpoints containing barbed-wire fences, anti-tank ditches, deep entrenchments full of infantry, anti-tank obstacles, dug-in armoured vehicles and machine gun bunkers. In front of and in between these strongpoints were minefields.

Some 503,663 anti-tank mines and 439,348 anti-personnel mines were laid, mostly in the first belt of defence. In addition, trenches totalling more than 6,000 miles were dug in the salient. Around 300,000 civilians from the Kursk area worked on all these constructions.

The Soviet plan was to progressively wear down the German panzer spearheads by forcing them to attack through a vast interconnected web of minefields and defensive strong points – by far the most extensive defensive works ever built. The plan worked, with the defence proving to be more than three times the depth necessary to contain the furthest extent of the German attack.

A new railway was built to improve the access of supplies to the Voronezh Front, while more than 250 bridges and 1,800 miles of road were repaired, mostly by civilian labour. And the German build-up was disrupted by partisan guerrilla attacks and air bombardments against German supply routes. More than 4,900 attacks hit German railways between February and July 1943, diverting large numbers of German units from front-line duties and preventing some ever being committed to the battle.
**Formidable**

Soviet military might was formidable. Newly trained, excellently equipped armies were added to the salient and reserve areas, as Soviet heavy industry was now fully mobilised for war – manufacturing a custom-built range of reliable, proven hardware and weapons in huge numbers.

The II-2 “Shturmovik” proved to be an outstanding ground attack aircraft, far more versatile than German planes. The Soviet T-34 medium tank and KV heavy tank had admirable streamlined design and rolled off assembly lines at up to 2,000 a month; whereas German Panther tanks were often beset with mechanical problems and experienced huge spare parts problems. Monthly production of the German tank Pzkw IV (itself inferior to the T-34 in every respect except in the gun-power of its latest version) only topped 100 in October 1942.

The German attack began on 5 July; by 12 July it had been ground down and halted in the north of the salient; in the south, by 23 July. Soviet counter offensives began and continued until early November. The Red Army broke out of the salient, retook Kiev and crossed the River Dniepr. German losses at Kursk were greater than at Stalingrad (see Workers January 2010).

A whole 11 months before the allied landings in France, the Soviet victory at Kursk sealed the outcome of the Second World War. After defeats at Moscow and Stalingrad, Germany had managed to rally and inflict some reverses; after Kursk, Hitler’s armies were forced into an almost continuous retreat.

At Kursk, on ground of Germany’s choosing, the Red Army beat and hurled back the Wehrmacht in high summer, hitherto Germany’s best campaigning season. The superiority of socialism was confirmed in that most exacting test, war. ■
The Soviet Union bore the brunt of the Second World War in Europe, which ended with the defeat of fascism. The balance of class forces shifted away from capitalism for a few post-war decades...

Victory in Europe: 8 May 1945

WORKERS, MAY 2014 ISSUE

After the battle of Stalingrad in the winter of 1942-43, the tide turned in favour of the Soviets. The German army was forced to retreat. For the next two years, the Red Army hurled back the Nazi invaders.

From 1943, the Soviet Union developed highly mobile, armoured formations. Their task was to punch through breaches in enemy lines, destroying German reserves and lines of communication. In autumn 1943 the German Wehrmacht deployed 236 divisions on the Eastern Front, more than 60 per cent of its total strength and more than 50 per cent of all its armour. When US and British forces opened a second front from D-Day in June 1944, they engaged just a third of the Axis forces and most of the best Wehrmacht formations were fighting on the eastern front.

By June 1944 the Red Army was advancing across a 2,000-mile front. Marshal Stalin supervised operations as overall commander-in-chief. He closely led a number of very able commanders including Zhukov, Konev, Rokossovsky and Chernyakhovsky, built up strategic reserves, oversaw weapon development and organised arms production.
First the Nazis were evicted from occupied Russia. Then the Red Army forced them out of Romania in August 1944, soon followed by Bulgaria and the Baltic states. By February 1945 the Nazis were out of Poland and Hungary; Vienna fell on 14 April. Immense Soviet forces were deployed along the Vistula river on the East Prussian border for the final assault on Germany which began on 16 April. These comprised an army of 6,500 tanks, 4,772 aircraft, 32,143 guns and heavy mortars and 163 rifle divisions. That represented a 5 to 1 advantage in manpower and armour; 7 to 1 in artillery and 17 to 1 in aircraft.

“Fortress Berlin” was Hitler’s last wartime illusion. Berlin’s defences were very poor compared to those of Moscow in 1941 (see Workers October 2011). Consideration was given to defending Berlin only in March 1945. Three makeshift obstacle rings were flung up: one 30 miles outside the German capital, another around its railway system and the last circling the central government buildings.

These defences were flimsy, without enough troops to man them and reliant on poorly armed Volkssturm and Hitler Youth members; they were easily overrun. No wonder quick-acting cyanide-based pills were much in demand among compromised Berliners. Eight Soviet armies encircled Berlin, and Red Army tanks advanced systematically, taking it block by block. By 25 April Soviet and Allied troops met at the River Elbe west of Berlin for a brief show of comradeship in arms.

**Reprisals**

In Berlin water and public transport finally broke down; food supplies were low and residents started looting. Flying SS court martial squads roamed the city shooting and hanging deserters. Outside of Berlin diehard Nazis often took savage reprisals against civilian officials attempting to surrender their towns to British and American forces. Hitler shot himself on 30 April; Nazi Germany offered unconditional surrender on 7 and 8 May.

Hitler’s fantasy of a “thousand-year Reich” completely ruined Germany. Most of its cities were rubble by the end of the war. A trail of devastation also littered the rest of continental Europe. Hitler’s ebbing empire was finally reduced to a concrete bunker 55 feet below ground.

In April 1945 Allied forces had overrun the concentration camps in Buchenwald, Bergen-Belsen and Dachau. Newsreel evidence was immediately screened in British cinemas, where audiences received it in stunned silence.

V-2 rockets accompanied the death throes of the Nazi regime. Silent and giving no warning, 1,052 V-2s were spotted from September 1944 onwards. Of those 518 hit London; 2,754 people were killed and 6,523 severely injured. The last V-2 fell on 27 March 1945.
During the war people’s thoughts in Britain were already turning to the organisation of peacetime. There was mass pressure for change. By 1942 this brought forth policy documents that culminated in the Beveridge Report. This called for comprehensive social reform of society – and sold 600,000 copies. Other reports followed with planning ideas for education, hospitals and full employment. Total war had depended on the state and the people.

**Public debate**

That mood continued post-war when regulation of aspects of capitalism was popular. There was wholesale public debate of national plans in civilian life and the armed services.

From the first week in April 1945 people were buying bunting and Union Jack and “Welcome Home” flags in readiness for VE Day – Victory in Europe. Shops sold Victory scarves, ribbons, rosettes and even hair-slides. On 7 May VE Day was announced for the following day and a 2-day holiday declared. Crowds began appearing in central London that evening. At midnight big ships riding in ports from the Clyde to Southampton opened up their sirens whilst searchlights flashed out Vs across the skies. Lights blazed everywhere as blackout regulations were ignored.

VE Day was a long piece of national rejoicing. Large crowds thronged the streets of central London most of the day and night. There were set speeches by prime minister Winston Churchill and George VI to vast gatherings, plus innumerable impromptu light-hearted happenings with much dancing, singing, hugging and kissing.

Though London featured most in the media, much the same occurred in the other notable towns and cities of Britain. Floodlighting and glare replaced wartime darkness. There were bonfires with effigies of Hitler and his henchmen and fireworks everywhere, throughout the land. Inhibitions were temporarily forgotten.

In the general election of July 1945, Churchill’s Tory Party lost convincingly to the Labour Party. Hopes and aspiration for a better future were truly widespread, but these were dissipated and banished over the next few decades.
When Japan withdrew from Malaya after the end of the Second World War, Britain resumed imperial control of its former colony...

1948–1960: Britain’s war in Malaya

Malaya – now Malaysia – was the great material prize in South-East Asia, possessing precious minerals and resources – above all, rubber and tin, but also coal, bauxite, tungsten, gold, iron ore and manganese. Its tin and rubber industries were important to imperial Britain’s recovery after the Second World War, being the biggest dollar earners in the British Commonwealth. Seventy per cent of Malayan rubber estates were owned by European, primarily British, companies.

Gurkhas on patrol during the Malayan war.

After the war Malaya had high unemployment, low wages and high levels of food inflation. A large number of strikes by increasingly powerful trade unions broke out between 1946 and 1948. The social
unrest was met with arrests, deportations and curfews. The colonial authorities’ desire to uphold the old ways of ruling meant people had no option but resistance, which the Malayan Communist Party organised.

The origins of the conflict lay in the failure of the British colonial authorities to advance the cause of the Chinese in Malaya, who made up nearly 45 per cent of the population. Britain, in line with its usual imperial tactic of divide and rule, traditionally promoted the rights of the Malay community over those of the Chinese.

In 1948 Britain promoted a new federal constitution that would confirm Malay privileges, consign about 90 per cent of Chinese to non-citizenship and see the colonial High Commissioner preside over an undemocratic centralised state where the members of the Executive Council and Legislative Council were all chosen by him.

Three European plantation managers were killed in June 1948. Britain declared an Emergency, not just to defeat the armed rebellion but also to crack down on workers’ rights. The colonial authorities banned some trade unions, imprisoned their members, outlawed the Malayan Communist Party and gave police powers to imprison without trial.

Retreating to rural areas, the newly formed Malayan National Liberation Army led a guerrilla campaign to disrupt the tin mines and rubber plantations. The British military despatched 40,000 troops to fight 8,000 guerrillas to ensure British business could exploit Malayan economic resources.

The MNLA was partly a re-formation of the MCP-led Malayan People’s Anti-Japanese Army, a guerrilla force which had been the principal resistance against the Japanese occupation and that had received training and arms from Britain. The Malayan Chinese had offered the only active resistance to the Japanese invaders.

In December 1945, guerrillas were encouraged to disband and hand in their weapons to the British Military Administration in exchange for economic inducements; around 4,000 refused.

The guerrillas were drawn almost entirely from disaffected Chinese in the tin mines and rubber estates and received considerable support from over half a million Chinese “squatters”. The MNLA attacked rubber plantations, sabotaged installations, destroyed transportation and infrastructure. The Malay population supported the MNLA in smaller numbers.

**Brutal measures**

Initially, British military strategy was to guard important economic targets, but soon it aimed to cut off the guerrillas from their supporters among the population and restrict the MNLA’s food supply.
Declassified files reveal how British forces embarked on a series of brutal measures.

Beginning in 1950, 500,000 rural Malayans including 400,000 Chinese from squatter communities were forcibly relocated into guarded camps called “New Villages”, which were surrounded by barbed wire, police posts and floodlit areas in order to keep inhabitants in and guerrillas out. Before the “new villagers” were let out in the mornings to go to work, they were searched for rice, clothes, weapons or messages.

It was described by the Colonial Office as a “great piece of social development”, but the Empire had used this tactic before in the Boer War. Where people were deemed to be aiding the guerrillas, “collective punishments” of house curfews and rice ration reductions were inflicted on villages, as at Tanjong Malim (March 1952) and at Sengei Pelek (April 1952).

In the first five years of the Malayan war, Britain conducted 4,500 air strikes and trialled a 500 pound fragmentation bomb. Chemical agents were also used. From June to October 1952, 1,250 acres of roadside vegetation at possible ambush points were sprayed with defoliant. There were also cases of bodies of dead guerrillas being exhibited in public.

At the Batang Kali massacre in December 1948 the British army killed twenty-four Chinese, before burning the village. The British government initially claimed that the villagers were guerrillas, and then that they were trying to escape, neither of which was true. A Scotland Yard inquiry into the massacre was called off by the Heath government in 1970.

Dyak headhunters from Borneo worked alongside the British forces and decapitation of guerrillas occurred. A photograph of a marine commando holding two guerrillas’ heads caused an outcry in April 1952 and the Colonial Office privately noted: “there is no doubt that under international law a similar case in wartime would be a war crime”.

Repressive British detention laws resulted in 34,000 people being held for varying periods without trial in the first eight years of the war; around 15,000 people were deported to China.

British capitalism achieved its main aims in Malaya: the guerrilla army was defeated and British business interests were essentially preserved; the extent of foreign control over the economy hardly changed, even after independence in 1957. By 1971, 80 per cent of mining, 62 per cent of manufacturing and 58 per cent of construction were still foreign-owned, mainly by British companies. A resort to war had protected the economic order.
A representative assembly of the anti-Japanese political bodies in Korea, the "Committees of Preparation for National Independence" had formed a national government with jurisdiction over all Korea.

The US occupation force ignored this government and instead appointed an Advisory Council which contained many well known Japanese collaborators, and re-armed the Japanese and quisling forces to maintain "law and order". The US Military Government proclaimed itself the only lawful authority south of the 38th Parallel. In February 1946 a "Representative Democratic Council" was knocked together headed by Syngman Rhee, just returned from over 30 years comfortable exile in the USA and Kuomintang China.

By the summer of 1946 South Korean prisons were full of opponents to the new regime, and the US Assistant Secretary of State himself admitted that "Many Koreans feel that they are worse off than they were under the Japanese". Comparisons with the situation north of the 38th Parallel were not difficult for the ordinary Korean; there the Soviet forces had handed over power to the anti-Japanese Committees, which had set up a government led by Kim Il-Sung the veteran leader of the guerrilla struggle. It had implemented a wholesale policy of land reform to benefit the peasants, and quickly reinvigorated the war-damaged industry, so that during the harsh winter of 1947/48 everyone in the North was adequately fed and clothed, with enough fuel made available by efficient rationing to every household.

In late 1947 the United States proposed that the "Korean problem" be handed over to the United Nations, where the US and its allies and dependencies had an inbuilt majority in the General Assembly. A UN Temporary Commission on Korea was established, which proceeded to "supervise" elections, and accompanied as they were by a terror campaign by Rightist thugs in which over 500 people were killed, perhaps the THIRTY thugs with 3000 auxiliaries were a little hasty in regarding the inevitable result as "a valid expression of the free will of the electorate", especially as "illiterates" were not allowed to vote. Two rebellions that occurred in 1948 against the UN approved government were suppressed with brutal savagery.

The results of the South Korean elections of May 1950 were to prove not so satisfactory. Even after the arrest of many opposition candidates during the campaign, it was obvious that the Syngman Rhee government was virtually isolated from all sectors of Korean opinion. In such circumstances, bellicose threats to "take Pyongyang within a few days", i.e. to invade the North, were commonplace in order to create an atmosphere of tension. South Korean raids across the 38th Parallel had caused the North to deploy their forces closer to the demarcation line. On June 25th the North Koreans had had enough. Their response to the incessant provocations was to mount a counter-attack into the South.

Next week we consider the United States aggression against Korea, a war that lasted in effect less than a year, yet was fought with such savagery by the Imperialists that it resulted in between 3 and 4 million dead.
The Korean War.

Part Two

Again it was a British resolution to the UN that sanctioned the invasion of the North, but perhaps the best comment came from the US Secretary of the Navy: "It would earn for us a proud and popular title - we would become the first aggressors for peace."

Diplomatic warnings from Chou En-lai that the Chinese people would not "supinely tolerate their neighbours being savagely invaded by imperialists" were blithely dismissed as just propaganda in the euphoria that surrounded MacArthur's 'Home for Christmas' offensive to occupy completely all of Korea. This boast was perhaps to prove more true than was intended, as once the UN legions came up against the Chinese forces that had rushed to the assistance of their Korean comrades, it resulted in such a headlong retreat that it left the UN troops back below the 38th Parallel in time to celebrate the festive season.

MacArthur's arrogant statement that there was "no substitute for victory" was to rebound against him. Desperate threats to use nuclear weapons and invade China were to prove too much for the allies of the US, which under pressure from their own populations, were forced to abandon the aim of unifying Korea under imperialist control.

The UN retreat from North Korea had been a 'scarred earth' policy that left few material resources of any value, and what remained was subject to 'strategic bombing' as the US met the Communist superiority in morale with 'meatgrinder' attacks aiming to massacre as many of the defiant Koreans and Chinese as possible. The inhumane nature of the imperialists was best revealed in their choice of names for their offensives - 'Operation Killer' and 'Operation Ripper' whose success depended upon the use of chemical and bacteriological weapons so familiar later in Vietnam.

Although cease-fire talks began in 1951, and an armistice was signed two years later, Korea remains divided as the United States has persistently opposed any moves towards unity. After a wave of popular unrest Syngman Rhee was replaced in 1960 by the late un lamned President Park, who, despite the imposition of a ruthless dictatorship, failed to prevent the recent upsurge of the Korean people demanding democracy and unity. Korea will be reunited; no people will tolerate forever the artificial division of their nation imposed by outside forces.
It is sixty years since the outbreak of the Korean War – a conflict which saw the United States and its allies – including Britain – committing troops to the aim of holding back the spread of communism...

1950: The outbreak of the Korean War

WORKERS, NOV 2010 ISSUE

Sixty years ago a bitter, three-year war broke out in Korea, propelling to centre stage a country that hitherto had been at the margins of international politics. It became the flashpoint of all the tensions then raging between the competing systems of socialism and capitalism. The Korean War was waged on land, on sea and in the air over and near the Korean peninsula. The first year of the war was a seesaw struggle for control of the peninsula followed by two years of positional warfare as a backdrop to extended cease-fire negotiations.

In 1910, Korea had been annexed by Japan, whose domination lasted until the latter stages of the Second World War. The Yalta Conference of 1945 agreed that Soviet and American troops would occupy Korea with a demarcation line along the latitude 38° parallel, pending the establishment of a unified and independent Korean government. Effectively, the terms of Yalta divided Korea into a communist northern half and an American-occupied southern half.

Usurped

America occupied South Korea and usurped power from locally controlled People’s Committees, reinstalling many of the former landowners and police who had held office when Korea was under Japanese colonial rule. These moves met with heavy resistance and open rebellion in some parts of South Korea such as the southern islands. In 1948, both the Soviet and US forces were withdrawn. However, after several altercations at the border, it appeared that civil war might be inevitable.
The war began on 25 June 1950 when the North Korean army crossed the 38th Parallel intending to use force to reunite the south and the north with armoured and infantry divisions. The invasion was also fuelled by a massacre in which 60,000 communists and supporters were killed on Jeju Island in the South. The decision to move into the South appears to have been the initiative of Kim Il-Sung, the North Korean leader, rather than that of his Soviet supporters. This bid to reunify the country met with popular support across the South. Quickly, the North Korean army, armed with Soviet tanks, overran South Korea. Its capital Seoul fell after three days. By the end of August, the North Koreans occupied almost all of the South, except around the port of Pusan.

Although Korea was not strategically essential to the United States, the US political environment at this stage was such that its government did not want to appear “soft on Communism”. So it came to South Korea’s aid. The US managed to contrive its intervention as part of a “police action” and it was run by a UN force from 15 nations, though the bulk of the troops were American with a large contingent from Britain.

With the US, UN and South Korean forces pinned against the sea at Pusan, MacArthur carried out an amphibious assault on Inchon, a port on the western coast of Korea. Having made this landing, MacArthur caught the North Korean army in a pincer movement. By October the US and UN forces had recaptured Seoul. Instead of being satisfied with the rapid re-conquest of South Korea, the US General MacArthur crossed the 38th Parallel and pursued the North Korean army. On 19 October, Pyongyang, the North Korean capital, was captured. The US and UN forces proceeded all the way to the northernmost provinces of North Korea, forcing Kim and his government to flee north, first to Sinuiju and eventually into China.

Afraid that the US was interested in taking North Korea as a base for operations against Manchuria, the People’s Republic of China, which bordered North Korea and had only just won its independence in 1949 after decades of war, issued warnings to America that it would not tolerate further advances by American troops. The US ignored them, failing to take note of the revolutionary zeal, military experience, confidence and leadership of the Chinese soldiers redeployed to the Korean border area, many of whom were veterans of the successful national war against Japan and the civil war against the Nationalist Chinese forces.
At the very beginning of the war, the Chinese had sent a volunteer army across the Yalu River (the North Korean/Chinese border) and entered the war as allies of the Korean People’s Army. The Chinese attack on the combined US/UN/ROK forces was so great that they were compelled to retreat. Chinese troops retook Pyongyang in December and Seoul in January 1951. In March UN forces began a new offensive, retaking Seoul. After a series of offensives and counter-offensives by both sides, by 1951 the front was stabilised along what eventually became the permanent “Armistice Line” of 27 July 1953, where there followed a gruelling period of largely static trench warfare for the next two years.

**Devastated**

North Korea was devastated by US air raids with very few buildings left standing in the capital and elsewhere in the country. By the time of the armistice, upwards of 3.5 million Koreans on both sides had died in the conflict. Around 53,000 US and 1,100 British soldiers were killed and estimates of perhaps 400,000 Chinese volunteers.

During the war North Korea and China accused the US of large-scale field-testing of biological weapons across all of North Korea and parts of China close to the border, including the spread of diseases such as anthrax and the use of disease-carrying insects. The allegations were always denied but clear evidence has emerged in subsequent years that after the Second World War US medical scientists in occupied Japan had undertaken extensive research on insect vectors for spreading biological diseases from as early as 1946, with the assistance of Japanese staff formerly working for the old imperial regime, so the capability was always there.
Boxes containing thousands of incriminating documents from the Kenyan colonial service show the barbarity with which the British Empire sought – vainly – to cling on to power in East Africa...

**1952 to 1956: The Mau Mau rebellion**

*WORKERS, JULY 2011 ISSUE*

Sometimes the past returns in the form of nightmare to shock the present, as has happened with revelations this year from a host of “lost” official documents unearthed this year which confirm British imperialism’s violent suppression in the 1950s of the Mau Mau rebellion in Kenya.

The British Empire’s connections with Kenya go back to the 19th century, when it developed trade with the East African coast in the 1840s. By 1887 the British East African Company secured a formal lease of land that ultimately developed in 1893 into a British government protectorate. Then in 1920, Kenya became a Crown Colony and its legislative councils were a privilege of the white settlers who had begun to farm there at the turn of the twentieth century.

There was a prolonged pattern of land expropriation by white farmers from Britain eager to acquire some of the richest agricultural soils in the world: for instance, the leading Kikuyu tribe lost 60,000 acres of land, whilst the Giricama tribe from the coastal regions were pushed to and fro.

By 1948, 1,250,000 Kikuyu people had ownership of a mere 2,000 square miles, while 30,000 white farmers had 12,000 square miles. This displacement also provided the white settlers with a ready supply of cheap labour. Meanwhile, the colonial authorities adopted a policy of near total neglect of African farming. But there was a history of resistance to British imperialism from the 1880s onwards notably the Nandi Revolt (1895 – 1905) and an uprising in 1913-14.

Though India won independence in 1948, the British government in the 1940s and the 1950s was split over granting self-government to all its colonies. It was more willing to go down that route in West Africa, but not elsewhere in Africa. The more diehard imperialist members of Macmillan’s Conservative government (1957 to 1963) combined with the white settler inhabitants of these countries to protect white minority colonial rule. Earlier, British ex-servicemen had received money from Attlee’s, Churchill’s and Eden’s governments to assist them to establish farms in Kenya.

This expanded colonisation generated heightened resistance from the Kikuyu tribe, which formed about 20 per cent of the population.
Ultimately the Kikuyu and other tribes pursued a course of violence including killings to drive the white settlers out, beginning in the summer of 1952 and continuing until 1956 with sporadic actions beyond that date. The Kenyan Land and Freedom Army was formed. Effectively, a civil war broke out between the anti-colonial Mau Mau nationalists and the colonial authorities supported by the British military and collaborators.

The colonial authorities responded harshly, turning Kikuyu districts into police states. There were wholesale arrests and curfews. In 1954, 25,000 British security forces were deployed in Nairobi, leading to internment for tens of thousands. Scores of detention camps, often staffed by white settlers, were established for “screening” (as always with our rulers, language became a casualty too). As many as 150,000 Kikuyu were “screened”.

Sanitation was non-existent in the camps and epidemics of diseases such as typhoid spread through them. Collective punishments were imposed on populations suspected of supporting the rebellion: communal labour; collective fines; further confiscation of land and property, including tens of thousands of livestock.

By the end of the civil war the number of hangings by the colonial courts reached 1,090, a staggering scale of terror. In addition, a “villagisation programme” was set up for over a million rural Kikuyu; its aim was to break the Mau Mau by removing people from the stronghold of their land, establishing new villages with curfews and surrounding the new villages with deep, spike-bottomed trenches and barbed wire. (So that’s where the Americans in Vietnam pinched their ideas from!) The civil war was bloody and violent.

In March 1959 widespread indignation followed the deaths of 11 Mau Mau inmates of the Hola prison camp. Though they had been beaten to death by their warders, the authorities first claimed they had died from lack of water. Wholesale revulsion to this act revealed that white minority colonial rule was no longer possible and hastened a change in the British government’s Kenyan policy. Self-government was announced in June 1963 and Kenya became a republic in December 1964. Even then, many white settlers were richly compensated with British taxpayers’ money and returned to Britain.

**In court**

In 2011, four elderly Kenyans, who allege they were tortured between 1952 and 1961 by British colonial administration officials during the suppression of the Mau Mau uprising, started legal proceedings against the British government and are seeking compensation at the High Court. They variously claim they were whipped, beaten, sexually abused or castrated while detained under colonial rule.
The British government, though not denying the claims, says it cannot be held liable for the alleged abuse and is fully defending the case, claiming that Kenya had its own legal colonial government that was responsible for the detention camps where Mau Mau supporters were taken. Does the tail wag the dog? No. The imperial government dictates policy in a colony. The attitude of the British government is no doubt determined by the fear of such litigation becoming contagious, spurring other victims of imperial adventures into coming forward.

Boxes containing 17,000 incriminating pages of previously undisclosed documents from the Kenyan colonial service have been “discovered” during research into the legal claims. They were removed from Nairobi at independence in 1963 because of the damning information they held and have been hidden away for almost 50 years to protect the guilty, stored in British government buildings.

These official colonial documents confirm the full extent of British brutality in the Mau Mau rebellion: systematic torture, starvation and even the burning alive of detainees; forced labour in camps; violent interrogation to extract confessions; and the British colonial governor present at beatings. Ripples from Kenya’s past still flow.
**HISTORIC NOTES**

**JULY 14 1958**

**Middle East Bastille, Iraq**

It was like any other morning when we left our house at six for a swim in the River Tigris. It was July 14 1958. The cool fresh air was anxiously waiting for the hot sun to climb above the horizon. The man at the boat-house had glees in his eyes as he took the boat into the river. Apart from a few army trucks and jeeps crossing the bridge as the boat floated softly under there from a few army trucks and jeeps was being made. In the almost deserted streets of Baghdad the army was more noticeable. The Monarchy had been preparing to send troops to the Middle East. The radio broadcast began as usual at 7 o'clock with a reading from the Koran. Few people ever listen to the words, it is the poetry and classical singing that intrigues so many. Immediately after came the announcement. The Monarchy had been overthrown and the Republic of Iraq had been established. The Bastille had been stormed and the monarchy was immediately dubbed the 'ancient regime'.

In less than an hour the streets of Baghdad were packed with people. Banners suddenly appeared, slogans were shouted, crowds were cheering. How the overthrow was achieved was of little interest. It was enough that it had happened.

News spread rapidly throughout the capital. The King was dead. His uncle, the real power behind the throne had been executed. Other government ministers and their henchmen were arrested. One name was missing ... Nuri Al-Said, the obedient servant of British Imperialism.

A curfew was declared at 2 in the afternoon which no one seemed to take much notice of including the soldiers who were asking people to go home as soon as possible to ensure the safety of the revolution. By nine in the evening the streets were empty except for army jeeps and motor-bikes rushing from place to place. The sun has gone down and darkness fell very quickly. Sleeping on the flat roof, as everyone did during the hot nights, we could see the lights flickering all over the capital. Suddenly the calm of the night was interrupted by a loud explosion followed by a big ball of fire from the direction of the oil reservoirs.

Everyone was back to work the day following the revolution. Work was done more efficiently. No bribes were offered and no bribes accepted at government offices. The wretched police, now stripped of their guns, stayed at home. The numerous apies, and every street had one, dared not show their faces. The calmness of the population belled the very serious situation that the young republic was in. The US sixth fleet was anchored off the shores of Lebanon, British troops stationed at bases in Jordan and Cyprus where on alert, the Baghdad pact countries were waiting for an excuse to interfere. Nevertheless messages of support came from all over the world.

The most memorable was the message from Cuba where only months previously the dictatorship of Batista had been overthrown. Workers in a Chinese factory decided to work an extra hour with the proceeds going towards the Iraqi revolution.

The final act of the drama came at 2.30 in the afternoon when we heard that Nuri Al-Said had been captured. It is difficult to say how the news reached our home from the other side of town. We listened to the radio for confirmation and it was not long in coming. Nuri Al-Said dressed in women's clothes with a veil over his face had asked the way to a suspicious address. As he walked away his pyjamas were noticed below the black gown. Women were encouraged to wear the ancient regime. Snatching the veil from his face the people in the streets carried out the long-standing sentence of the Iraqi people. When the army arrived on the scene the young officer pronouncing him dead emptied his machine gun into the air in jubilation. The people, determined to avenge the murder, torture, arrested and repression dragged the body through the streets of Baghdad.

The Bastille of the Middle East had fallen. Iraq was free. Little did we know that the end of the Monarchy signalled the beginning of an even fiercer struggle.
"The government newspapers have been recommending the Parliament to pass a law to put an end to these Unions. Better call for a law to prevent those inconvenient things called Spring Tides." William Cobbett, 'Political Register', December 1833.

The cry that the Unions are "too powerful" is as old as capitalism itself, for it was a petition from a group of employers in 1799 pleading against "a dangerous combination... among the journeymen millwrights within the metropolis... for enforcing a general increase of their wages," which prompted Parliament to pass a law making it illegal for any workman to join with others to secure an increase in wages or any improvements in conditions of work.

Such was the threat to the profit system posed by collective bargaining for twenty-six years this Combination Act remained on the statute book. That eventually repealed in 1825 was in no way a change of attitude by the employing classes, but rather of the defiance of the law by the working class which made its continued existence counterproductive. Far from dying away, trade unionism flourished, openly in some parts of the country, and solidarity was strengthened. In 1810 alone the London goldbeaters sent donations ranging from £5 to £30 to eight other unions. However it was the escalation of violence in industrial disputes and the development of the very conspiracy which the Combination Act was intended to root out which frightened Parliament into repealing it.

Repeal did not bring an end to capitalist assaults on the trade unions as the case of the Tolpuddle Martyrs and countless similar episodes have demonstrated, but at no time since their infancy in the early days of capitalism has the question of the trade unions and the law so preoccupied Government and Parliament than in the present decade of accelerated capitalist decline. It was just over ten years ago that the Labour Government issued its white paper, 'In Place of Strife', many of whose proposals and all of whose attitudes are reproduced in the present Government's planned assault.

When the Government attempted to implement its proposals in an Industrial Relations Bill, the trade union movement forced it to drop it in 1970. The Conservatives, however, given confidence by their 'mandate' from the electorate were not so timid, and undaunted by a series of one-day strikes had by August 1971 placed an Industrial Relations Act on the statute book.

It was only then that the trade unions really mobilised their strength. The TUC advised its affiliated unions to boycott all the machinery connected with the court and some, led by the AUEW, refused even to recognise the authority of the Industrial Relations Court. The court's prestige never recovered from the humiliation of committing three dockers to prison for contempt of court, for defying its order to stop picketing of some

Laws will never stop trade unionism

Capitalist law confronts the Shrewsbury pickets after the building workers' strike in 1972.

Photo: Press Association.

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As the new barbarians prepare to make yet another attempt to limit the power of collective bargaining, we must be mindful of the lessons these episodes can teach us. They show clearly that the Government is nothing but an instrument of the capitalist class and that its laws exist primarily to protect and enhance profit. They also show that only through their own organisations and not through Parliament, can the working class protect its interests.
NOW that there is again talk of which sort of picketing the Government will allow - picketing is alright so long as it has no effect - we look back at lessons from history.

Ever since the establishment of the Craft Unions for skilled men, the employers and their governments have been trying to break them up. The Unions set up large strike funds, and boasted of their size, so the Lord Chief Justice sanctioned the theft of funds from the Boilermakers by a treasurer who absconded - even though unions had been officially legal, they were 'so far in restraint of trade as to render the society an illegal association'.

The struggle for wages and shorter hours led to a massive lockout, but still the employers could not win, without the aid of the law. So finally, in 1866, when a can of gunpowder exploded in a blackleg's house in Sheffield, the government immediately cried out against the 'terrorism of Trade Unions'. The government promised to protect those 'forced to join' the unions from the extremist 'minority', the 'number of unscrupulous men leading a half-idle life'.

The immediate response of a handful of 'respectable' union secretaries, nicknamed the Junta, including Allen of the Engineers, and Applegarth of the Carpenters, was to suggest the government set up a Royal Commission to investigate trade unions. The government seized on this to set up a Commission to investigate all trade union activity every where for the past 10 years. They granted a pardon to all witnesses, accomplices and even perpetrators of violence who would come and testify against their unions.

Before the Royal Commission, Applegarth and Allen insisted that their unions were not really militant organisations, that the new unions sought not to encourage but to prevent strikes, and that they were more like insurance companies, with their sickness benefits, than fighting organisations.

The Commission took them at their word, offering the unions legal protection on the condition that they abandoned all restrictive practices, and ceased to help one another. This shock united the labour movement. The International Working Men's Association, in which Marx was involved, the London Trades Council, and many national unions began agitating for a bill granting the unions' case.

The agitation was so great that the Liberal Government was forced to recognise the unions' legality and protect their funds, provided that their rules did not contravene the law. Strikers could no longer be imprisoned for conspiracy.

But the struggle was not over. Applegarth's attempts to disown pickets who resorted to more than 'peaceful moral persuasion' was seized upon by the Law. In 1867, Judge Bramwell pronounced that pickets in combination were guilty of 'molestation', even if they only gave black looks, or were present in large numbers, or stood across the road from their employers premises.

In 1871, an act was passed which while recognising the legality of trade unions, made them impossible to operate, it resurrected the words of the Combination Acts without definitions: 'molest', 'obstruct', 'threaten', 'intimidate', etc. 'Persistently following' any person, or 'watching or besetting to premises', was outlawed. While employers could 'blacklist' workers, a man who conspired to persuade another not to work could be imprisoned for three months. This threat was indeed carried out.

Great demonstrations followed. In one of them, 20 000 trade unionists marched through Glasgow, carrying banners saying "Down with all Class Legislation". As a result, Disraeli’s Government was compelled to legalise picketing and make acts committed by trade unionists subject only to ordinary laws (1875).
As this government with its Employment Bill treads the path of anti-Union legislation, the WORKER looks back at its predecessors' attempts to shackle the Trade Union movement - each of which ended in ignominious failure. The first in this series deals with Labour Party proposals of 1969, so clearly opposed by the Trade Unions, that they were dropped.

SINCE 1945 governments have always sought to limit the rights of unions to obtain better conditions for their members, by wage freeze and other devices (George Brown's Wage Pause among others). Working class opposition was variable, now submitting, now opposing. Overall, the attempt by governments Labour and Tory to limit union power failed, and the imposition of each wage freeze was, sooner or later, followed by its rejection by the labour movement.

Hence, towards the end of the '60s, the voice was raised for a "new" approach - the "reform" of the Trade Union movement. This was nothing but a return to the oldest stance known to capitalism (penal law against unions as with the Combination Acts). The cloaking of it with windy jargon testified to the fear in place in the capitalist parties, Labour and Tory, by the organised labour movement, stronger after two hundred years of struggle.

Public opinion was prepared - as they say - by the Donovan Report. Hundreds of pages of analyses of trade unions as the vehicle for proposed restrictions of their freedom. It fell to the Labour Cabinet in January 1969 to adopt (not without dissent) Barbara Castle's proposals contained in the White Paper "In Place of Strife".

However it was the voice of the trade union movement within the Labour Party (that misbegotten and woeful creation of our working class), which secured the defeat of the proposals.

Such opposition, that special meetings of the trade union group of MPs and the entire Parliamentary Party were organised, 53 Labour MPs voted against the proposals on March 3rd. On March 26th, the National Union of Mineworkers successfully moved in the Labour Party Executive that the Executive could not accept "legislation based on all the proposals of In Place of Strife." By early summer, the Trade Union movement had imposed its will on the Labour Party. On June 18th, by agreement between the TUC and No 10, the proposals were dropped.

The battle illustrates the strengths and weaknesses of the opposing sides. Neither side was willing to press for all-out war against the other, and particularly so the working class. How times have changed with Thatcher!

On the capitalist side then, within the Labour Governments, the voice for immediate penal legislation against the trade unions was a minority. It was opposed by Castle with her more shamefaced and apologetic approach, which was itself opposed by those whose stance willynilly reflected trade union opposition.

It is interesting that the Callaghan faction which opposed legislation in 1969, once in power after the defeat of the Heath anti-union laws in 1974, imposed the bitterest of any curtailment of trade union power until then, through wage restraint, and all under the banner of "no legislation against the unions" so opportunistically raised in 1969.

On the side of the working class, opposition to In Place of Strife was never as wholehearted as it could have been. This hesitation in response gave hopes to Heath and Callaghan that they might yet succeed where Castle failed.

The consequence of mitigated opposition to Castle in 1969 was the misery of life under Heath and Callaghan, overthrown though they have been. But the consequences of mitigating opposition to Castle's successor Thatcher are unthinkable.
Then in the autumn, when the employer at a small union firm in Surrey, Con-Mod, sack-ed twenty men for attempting to join, they thought they saw their opportunity. The size of the fine ($100,000) for the Union's non-attendance at the SRC, and the lack of organisation at the heart of the dispute must, they hoped, phase two of our attack. This is class war. We shall have class war, they try to impose their law on us but we shall destroy them. They believe we shall sit for peace, but our end is the end of the employing class. Such clarity of purpose explains why popular history, in the interests of the bourgeoisie, holds

**We welcome**' said Reg Birch of the AUEW striking against the Industrial Relations Act in November 1973, 'the other trade unionists who have seen the correctness of our stand and have joined us because our stand has been a somewhat lonely one.' This third in our series on the defeat of recent anti-union legislation shows how the guerrilla action of 1972 against Heath was developed by the Engineers into a protracted struggle which, even unassisted by other unions, culminated in the massive strikes of 1973-74 which alone overthrew Heath's prototype of Thatcher's proposals.

**Fitted for 'contempt'**

They began with a £500 fine for the Union's 'contempt' of orders to reopen the books. Their members in Sudbury had denied membership to a certain teapot. The TUC, however, also followed. The Government, although empowered to take over the whole procedure if its leaders, shrunk in cowardice from this, and seized a total of £67,000 through a strikebreaker. All hopes they had of avoiding conflict were dashed by the wave of engineering strikes which followed then and in the New Year of 1972.

Defeat even more glaring followed when, as when a Chrysler worker tried to resign his AUEW membership, Strike Breakers were sent to the SRC, to which he appealed, refused to pronounce judgement, and hence expelled.

The Engineers' struggle against Heath moved to a higher, more organised stage when at the Spec-ral Ballroom in Trafalgar Square, 1973 - a prelude - specifically to avoid struggle - the motion was carried for one general strike on May 1st.

**Guerrilla Struggle**

That first of May was marked over by two million workers defecting the government. It also marked the fifth birthday of the Communist Party of Britain (Marxist-Leninist) whose Chairman, Reg Birch, the Head of national cooperation with the Act by the AUEW originated.

Now the Party published its best-selling pamphlet 'Guerrilla Struggle and the Working Class', looking forward from the guerrilla struggle of the first stages of the fight against the Act, to the protracted struggle of the Engineers which, as it became more organised and won the support of other workers, was to become mighty enough to overthrow the Act itself.

Yet no sooner was May Day past, than the TUC resumed negotiations with the Government. The AUEW embargoed this move (one of many) towards capitulation by forbidding the President to attend the six-man talks. Neverthe-less, through the Engineering Employers' Association, Donaldson of the SRC that his Act was a failure. Donaldson could still hope to wear down this one remaining obstacle to the Act, the AUEW.

In August 1973, the Government attempted to bring him, as he had brought up his law on us but we shall destroy them. They believe we shall sit for peace, but our end is the end of the employing class. Such clarity of purpose explains why popular history, in the interests of the bourgeoisie, holds

Above: March 1st 1971 and the first against the IR Bill is on earnest. 100,000 workers marched through London on a Sunday, in Trafalgar Square. At the time THE WORKER warned, 'This will and what it implies will not be defeated by some short, once for all demonstration of temporary unity.' And we were right. Only the AUEW, led by a firm Reg Birch, on its Executive Council, persisted in boycotting, and it was not until the National Industrial Relations Court.

Right: the simple headline "AUEW STRIKES" says it all. Instructed by their Executive to withdraw their hands, the strikers kept them hands streamed out of work when they heard the news on the radio. By the time the official instructions reached anyone, it was all over: an anonymous benefactor had paid the AUEW's fine, and the SRC, which never was recognised by the Tories, gave them back their money.

Thus no sooner was Heath defeated, than voices of cooperation with the new government were immediately raised - even though the Industrial Relations Act was still as the book. When Donaldson in May is a final fit of pique sequenced the Union's funds, the reaction of the Union was instant. The Executive Council "instructs all members of its engineering section, without exception, to withdraw labour forthwith," in face of such massive action, the employers capitulation was complete. Within hours the monies required were provided by anonymous donors. It was, indeed, as the Worker said "now the quick and easy complete victories ever won by workers against the state" - a reminder that guerrilla struggle is never as easy in itself but a means to higher and more organized struggle.

**Fighting Thatcher**

As we face under Thatcher a revival of Heath's legislation we should remember the great power wielded by only one union, united under correct leadership, as a reminder that this time it should not be one union, but all united. How right the WORKER was then. "Only by federal action can freedom be maintained against the re-imposition of anti-Trade Union legislation."
Guerrilla Struggle against the Bill

This second article in our series looking back over recent attempts to emasculate the unions deals with the early stages of the fight against Heath's Industrial Relations Act. Irregular, guerrilla opposition was indispensable to maintain a protracted struggle against the employer's law. This created the conditions in which the Engineering Union flouted and made inoperable the Industrial Relations Act and, other unions supporting, ultimately destroyed the Heath government.

IN PLACE OF STRIFE was withdrawn by the Labour Government because of the opposition from the Trade Union movement. But there was never single-minded opposition to state interference. Opposition was even undermined by the pervasive support among trade unionists, at all levels of the movement, for the Labour Government while at the same time there was opposition to Labour policy in practice.

This weakness in working class opposition found expression in the 'solemn and binding' agreement with the Labour administration, elaborated by the TUC as a framework for cooperation with the government, and a quid pro quo for the withdrawal of In Place of Strife. The Solemn and Binding Agreement like the Social Contract, offered to Callaghan later, was more than a face-saver offered to the Government, it was based on the dream of union cooperation with government. The Government, on the other hand saw it for what it was - an indication of passivity. Heath, succeeding Wilson, could hardly doubt that the Trade Union movement would this time submit to state legislation to fetter it.

Heath had every reason to hope for success. Although on December 8th 1970 half a million workers came out against the Industrial Relations Bill, it was without TUC blessing. The TUC was wedded to temporising and advocated education and discussion meetings. In March 150,000 workers under TUC banners flooded Trafalgar Square in protest. The Engineering Union called two national strikes, on the 1st and the 18th, the latter in particular massively supported and involving many other unions, several million workers in all.

Nevertheless the Engineers were alone among all unions when on 26th January 1971, they looked realistically ahead to the Bill becoming law, and decided to prepare well in advance for a campaign of non-cooperation with it in that event. By contrast, the TUC at Croydon, expressed the lack of clarity in workers' minds, when it decided against a campaign of industrial action, in spite of the support for that of the AUEW.

The Bill became Act in the course of 1971 and at the TUC Congress in the autumn, there was much dust raised over "de-registration" under the provisions of the Act. In effect, this was a refusal to consider the "non-cooperation" with the Act adopted by the AUEW.

As the year ended, the WORKER wrote: "The situation in the Engineering Industry is about as complicated and muddled as it could be. Unemployment rises. The Industrial Relations Act exists. Already, the employers have taken gauge of the confusion, have taken note of the lack of involvement of the membership" in the current wage claim.

It was from this position of weakness that opposition to Heath grew, slowly at first, from struggles which were isolated and guerrilla.

In July 1971, the Upper Clyde occupation began. The miners took on, and in 1972 won, their wage claim against the Government. Throughout most of the year the AUEW waged a guerrilla campaign on its claim with official support for all factories taking action. It was a struggle from weakness which in the end involved many more than could have been involved in frontal confrontation.

In June, the Government used the act to enforce a ballot on the question of industrial action on the railway men. A massive vote in favour of struggle was the embarrassing result for the Government.

In July the government, seeing the dockers divided on a national stoppage and preparing to retreat, blundered into using the Act. They imprisoned three men. Instantly the dockers were all out, the men released and the mysterious Official Solicitor settled the situation in the union's favour.

Slow to learn, the employers a month later tried to exploit rivalry between the dockers and container men.

Under the Act five dockers were put into Pentonville. Working class reaction this time was overwhelming. The dockers were released, the law was proved to be an ass.

In September the government, under pressure, retreated on the Act. It would only be used as a last resort! The TUC were invited to and agreed to set up conciliation machinery with the Government to do the Government's work where the Act would not be used. This was a tactical retreat the better to use the Act, which still remained on the statute books.

Despite the resolve of the TUC that unions should not register under the Act, a decision culminating in the expulsion of the National Union of Seamen when it did so, union after union took the decision to defend themselves in the National Industrial Relations Court (NIRC). The AUEW however, stood firm in its resolve not to recognise the court and its successive defiance resulting in the sequestration of larger and larger sums of money from the union's funds. Finally, the presiding Judge, Donaldson, lost his temper and imposed a massive fine. A national engineering stoppage took place on Guy Fawke's Day in 1973. The Industrial Relations Act was effectively smashed. The unions had shown that its real assets were its membership and not its funds.

The Act was repealed by the Labour Government which was elected following the smashing of Heath's pay freeze by the miners in the spring of the following year. The Act was gone, but it was a close run thing.
"The strike has already won something," said Lawrence Daly at a rally during the 1972 Miners' Strike. "There are eight miners walking around today who would have been killed in the last four weeks."

This comment, given by Kent miner Malcolm Pitt in his book "The World on Our Backs," illustrates the conditions facing the miner in his daily work. These conditions, and the solidarity among the miners which arises from them, are described by Malcolm Pitt as a precursor to his chronicle of the 1972 miners' strike.

Improved conditions in the pit have been won, of course, by union struggle since the early days - and although you won't see women and children down the mine, you will see men crawling on their bellies in a narrow tunnel to reach the coal face, sometimes working in deep water, sometimes in extreme heat where to wear any clothing is unbearable.

Mining exemplifies the "socialisation of production," where workers, herded together by the employer as a producing unit, combine together if necessary to defend against the employer. The contradiction between worker and capitalists (or the state acting on behalf of the capitalists after nationalisation) is probably nowhere more sharply cut than in the struggles underground. For the union has to be always on the lookout to defend its members' working conditions against "new methods" and "rationalisation" by the Coal Board. The employer not only uses every last ounce of the labour power he buys from the miner every day. He sometimes robs him of his health, when a miner dies, it is said: "his eyes set like two lumps of concrete."

Incidentally, it took only a few years for miners to realise that the NCB was no different an employer from the private owners, having closed 548 pits and destroyed 410,000 jobs between 1956 and 1971.

The personalised description of the well organised, well supported miners' struggle of 1972 is a lesson from which every member of the working class should learn. It was a military operation. The Kent miners were made responsible for the area from Fulham Power Station down the Thames and round the South Coast to Shoreham to ensure no power station was fuelled. Workers all over the south east supported the Kent miners by giving them food and accommodation close to their picket lines and taking numerous collections. Examples of the ingenuity of the working class fill the book. The NUM organised launches to traverse the Thames across the path of scab ships delivering coal to power stations. Any coal which subsequently landed could therefore be legitimately blacked.

The 1972 strike cannot be seen as a complete entity. It arose out of miners' struggles all over the country, and out of 2/3 across the 1974 strike which was to bring down the Heath government. But 1972 must be remembered as a significant advance in the long history of British workers. "The World on Our Backs" - The Kent Miners and the 1972 Miners' Strike by Malcolm Pitt, Available at Bellman Bookshop.
NALGO and white collar unionism

In the nineteenth century, local government consisted of some 3000 separate and autonomous local authorities, who, apart from a few specialist posts for which Parliament had prescribed qualifications, employed whom they pleased as they pleased.

It is no coincidence that at the turn of the century, a time when trade union membership in Britain topped two million for the first time, workers in local government began to look to collective organization to bring about change.

The breakthrough

The first real break was the founding of the London Municipal Officers Association.

Next came the foundation of the Liverpool Municipal Officers Guild by Herbert Blain in 1896.

This was the first association of local government officers in Britain which attempted to reach the new association grew rapidly.

By 1914 the membership had topped two million for the first time, when Whitleyism had been invented.

Its opponents denounced the plans as anarchy, but the plan's authors saw it as a means of reaching towards the "ideal and efficient local government service".

The new association grew rapidly and within four years similar Whitley Councils with their terms of trade unionism, and a set of salary scales evolved into Whitleyism.

With the advent of Whitleyism, the historical background, NALGO was formed by removing their functionality from the trade unions which attempted to reach them, and their trade unionists, and the addition of a new objective of retirement.
Albania celebrates 35 years of Socialism

In 1941, Enver Hoxha summoned a founding conference, and the Communist Party of Albania, the Party of Labour, was born. This was added to the Albanian passion for independence, the Marxist principles of scientific socialism. Not only was the war one of liberation of the country from fascist invaders, it was also a revolutionary war to prevent the return to power of businesspeople, priests and feudal Zogists supported by the deposed King Zog who had exploited the people and betrayed them to external enemies. The Albanians waged a people's war under the leadership of the Communist Party, absolutely united, defended an Italian army of 100,000 and a German army of 70,000, thus making a very considerable contribution to victory in the war.

Even before the war was over, Yugoslavia, in whose own liberation war Albanian partisans had participated, plotted against Albania's independence. The argument was that Albania was too small to stand on its own, and was bound to be gobbled up by some imperialist power; therefore it would be better if Albania were incorporated in Yugoslavia as a seventh province. Under Hoxha's firm leadership, the Albanian people asserted their right to exist on their own, and resisted the charge of failing prey to imperialism by standing up to both Britain and the US who combined together to continue, two years after the war was over, trying to destroy Albania by sabotage and armed subversion.

The Albanians received assistance from fellow socialist countries in building their socialist society; but they have never depended on such aid to the extent that they would sacrifice their independence or their right to go on developing in a Marxist-Leninist way. First the Soviet Union and then China, having given Albania economic help, abandoned socialism and began to expect Albania to accept colonial status in exchange for further assistance - just like the western imperialist powers. In both cases, and with considerable sardonicity, the Albanian people rejected such help with strings and made up for the loss by redoubling their own efforts.

On this occasion of their Liberation Anniversary, we salute the historic struggle of the Albanian people for national independence and for socialism, because the two things are ultimately inseparable.
The epic story of the battle of Cuito Cuanavale in southern Angola in 1987/89 is little known in Britain. But the events leading up to it show how small yet decisive actions by workers can bring about massive changes in the world...

Cuito Cuanavale – the story behind the battle that became Africa’s Stalingrad

WORKERS, JULY 2010 ISSUE

You could argue that the battle of Cuito Cuanavale all started with the actions of Cuban workers through their trade unions, that led first to the Cuban revolution of 1959, and then through their crucial role in Africa to the establishment of independent Guinea Bissau, Angola, Mozambique and Namibia, handing a decisive defeat to Portuguese and US imperialism in Africa and contributing to the victory against apartheid in South Africa.

Without the Cuban revolution, one Jorge Risquet would not have led an armed column to Congo Brazzaville in 1965 at the request of the newly independent Congolese government. Here contact was made with the Popular Movement for the Liberation of Angola (MPLA) who were fighting for independence from Portugal.

Neither would one Ernesto Che Guevara have led another column to Eastern Zaire via Guinea where he talked with Amilcar Cabril, the leader of the independence movement for neighbouring Guinea Bissau and Cape Verde (PAIGC) that was conducting armed struggle against the Portuguese colonialists and who were considered to be the best organised liberation movement in Africa.

The consequences of these engagements were very significant. Cuba sent to Guinea Bissau 31 volunteers – 11 mortar experts, 8 drivers, 1 mechanic, 10 doctors and an intelligence officer, all of them black to be unnoticed and all in time for a battle to take the Portuguese fortified camp at Madina de Boe.

The doctors were to go to the liberated areas and the mortar experts were sent to instruct on the use of artillery that Cuba would send along with trucks, munitions, olive uniforms, medicines and, of course, cigars and brown sugar! Cuba also trained 31 students from the Cape Verde islands in guerrilla war tactics and returned them to fight with PAIGC. By 1967 there were 60 Cubans in Guinea Bissau.

In 1969, US Ambassador Dean Brown reported from Dakar “The war in Portuguese Guinea has gone from bad to worse for the Portuguese during the past three years despite increased Portuguese troop strength from 20,000 to 25,000. PAIGC controls 60 per cent of the country”. In November 1970 the Portuguese resorted to attacking the
capital of neighbouring Guinea hoping to overthrow that government and so end its backing for the PAIGC’s anti-colonial struggle.

The attack was a fiasco and the writing was now on the wall. With Portugal about to lose Guinea Bissau to PAIGC and fighting the MPLA in Angola and Frelimo in Mozambique its army was set to mutiny. On 25 April 1974, revolution overthrew the fascist dictatorship in Portugal, whose troops were withdrawn from Guinea Bissau by November.

In 1975, Portugal was set to hand over power to Frelimo in Mozambique and to a combination of three independence movements in Angola: the MPLA; the FNLA funded by the CIA and Mobutu’s Zaire; and Unita, backed by apartheid South Africa. In July 1975, the US agreed secretly to fund both the FNLA and Unita.

**Double invasion**

Fighting broke out in 1975 between the deeply unpopular but well armed FNLA, whose Zairian leader had not stepped foot in Angola since 1956, and the MPLA. At the same time Zairian troops entered Angola from the north and South African forces from the south to support Unita. Eventually the MPLA would take control of the whole of Luanda, the huge capital city, where it had mass support.

As Independence Day approached in November 1975, the MPLA appealed to Cuba for military instructors, weapons, clothing and food as Zairian and South African forces headed towards the capital.

Cuba sent 480 instructors who would create four training centres that opened in October 1975. They also sent weapons, clothing and food and were set to train 5,300 Angolans in three to six months. However, as the South Africans and Zairians advanced, they found themselves having to go into action themselves to defend their training camps.

Cubans were queuing up to volunteer to go to Angola, but the USA did not find out about this until weeks after the first Cubans arrived. It was described as the world’s best kept secret – only eight million Cubans knew about it! They crossed the Atlantic on old Britannia planes dressed as tourists,
with weapons in their suitcases and in the hold of the planes. They went by ship as well. Jorge Risquet was politically in charge of the military and civilian Cuban missions.

As the South Unita and Zairians/FNLA closed in, all seemed lost. But with the MPLA fighting on their own turf, Soviet military equipment arriving and Cubans going into action straight from their plane, Independence Day came with the MPLA in control of Luanda and the joint Cuban/Angolan forces pushing back the South Africans and Zairians. Victory was sealed after a few months. However, FNLA and Unita continued a slash and burn war.

Cubans began to help Angola build health and education services, carrying out vaccination and anti illiteracy campaigns and training the Angolan Air Force and Army (FAPLA). Whilst Cuban and Angolan forces still had to battle with Unita and FNLA, the South West African Peoples Organisation (SWAPO), fighting for Namibian independence from South Africa, set up bases in southern Angola with Cuban and Angolan support.

The South African Defence Force (SADF) set up what it called the 32nd Battalion, comprising ex-FNLA soldiers who had fled to occupied Namibia plus other black mercenaries under white SADF officers, who murdered and sowed terror in Angola. South African bombers frequently attacked Angolan towns, cities and Namibian refugee camps. Invasions of southern Angola were frequent.

Eventually, after another South African invasion of southern Angola in 1987, the combined forces of Cuba, Angola and SWAPO forced the South Africans back to the Namibian border taking the strategic Angolan town of Cuito Cuanavale. The South Africans responded with airpower and tanks and tried to retake the town, knowing its strategic importance. Cuba sent reinforcements, tanks plus Cuban and Angolan MiGs.

As Jorge Risquet said, “There were negotiations going on between Angola and the US, who was after all behind the South African government. In southern Angola, the SADF responded with aircraft and stopped the FAPLA offensive. FAPLA withdrew to Cuito Cuanavale where elite Angolan troops were gathered. The SADF laid siege to Cuito Cuanavale aiming to liquidate the Angolan troops in the midst of negotiations. If they won they would have demanded Angola’s full surrender.

“The US had refused to allow Cuba to participate in the negotiations and Cuba had said that it was prepared to stay in Angola until apartheid was defeated, but would only stay as long as Angola wanted them to. However, the SADF launched an attack on Cuito Cuanavale on January 13 1988. By then Cuban reinforcements had arrived and Cuba’s best pilots were flying sorties against the SADF inflicting heavy casualties. The South African attack was defeated.
This changed the balance of forces and the US agreed by the end of January to the participation of Cuba in the negotiations.

“In March another meeting was held between Angola, Cuba and the US after the South Africans suffered another defeat in their second attack on Cuito Cuanavale in February. Five attempts to take Cuito Cuanavale were made by the SADF and all failed. We built an airstrip in record time and our planes could now reach SADF bases in northern Namibia and this forced South Africa to accept the first four-party negotiations in May. It was time for the US to stop serving as a messenger between Angola and Cuba on the one hand and South Africa on the other. It was time to seat the declared enemy at the table and seek a negotiated settlement.

Decisive

“So Cuito Cuanavale was decisive. The negotiations came later. The battle of Stalingrad took place three years before the fall of Berlin, but it was at Stalingrad that the outcome of World War II was decided. The South Africans arrogantly used delaying tactics but the die was cast after two more defeats at nearby Tchipa and Calueque. They realised that a frontal war in southern Angola and Northern Namibia would be the swan song for apartheid. So they were forced to negotiate.”

The result was full independence for Namibia, no further South African or US support for Unita, withdrawal of all SADF forces to within South Africa’s borders and withdrawal of Cuban troops. The SADF was broken and so was apartheid.

In April that year, Nelson Mandela was transferred to Pollsmoor Prison from Robben Island and in December to Victor Verster Prison to negotiate the end of apartheid, followed by his release on 11th February 1990. In 1994, the first democratic elections were held in South Africa sweeping Mandela and the ANC to power.

No wonder so many ANC activists and trade unionists said at the time that those elections were made possible by not only their struggle but by the Cubans at Cuito Cuanavale.
A long and bitter struggle in the winter of 1989-1990 laid the foundations for the current transformation of ambulance workers into paramedics...

When ambulance workers drove a coach and horses through government pay policy

A long and bitter struggle in the winter of 1989-1990 laid the foundations for the current transformation of ambulance workers into paramedics, by building the understanding, confidence and organisation of the workforce. We should never forget the dispute or the people who took part, and never permit the airbrushing of it out of our history.

In the small hours of a cold late February morning in 1990 at a South London, Elephant & Castle government building, a deal was struck between the unions representing ambulance workers (NUPE, COHSE, NALGO, GMB and T&GWU) and the Department of Health, after a marathon meeting throughout the night. This deal was to be put to ambulance workers as a way of trying to resolve the six-month-old national ambulance dispute.

A very tired Roger Poole, chief negotiator for the Joint Unions, came out on the front steps and, facing a forest of microphones, television cameras and Press, made his famous (infamous) “Coach & Horses” speech: “Today we have driven a coach and horses through the Conservative government’s pay policy!”

The proposal inside that coach included a 16.9 per cent increase over two years, an extra 2 per cent for productivity, increases in London Allowance, and funding to develop the new role the paramedic for the future. The increases were to be backdated, with part of it paid as a lump sum.

In return for this the unions agreed, under duress, to withdraw a major part of their claim – an annual pay formula linked to the pay systems of police and fire-fighters.

The full original claim from 1989 was:

- £20 a week increase to bridge the gap between ambulance staff and the fire service;
- A formula to determine pay in the future;
- An overtime rate for overtime work;
- A reduction in the working week and 5 weeks’ holiday;
- Better pay and holidays for long service;
- An increase in standby pay.
By 13 March 1990 over 81 per cent of ambulance workers nationwide had accepted the offer.

So, after six months of a hard-fought dispute starting in September 1989 with a rejection of a 6.5 per cent pay offer amid an overtime ban and a work to rule; with police and the army on the streets doing ambulance work; Christmas and New Year without pay; marching and demonstrating in London’s Trafalgar Square with 40,000 others; collecting money in buckets from a very generous and supportive public; being locked out of ambulance stations; breaking back into ambulance stations for “sit ins”; being called “van drivers” by the then Health Secretary, Ken Clarke; taking 999 calls straight from the public at stations in a kind of Soviet/commune atmosphere; presenting a 4 million plus signature petition, which at the time broke the British record for the largest ever collected (and may well still be the largest for an industrial dispute); having thousands and thousands of other workers stop work in support on one lunchtime: after six long bitter months...

At 07.00 on the 16 March 1990 ambulance workers across the country went defiantly and proudly back to work.

Those who can remember the ambulance dispute of 1989-90 will also remember the bad taste in the mouth that it left. Although the political, the moral, and the public argument was won, the six-month dispute ended with a settlement that didn’t move ambulance workers on very far as a profession worth joining or working in.

One reason for this was because a major component of the pay claim that year had been the establishment of a pay formula. But this was dropped.

The formula would have seen pay and terms and conditions improve year on year without an annual fiasco, and without putting patients at risk. It would have brought stability and professionalism into the ambulance service and at last seen ambulance staff gaining the respect that they deserved and were entitled to.

In addition to this, a pay formula would have been a way of creating a proper career structure based on training and experience.

Because of lessons learned from the dispute and a more disciplined, organised union (particularly Unison, particularly in London) ambulance staff now work within a modern, professional Ambulance Service alongside and among staff whose training, skills, career choices, pay and terms and conditions could not even have been
dreamt of by the workers who stood at the picket lines and fought for their future back in 1989/1990.

**Ideas and vision**

All this did not come about by accident, nor was it simply given to ambulance workers. All this did not happen in a void. These gains and improvements are attached to an invisible umbilical cord stretching right back to the ideas, vision and strength of character of workers who went through the dispute and came out the other end still optimistic and positive.

The experience of the dispute certainly cleared a lot of heads and gave firm views of what trade unions ought to do and where ambulance services ought to be. A seed was planted in that national dispute that has been watered, tended and lovingly cultivated by workers who went through it. A belief and confidence sprung up alongside a determination that ambulance workers and ambulance services would never go back to those times ever again.

Clarity emerged that the police and fire service were not role models in the sense of positioning ourselves within the public services as many politicians wanted. Ambulance staff knew that their position should be at the heart of, and central to, the National Health Service and that the pursuit of some kind of ‘joint rescue sector’ with the other emergency services was a red herring.

The dispute taught workers that with organisation and discipline they could stand on their own two feet. They have done that and their achievements in the ambulance service are many.

Agenda for Change is the modern version of the pay formula that was brushed under the table at the Elephant & Castle 20 years ago. Finally rescued, resuscitated and brushed down, it has not only brought parity with the police and fire service but has surpassed them.

**Training**

The need for properly trained paramedics was an idea that started to grow in the latter stages of the dispute when the unions were not only fighting a pay claim but, with their members, fighting for the survival and future of ambulance services and ambulance workers. Ambulance workers deserved better, the public deserved better and patients deserved better.
The union’s full involvement in decision making was vital if they were to drag poorly funded, poorly paid, poorly appreciated ambulance services into the modern age, and although it took a further ten years to start the process of partnership working as one way to protect public services (a lot of wounds were still raw), the battlefield relationship between management and staff in 1989/1990 and before made it plain that things had to change.

One of the greatest visible links between the past, present and future of ambulance services is currently back at the Elephant & Castle. Who would have thought that the very building where that deal was struck in the early February morning of 1990 – the Department of Health’s Hannibal House – would now be used as a training centre for London Ambulance Service at which student paramedics are trained at the start of an innovative three-year course?

How ironically full circle that the same rooms in the same place that had witnessed many a difficult meeting in the midst and struggle of a national ambulance dispute to improve work, pay and job security, are the very rooms now being used to train the future!