

international

A journal of Marxism in the Labour Party

**REAGAN'S
TERRORIST
OFFENSIVE**

**INSIDE:
★ CHERNOBYL
★ WOMENS
LIBERATION TODAY**

**★ 1926 GENERAL
STRIKE
★ ERIC HEFFER
INTERVIEWED**



INTERNATIONAL
A journal of Marxism in the Labour Party

INTERNATIONAL
New series: No 4
Published by **International**
PO Box 503, London NE1 1YH

ISSN 0308 3217

Printed by East End Offset (TU) Ltd,
London E3
Typeset by Character Typesetting (TU) Ltd,
London EC1

Cover photo: John Arthur - Reflex Pictures,
83 Clerkenwell Road,
London EC1

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No. 4 May/June 1986

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Libya and 'rollback'

REAGAN'S ATTACK on Libya has been universally condemned on the left — and indeed well beyond the left. Both the peace movement and the far left responded in an exemplary way in street mobilisations protesting the attack. But the rationale for the raids on Tripoli and Benghazi has been little understood. One socialist paper responded with the headline 'Reagan is the real Mad Man'. Let us give a little license for agitational slogans. But it is not true in any literal sense that Reagan's bombing of Libya was irrational or insane from the viewpoint of American imperialism. It was a deliberate and well-thought out escalation of the United States global strategy. Briefly summed up, this strategy amounts to asserting US economic and political leadership of the 'free world' in a struggle against 'terrorism' and communism through a new, not-so-cold, war.

No one should underestimate the lengths to which the present American leadership is prepared to go. While it is true today that it is 'third world' opponents of the US which are the imperialists' gunsights — countries like Libya, Nicaragua, Syria and Angola — the Caspar Weinbergers and Richard Perles of this world have much more ambitious long term aspirations. They are part of an American leadership which is super-ideological and genuinely committed to 'rollback' — over-throwing every ally of the Soviet Union, defeating every national liberation movement, and then moving towards threatening the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe.

In a world of nuclear weapons 'rollback' poses immense dangers. Nicaragua and Libya may be able to rely only on their own resources

and international solidarity, but the Soviet Union would probably go to war over Cuba or Syria. The stakes for humanity in the battle against Reaganism are enormous.

It is now urgent that the British left takes up the fight against British membership of NATO. The NATO alliance is the major conduit of US military, diplomatic and political intervention in the 'free world'. It is the vital mechanism for dragging the whole of capitalist Europe, especially Britain, behind US leadership in every sphere. There is no hope whatever of any independent, let alone socialist, foreign policy inside this imperialist alliance.

Labour leaders like Kinnock and Healey are either dishonest or naive, it doesn't much matter which, when they argue for a 'non-nuclear' strategy within NATO, and in favour of getting rid of only American nuclear bases. NATO is all about an imperialist world strategy against 'communism' and revolution, which has the use of nuclear weapons as a central element of its warfighting strategy. The socialist left much put the Labour leaders on the spot — either they are for a non-nuclear Britain and an independent, socialist foreign policy, or they're for NATO. It's only in the Kinnockite world of dreams and doubletalk that you can have it both ways.

Wherever the next US terror raid comes, there can be no doubt that it is a prime intermediate strategic aim to overthrow the Nicaraguan revolution. Fighting against NATO goes hand in hand with building solidarity with Nicaragua, and demanding imperialist hands off Libya, Syria and all the peoples of the countries oppressed by imperialism.

The Socialist Action school of falsification

MANY READERS of *International* will know that our journal originates from a split on the editorial board of *Socialist Action*. When we parted company we decided not to engage in public polemics with our erstwhile comrades, but just to get on with the job of building a Marxist current in the labour movement. We have maintained our silence in the face of *Socialist Action's* attacks, because we know that public squabbling between Marxists can be immensely harmful.

In keeping silent on the disputes between us we decided to ignore the attacks made on our journal in the ever-more-rightwing pages of *Socialist Action*, and the fact that *Socialist Action* supporters were visiting leading figures in the labour movement accusing us of being 'ultra-left' and 'sectarian' maniacs. However so outrageous have the lies and actions of Socialist Action in the labour movement become, that we have decided to break our silence.

One example will show SA's method of deliberate lying.

The Labour Committee on Ireland decided at its recent conference not to affiliate to Labour Left Co-ordination. SA, in their 3 May copy, reported that this was because of the bad reaction to the speech made by LLC secretary Davy Jones, an *International* supporter. The article failed to report, however, that *Socialist Action* supporters made a bloc with the Labour Co-ordinating Committee to vote down the proposed affiliation!

Other things which *Socialist Action* didn't report recently include a) how *Socialist Action* blocked with the Communist Party and pro-Kinnockites in the National Justice for Miners Campaign; b) how *Socialist Action* blocked with the LCC and the right wing in the Labour Party Womens Action Committee; c) how *Socialist Action* blocked with the Communist Party in North West Anti-Apartheid to defeat the left; d) how *Socialist Action* has attempted to wreck the Labour Left Co-ordination itself. In future issues we shall document all this in detail. In this issue we publish an explanation of the political issues in the split.

Local election victories — now stand firm!



AS PREDICTED there were sweeping gains in the 8 May local elections for the Labour Party. The results were a confirmation not only of the general unpopularity of the government, but specifically of the Tories' attack on local government services and democracy. In London in particular the Tories payed the price for the massive unpopularity of rate-capping and the abolition of the GLC.

Contrary to what some observers had predicted, there was no rejection of the 'hard left' councils and councillors by the electorate. Labour held Lambeth despite the surcharging and removal from office of the previous Labour councillors. Bernie Grant increased his personal majority and Labour held Haringey despite the enormous press witch hunt against Bernie Grant in the aftermath of the Broadwater Farm black uprising. And in Liverpool, where the Council and the District Labour Party have been under attack from the government, the media and the Labour leadership itself, there was no general revolt against Labour at the polls. Where there were less encouraging results for Labour, it has hardly the fault of the left. For example, the loss of Tower Hamlets to the Alliance was a direct result of years of the worst kind of

corrupt, right-wing Tammany Hall style Labour rule, and the fact that de-selected Labour right-wingers put up their own independent candidates.

There are now dozens of new Labour councils and probably hundreds of new left wing Labour councillors. The stage is set for a renewed confrontation between the government and the labour movement over the issue of local authority services. The next stage of the attack which the Tories are preparing involves compulsory privatisation and 'tendering out' of local government services, announced in the February 1985 Green Paper, and likely to be included in next November's Queens Speech.

But there is another side to the electoral victories which it would be foolish to ignore. Despite the victories of the left Labour councils and councillors, there will be pressure to put down Labour's victories to the 'success' of Kinnock's new moderate image for the party and his witch hunting campaign to marginalise the left. There will be a pressure on the whole left not to rock the boat, to avoid struggle and confrontation with the Tories on the grounds that it 'creates division and plays into the Tories' hands'.

Sadly, the accommodation of sections of the left to Kinnock is proceeding apace. The recent demagogic attack on *Militant* published by Eric Clarke, Michael Meacher and Margaret Beckett is a case in point. Their statement, which calls on the party to defeat *Militant* 'politically' is a de facto statement of how they are not going to resist the witch hunt. They call for a party-wide attack on *Militant* because of its bad positions on women's rights, black self-organisation and CND.

But even if everything they said about *Militant* was cor-



rect (and it isn't: *Militant* stand unequivocally for unilateral nuclear disarmament for example, not 'multilateralism') — why this call to 'defeat *Militant*' now? Surely there are rather more powerful forces in the labour movement who have as bad, if not much worse positions, on all these questions? Like the right wing for example? Like Denis Healey, the Solidarity group of right wing MPs, like the leadership of the AUEW, don't you think? So why is there a particular need to wage the fight against *Militant*? Why is this number one priority for the 'soft' left? To pose the question is to answer it: the 'political' attack on *Militant* is needed as a cover for the refusal of the soft left to stand up and fight against the witch hunt.

Before the local elections, 190 Labour candidates in London signed a *Labour Briefing* statement pledging to stand firm against the attack on local authorities. At least 120 of these candidates have been elected, as well as many more who would have signed the statement if there had been time. The time has indeed come to 'stand firm' against government attacks, but also against those in the labour movement who say radical policies are inherently unpopular — something which has been disproved in Lambeth, Liverpool and Haringey. And if we are to avoid the picture of a divided and strife-ridden party in the run-up to the General Election then the witch hunt will have to be defeated rather than accommodated to.



CND rallies against Chernobyl

The Chernobyl Explosion

SOMETIME ON Saturday 26 April the most recently commissioned nuclear reactor at Chernobyl nuclear power station exploded. The nuclear station just north of Kiev sent a massive radioactive cloud out towards Poland, Finland and Scandinavia. It was not a nuclear explosion, but the destruction of the reactor building and the reactor core resulted in a massive release of radiation, making the Chernobyl accident the worst nuclear power accident in the history of nuclear generated electricity.

The exact details of the causes and consequences of the accident are unknown and will probably never be known outside of a few Soviet

leaders and engineers. The Soviet bureaucracy takes the same position of secrecy over all things nuclear as the British authorities.

Interesting as it is to discuss the differences between Eastern and Western designs of nuclear reactors and their relative 'safety', that no nuclear installation is safe, that major accidents can and do happen and the consequences of major nuclear accidents are catastrophic. This was already demonstrated by the Three Mile Island accident in the United States in 1979 and by the Sellafield leaks.

The economic consequences of the Chernobyl explosion will be serious for the

Russian economy. With an installed nuclear electricity generating capacity of 21000 megawatts, the four 1000 megawatt units at Chernobyl represent just under 20 per cent of the country's nuclear generated electricity capacity. The destruction of farming land in the Ukraine must also have serious consequences.

The Chernobyl reactors, like the Magnox and Advanced Gas Cooled Reactors in Britain have a second use in the production of plutonium for nuclear weapons. In the west the nuclear programme has had a twofold purpose; to secure electricity generation from more militant sections of the working class like the miners and to provide a

source of weapons grade plutonium.

Western leaders are clearly concerned that the effect of the Chernobyl explosion will be to emphasise the anti-nuclear power and nuclear disarmament campaigns in their own countries. Following Three Mile Island accident was to almost new nuclear power development in the United States has been almost completely halted for the past seven years. It is unlikely, however, that the same will befall the planned Pressurised Water Reactor at Sizewell which the Tory party and sections of the Labour leadership so ardently support.

The Labour Party conference in 1985 called for nuclear power stations to be phased out in Britain. Stan Orme, the Labour Party energy spokesperson reiterated this Labour policy in the aftermath of Chernobyl, but John Cunningham the front bench environment spokesperson said simultaneously that the option of nuclear power must be retained.

Neil Kinnock seemed simply confused, opposing Sizewell but supporting the new reprocessing plants at Sellafield and Dounreay. If Labour policy on phasing out nuclear power were to be carried through there would be no spent fuel to reprocess — unless Kinnock's view is that a future Labour government will need to keep Sellafield open for its role as part of Britain's nuclear bomb factory.

It is obvious that a central purpose of maintaining 'civilian' nuclear power is in fact to sustain nuclear weapons' production. Once that rationale is removed, it is impossible to sustain a case for nuclear power on either economic or safety grounds. The left of the Labour Party must hold the likes of Kinnock and Cunningham to conference policy of phasing out nuclear power. The safe decommissioning of the nuclear power stations is essential before the next, inevitable, Chernobyl occurs.

SIMON MAY 3

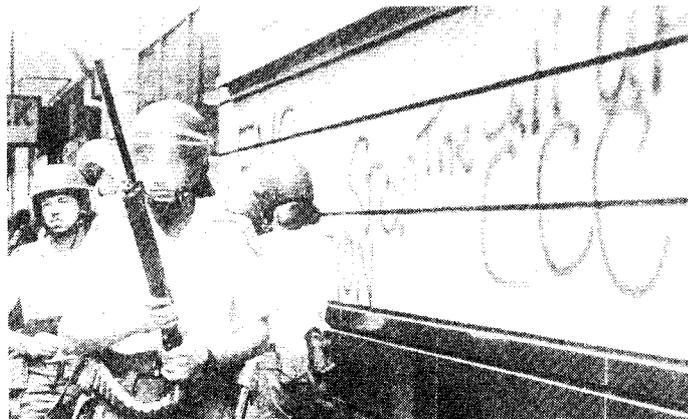
South Africa — the crisis continues

THE ENDEMIC crisis of South Africa's racial capitalism continues to provide daily headlines. These deal overwhelmingly with the social discontent which manifests itself in the black townships, through a perennial state of war between their populations on the one hand, and the police, army and black collaborators on the other. Funerals of black victims of state repression rapidly provide a focal point for united anti-government demonstrations and a spark for yet further clashes with its agents, clashes which often themselves provide further victims for the spiral of violence.

Botha's nationalist government has just announced yet another supposedly 'radical' reform: the pass laws that provided a constant excuse for the harassment of blacks are to go. In future all South Africans will be required to hold an identity document and will be formally entitled to live anywhere — provided they occupy an 'approved' house or site. And there's the rub — because the Group Areas Act which enforces racial segregation remains, and ensures that there is a big shortage of suitable housing for blacks in urban areas. Meanwhile the six million supposed 'citizens' of the 'independent homelands' — Transkei, Venda, Ciskei and Bophuthatswana remain 'foreigners'. The Illegal Squatting Act is to be tightened up to ensure little changes.

All this is typical of a government which is enmeshed in a worsening tangle of contradictions and is incapable of a solution, a government whose political base in the super-privileged whites, half of them state employees, stands in absolute contradiction to the need of South African capitalism for radical political and economic changes which will ensure stability in the years ahead.

4 The development of



On guard outside UDF offices in Johannesburg

COSATU, the federation of the independent black unions founded at the end of November, poses starkly the possibility of the formation of an equivalent political formation. Indeed the wide-ranging nature of the resolutions passed at the COSATU conference, many of which assert unequivocally the central role of the working class in the struggle against apartheid, along with its reluctance to join the United Democratic Front, pose the question of how soon we shall see the emergence of such a force.

In that context the exiled leadership of the ANC and SACTU has moved quickly to try to incorporate COSATU's political leadership. To that end a meeting was held in Lusaka on 6 March attended by members of all three executives. The communique issued at its conclusion, while conceding that the ANC 'is regarded by the majority of the people of South Africa as the overall leader and genuine representative' did not however concede anything on COSATU's political independence.

On that it insisted on the necessity to 'unite the entire workforce of our country under the banner of COSATU' which would pursue 'the advancement of the interests of the workers and the democratic struggle of our people' by 'working together with other democratic mass organisations . . . to build

disciplined alliances'.

The pressure extended on the ANC's leadership by the dynamic of independent mass struggle in South Africa is similarly demonstrated in an article in the March edition of the ANC's *Sechaba* magazine under the pseudonym Siphon Mila Pityana. This suggests that the National

Forum, a body which has insisted on the indivisibility of the democratic and socialist struggles, and which has traditionally been denounced as 'Trotskyist', 'ultraleftist' etc. should itself enter the UDF as a recognised political tendency to fight for its positions.

The rapid political evolution in South Africa makes it vital that Marxists in Britain add their weight to the independent working class component of the struggle. This means fighting in the Labour Party and the trade unions for the strengthening of direct links with the unions in South Africa, especially those in the same industry or company, organising tours of COSATU leaders to meet rank and file unionists here, raising financial support for COSATU and its affiliates and so on.

TONY SOUTHALL

The fall out from the Accord

FOR THATCHER, one small victory arising from the US bombing of Libya was the implicit backing given to it by the Dublin government. This is one of several political developments since the Hillsborough agreement was signed last November.

In January, 15 US Congress members indicated that the promised aid package tied to the Accord might depend on Irish support for US sanctions against Libya. The following month, Irish premier Fitzgerald signed the European Convention on Terrorism, fundamentally compromising Irish sovereignty by making it subservient to British and European security policy. In April, after the bombing of Libya, twenty-six county Foreign Minister Peter Barry (along with leaders of all the major parties) refused to criticise the US attack when questioned in the Dail. Given that Reagan was only supported by four countries over the issue, the twenty-six counties'

neutrality between 1939 and 1945 and its refusal to back Thatcher's Malvinas war — this was a significant capitulation.

One return is supposedly £34 million a year in US aid over the next five years. This, however, is only 2.5 per cent of the profits exported from the twenty-six counties by multinationals every year — and that's before the repayment of Dublin's foreign debt (currently well over 100 per cent of GNP) is taken into account. If the amount involved is tiny though, purchase of Irish support by imperialism is nothing new.

The Marshall Aid loans after the war were used to open up the Irish economy on terms very favourable to the multinationals. They were conditional upon the twenty-six counties joining the Convention for European Economic Co-operation (forerunner of the EEC) in 1948. Britain and the US used this in the 1950s and 1960s to thwart Irish eco-

WAPC conference

ON THE first weekend in April, about 250 representatives from Women Against Pit Closures groups from all of the coalfields in Britain met in Sheffield for their first national delegate conference. The weekend was a tremendous success and represented a milestone in the history of the movement. More than a year after the end of the strike, the attendance at the conference, based on one delegate per women's group, reflected the extent to which women are still actively involved.

Most of the resolutions to conference dealt with internal organisational issues, affiliation fees, the composition and election of the national committee, all essential to such a relatively new organisation. However, at least a third of the resolutions made proposals for future activity.

The first resolution discussed concerned the issue of

membership cards and provoked a debate that clearly set the framework for the rest of the conference and reaffirmed the experiences of the women organising during the strike. It was proposed that women should have membership cards with their husbands' pit numbers printed on them. Did women have to depend on their husbands for membership? Where was the autonomy in that? What about the wives of sacked and jailed miners, not to mention non-mining women supporters? The resolution was defeated.

An amendment proposed by Barnsley women to a resolution opposing the entry of scabs' wives into membership of WAPC, emphasised the need for unity in the coalfields against future attacks. It asked that each area have the right to decide on membership. This generated a



predictably very heated discussion with the majority of women arguing against any involvement whatsoever with scabs' wives. Barnsley and Notts women said again that women should not be judged by their men and that in areas where the UDM had influence, it is crucial to the re-building of the NUM that contact now takes place with those people who may have scabbed during the strike. It was unfortunate that the amendment was defeated since women were not being asked to forgive the scabs.

There was unanimity for stepping up the campaign against the UDM and demands that the Labour Party should membership of the party to UDM members.

A message of solidarity was sent to the demonstration in support of the printworkers, which was taking place in London at the same time as the conference.

The conference drew up a large agenda for WAPC for the coming year. Just as important as the discussions and decisions on resolutions was the opportunity the weekend provided for women from all over the country to meet socially. At the highpoint of the social event on Saturday night we joined hands and sang *Flaming Nerve* our song; 'We are women, We are strong' . . . we didn't need to convince anybody!

TINA YEMM

economic independence. The current set of agreements is similarly being used to erode its political independence. Today this means Dublin cannot afford to criticise the US bombing of Libya. Tomorrow the pressure will be on to abandon neutrality, sign defence treaties and even join NATO.

There is, however, an obstacle. Historically, the limited independence of the south of Ireland has been symbolised by its constitutional claim to the northern six counties and its neutrality. When Fitzgerald first advocated removing this obstacle a few years ago, he was rather isolated. One result of the 'Anglo-Irish process' has been the ending of his isolation.

An example is Progressive Democrats' leader Dessie O'Malley, who split from Fianna Fail a year ago and whose new party is gaining 25 per cent in opinion polls. He has argued for this consti-



tutional change and a de facto recognition of partition.

All this backtracking by constitutional nationalists has been accompanied by increased repression against the northern nationalists they claim to represent. There has been a sharp rise in sectarian loyalist attacks on Catholics. This was ignored by the

media until the RUC admitted under Sinn Fein pressure that their press office wasn't even keeping a record. The figure of 79 attacks in April they then produced was clearly an underestimation. The number of families driven from their homes is already in the tens.

An IRA volunteer, Seamus McElwaine, is alleged by republicans to have been summarily executed by an SAS under-cover squad after being injured and captured. Despite the widespread opposition to the repressive and sexist practice of strip searching, it has not ceased with the transfer of women prisoners from Armagh to the new Maghaberry prison. And the strip searching four times a day of Martina Anderson and Ella O'Dwyer in Brixton has continued unabated in an attempt to render them unable to defend themselves. Neither has the killing of loyalist Keith White by a plastic bullet been any comfort to nationalists. It only confirmed

the British trigger-happy willingness to violently impose their rule on the Irish. In Dublin itself from the farce of Eibhlin Glenholmes's attempted extradition, Fitzgerald's willingness to collaborate on repressive measures was a far more important lesson than any evidence of 'British bungling'.

Whether it is ever fully implemented, the Accord has been a concerted attempt to drive down nationalist expectations and rehabilitate Britain's role as 'peace-keeper and neutral arbiter'.

If this realignment were successful in the long term, a significant marginalisation of republicanism would result. But it still remains a very high risk strategy. A combination of increased repression plus undelivered promises of reforms could lead to a new wave of support for 'Brits Out' and Irish self-determination and a spilling over of the war into the South.

PIERS MOSTYN

Reagan's Libyan attack was not the work of a madman but a calculated part of American global strategy. **OLIVER MACDONALD** looks at the consequences for humanity.

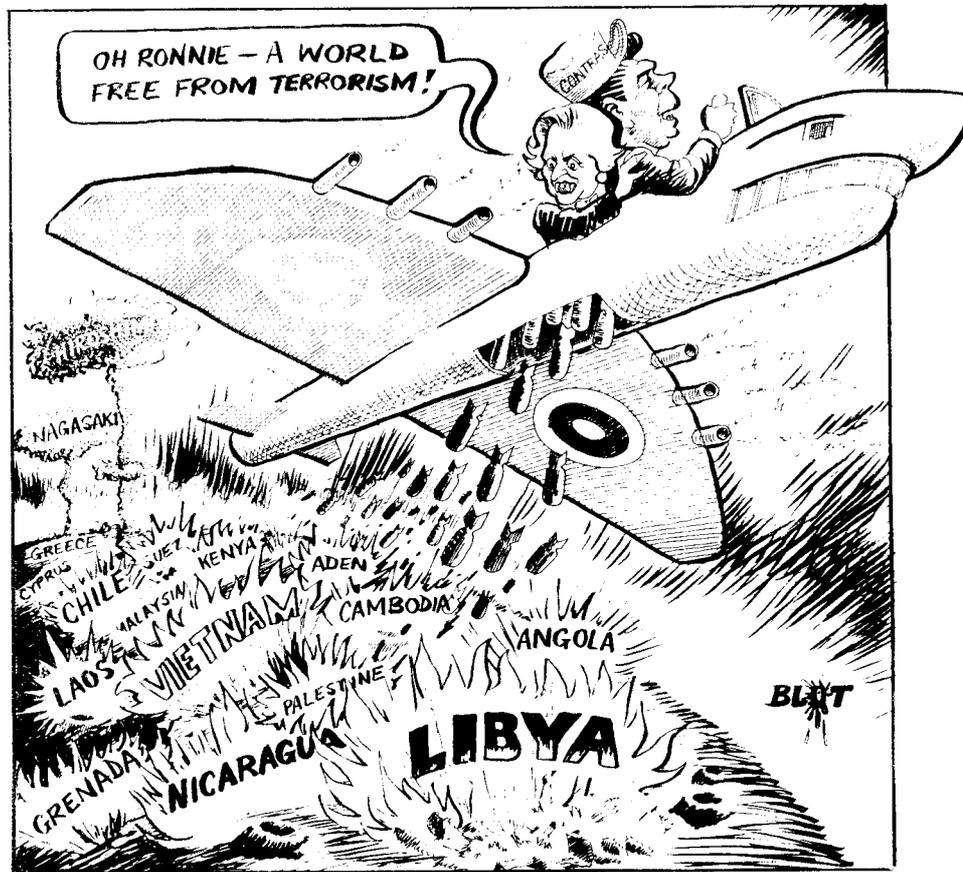
PRESIDENT REAGAN'S indisputable physical triumph over the several hundred people his warplanes killed or maimed in Libya should not obscure his equally spectacular symbolic achievement — zapping those West European embassies in Tripoli. No doubt it was a slip of the trigger-finger, but it was surely a Freudian one, rich in underlying meanings.

Attempts to explain the attack on Libya by reference to terrorism and Washington's efforts to combat it can't be taken seriously because they suggest that the State Department — one of the driving forces behind the entire anti-Libyan policy — is run by a bunch of morons, oblivious to any of the political realities of the Middle East. Anti-terrorism is very important to Washington as an ideology justifying the use of American military power against a host of targets. Most of these targets, however, have nothing whatever to do with terrorism in any definition of the word, they are political targets, hit to further Washington's political aims.

One should not assume any single exclusive political aim behind the Reagan administration's anti-Libyan project. The various Washington bureaucracies and interest groups would all have their own pet pay-offs from the programme. But let us explore what seems to be the central paradox of the raid: that for the sake of hitting Gaddafi and the Libyan-Soviet connection, Reagan was ready to deeply embarrass both the moderate Arab states like Mubarak's Egypt or the Saudis and also 'the allies' in Western Europe. Does this make sense as rational policy?

Conventional assumptions about the nature of world politics and US foreign policy would suggest this policy indeed makes no sense. The conventional assumptions are that Gorbachev plus Gaddafi equals Red; the moderate Arab regimes plus Western Europe plus the USA equals Blue. But what if the Reagan administration doesn't operate on these conventional assumptions? What if it sees America as the good guys and everybody else as either a problem or a menace? With these assumptions Libya appears in a new light: not Red versus Blue, but US power versus threats to US power.

Libya then appears as a model not of revolutionary radicalism in the Arab world but of an oil state outside US control, shielded to some degree by Soviet military power and able to sell oil as it likes to whom it likes — in fact mainly to West Germany and Italy. Thus the customers are also not dependent on US power for their oil supplies. On our new assumptions, that is a very unattractive model for the US. How, for example, would they react if the present Saudi regime switched alliances, brought in the Soviet militarily and then shifted their oil



Libya, Europe and Reaganite strategy

Appeasement, Collaboration or Resistance

sales and their international market as it suited them, without reference to US power? Of course they would sell to Europe and the customers there would also be no longer dependent on US power for the security of their oil supplies.

If these were the real concerns of the State Department, the paradox of the anti-Libya programme disappears: the raid was designed not only to get rid of Gaddafi and the Soviet-Libyan connection, but also as a warning to Mubarak and other Arab moderates and the West Europeans not to follow the Libyan model, or else. For Washington, triangles involving non-socialist Arab states, Soviet military power and West European concerns to be economically independent of the US are not on these days.

American Strategy

What Washington has been seeking to do is get a firm grip on certain vital levers of control over America's allies in order to lay

down the rules of the game within which rivalry can proceed. These levers are, first overwhelming military superiority over the USSR; secondly a global military capability for action anywhere in the Third World; thirdly arrangements which preclude any possibility of an uncontrolled economic and/or political axis developing between Bonn and Moscow; fourthly, arrangements precluding the rise of a West European super-state. And finally, the US wants to begin roll-back against regimes allied to the USSR in the Third World.

With such measures increasingly in place, Washington need not fear either of its nightmares. The first of these is of a quasi-super-state arising in Western Europe with the capacity to create a militarily secure anti-dollar trade bloc in the Middle East and other parts of the Third World. The other is a tacit entente between certain West European states and the Soviet Union enabling the West European states to use Soviet

military power in the Third World as a shield behind which they could maintain markets and sources of raw materials outside US control — Gaddafi's Libya is a classic, though rare, example of such an arrangement.

Against the background of these controls, the Reagan administration hopes to achieve the reconstruction of the world economy and international division of labour in a pattern that ensures effective US hegemony over its allies-rivals into the twenty-first century. *Reagan is attempting to do the job of global restructuring previously always achieved through war without actually having to engage in that Third World War.*

Problems of Reagan's strategy

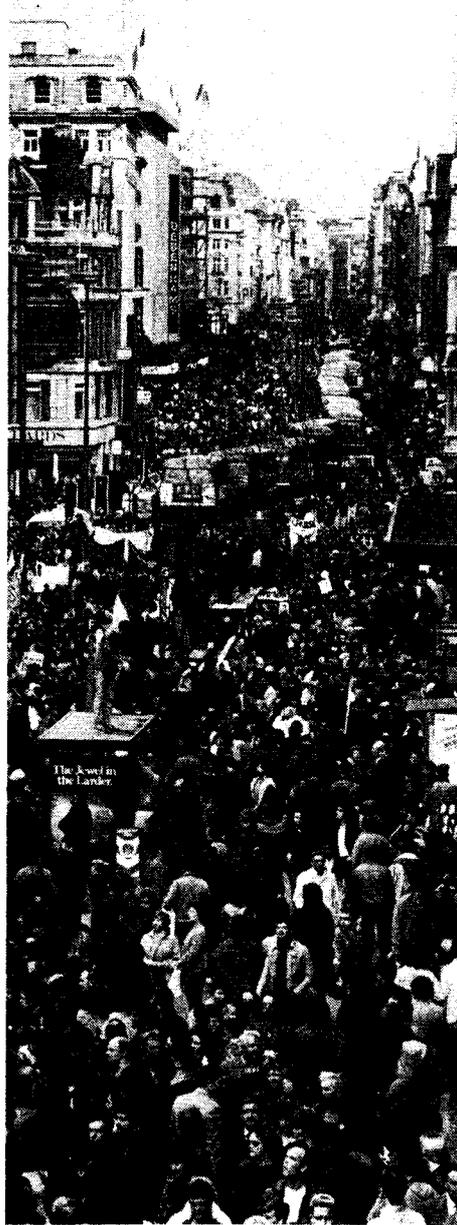
It is likely that Reagan's strategy will fail just as much as other strategies failed before. But what cannot be predicted with any certainty is how. We can simply underline various points of strain that could explode. The plan involves attempting to establish undisputed military hegemony in the Middle East, with Israel as junior partner, thus driving out the Soviets altogether. This involves overthrowing the Assad regime in Syria and destroying its treaty link with the Soviet Union. This will not be easy and efforts to achieve it, starting, for example, with an Israeli strike against missile sites, could slip out of control leading to superpower military confrontation and nuclear war. In other words necessary political objectives threaten Reagan (and us) with blow-out.

Decisively keeping Western Europe under control means securely blocking a West German-Soviet axis, which in turn means three things. First, returning Germany to an aggressive posture towards the East, giving NATO a new aggressive military doctrine and offering some idea of 'liberating' Eastern Europe to the German right, as in the Adenauer days. This undermines Soviet security, destabilises the military 'balance' and threatens war in Europe, by accident or design, especially in the context of an internal upheaval in one of the countries of Eastern Europe.

Second, preventing or being able to swiftly destabilise a left reformist government that might emerge in West Germany in reaction to Reaganism. This could create dangerous political upheavals spreading more widely in Western Europe.

Third, containing the trade war pressures, particularly in the USA. A frontal assault of West German trading interests could produce virulent 'Gaullist' responses, ready to throw caution to the winds and hit back with the help either of Moscow or of Paris or both.

The arms race in space — Star Wars — and the absence of arms control agreements with the Soviets is likely to destabilise relations with the USSR and propel the Soviet leadership towards a more assertive use of its own power. While one aspect of Reagan's rollback strategy in the Third World is undoubtedly to seek to provoke the Soviets into cancelling future summits (thus obviating arms control) and even using some muscle (perhaps on Berlin) in order to turn



CND stops the traffic in Oxford Street following Reagan's attack on Libya

West European and American public opinion decisively behind Reagan's cold war politics, these efforts could backfire into military confrontation and war.

Reagan's rollback in the Third World as well as his attempts to keep control of Third World capitalist states strangled by the imperialist banking system could backfire, leading to either Iranian or Vietnam types of disasters for American power. Either type of

'The US insisted on one European collaborator — Britain'

development would produce centrifugal forces throughout the American global system, with the medium-sized West European powers taking advantage of US paralysis to stage at least partial break-outs from the Reaganite straightjacket.

If any of these possible developments were to occur, never mind a combination of them, the effort of the US establishment to assert US super-imperialism would have collapsed, whether or not it brought the world down with it. Partial or total collapse

is at least as likely as success. In addition, there is always the danger of a massive economic crisis which will destroy the whole project.

The phoney alternative

In the face of the rise of this aggressive American strategy over the last few years, there has been great disquiet in Western Europe. One obvious political perspective has emerged on all sides of the political spectrum: for the European capitalist states to collectively assert their interests and security requirements independent of, and partially in opposition to, Washington's policy. This idea of collective action by capitalist West European states has been championed vigorously on the left as well as by some quarters on the right. But most of the discussion of this idea starts from a phoney premise, namely that a thing called Western Europe already exists as an active unit in world politics.

In various left-wing journals there is a widespread assumption that the Common Market is a substantial force. Such ideas are false on two counts. First because international politics is about the wielding of force — coercive power, both economic and military. It is not about population size, market size, standard of living or whatever. Secondly, as far as capitalist politics is concerned, the wielders of force have to be hard entities — great military-bureaucratic-tax-raising machines under unified command, not gaggles of electoral politicians struggling through the night to find a form of words that will obscure their disunity.

Thus Europe cannot mount a 'challenge' in international politics for the simple reason that Western Europe does not even exist as a hard entity with the capacity to act as a coercive force in world politics. Instead a collection of small, medium-sized and very small powers exist that have managed to reach very limited agreements among themselves on some economic matters within their region, on some aspects of their economic relations with the outside world, and on some principles of domestic social order — notably a joint opposition to socialist transformation.

There is also, of course, a supra-national unity in matters that do really count in world politics, namely military power, but that unity is not West European at all: it is American-dominated NATO co-ordination. The entire pattern of military forces in each Western European country is structured by the American presence, and by American purposes.

It is, of course, perfectly true that there were various attempts to turn Western Europe into a significant political force during 1983-85. On the military and high tech side, the driving force for this was the French government, while on the aspect concerned with strengthening Western European political unity, the Italians took the lead. But this set of efforts was roundly defeated by the US and reviving it in the foreseeable future will be very difficult.

As for strengthened political co-ordination, the Italian plan for a big step towards



Grosvenor Square 19 April: protest against Reagan's war moves

greater political unity looked set for a still-birth at the Common Market summit in the summer of 1985, because the Germans were being encouraged to drop it by the British and the Americans. At the last minute the Bonn government wobbled over to the side of the plan, to the panic and fury of Thatcher. But by the autumn of last year the momentum behind the plan had dwindled away and the summit took the guts out of it.

The US knew this only too well before the attack on Libya. They knew once the deal with Bonn was finalised at the beginning of March that they could hit Libya without any threat of united European opposition. But just to make doubly sure, they insisted on one European power — Britain — being drawn directly into their aggression against Libya as a collaborator.

Behind all these reasons the West European states will not turn themselves into a coherent political force, there are the deeper structural factors. Such a 'super' state would have to have its own nuclear force, but it can't because the British nukes are in fact controlled by the Americans; the economic rivalries between capitalists in Europe are often as intense or more so than their common hostility to US capitalists, while anyway the US capitalists are massively present in Western Europe; the ideological cement of the parties of the right in Europe (except in France) would be shattered by an attempt to make the US as much of an enemy as the USSR; and the intricate institutional

and tax deals that bind the ruling social blocs in the different countries together would be shattered by efforts to create a uniform quasi-state in Western Europe.

The Consequences of Nonentity: Appeasement and an internal authority crisis

If then there are almost insurmountable obstacles to capitalist Western Europe becoming a real force in world politics, the consequences need to be spelt out. These can be summed up in a single sentence: the vital interests and security of these capitalist states are *not* under their own control, while the middle classes of these states like to *believe* that they are indeed fully sovereign and in control of their own destinies.

Let us begin by briefly summarising the main headings of dependence. First of all there is dependence over the biggest question of all — the capacity to decide on war or peace. It used to be thought that this question would be decided in Moscow and to prevent Moscow opting for war you needed overwhelming military strength in NATO and thus the lack of ability to decide on war in Western Europe wouldn't matter. But now there is the realisation that this question is most likely to be decided in Washington and logical thinking has been turned upside down.

Then there is the economic security issue, which encompasses a range of problems such as secure access to strategic raw materials which at present can only be got

from the American powerzone, notably sub-Saharan Africa (or, of course, the Soviet zone). Then there is the security of capitalist export markets to pay for oil imports and to keep domestic big capital afloat: the bulk of this again involves the American power zone, notably in the Middle East and the Americas, although Comecon also has some importance especially for safeguarding a thick margin of sales in slump conditions. Then there is the security of energy resources themselves — above all oil and uranium for the nuclear industries. This also depends heavily on US power, although there are partial alternatives: Libya for oil, the USSR for gas and uranium and potentially for oil as well.

The third broad area of state security concern is the internal front. The West European countries are small and medium sized capitalist states with large, relatively very well organised labour movements on the Western rim of a vast landmass dominated by post-capitalist relations of production. It is a permanent worry of the West European bourgeoisies that this geopolitical situation could end up one day with the example of the East and the domestic movements of the working class tipping capitalism into the Atlantic. It was this fear that took these states to Washington on their knees back in the late 1940s begging for a massive US rescue operation.

As a result, they find themselves with a deep US penetration of their societies both through direct military presence (there are

more American troops than British soldiers in Britain) through intelligence networks, political penetration of state bureaucracies, CIA operations in the labour movement and so forth. Without this structure the ruling classes in a number of West European states would feel psychologically vulnerable, yet at the same time in many fields of policy it makes them dependent on the US.

The absence of West European unity and these crucial dependencies on the US in the external military and economic fields and in domestic politics created only occasional crises during the long post-war boom and these came from either clashes between the European imperialist powers and the US during the struggles for independence in the Third World (Suez, for example) or sudden fears over East-West crises (the Cuban missile crisis of 1962, for example). But with the end of the boom in the 1970s and the turn in US foreign policy towards 'unilateralism' and 'neo-globalism', the West European states have been squirming and writhing in the face of contradictory requirements and pressures, unable to pursue any stable direction in foreign policy.

The overall effect of this has been to create a sense of unease and disquiet amongst sections of the solid middle classes of Western Europe — unease about threats posed by the US, fears of war, fears of economic vulnerability and above all a feeling that their own states are far less decisive and authoritative than they ought to be in asserting their interests vis-a-vis the US. The word is not used but the feeling is widespread that in the face of US irresponsibility and worse, their own states are doing no more than trying, timorously, to appease the Reagan administration.

Until the Libyan crisis, this malaise within the dominant social blocs in Western Europe over foreign policy did not govern domestic politics. Even at the height of the strength of the peace movement, in 1983, the German middle classes voted solidly against the SPD and the pattern was, of course, even stronger in the British elections that year. The fact was that the domestic class struggle was in full swing and the fight to push back the labour movement had primacy over all other issues. The shock of the Libyan crisis will, no doubt, also pass, but the question is will the malaise deepen?

Possible future developments

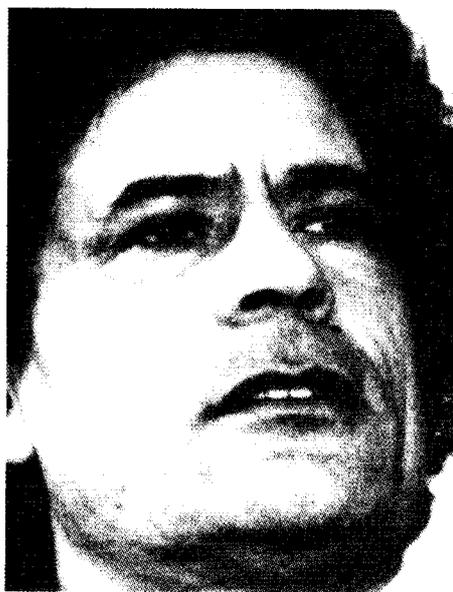
The long-standing and fundamental global conflict between the Soviet Union and its allied post-capitalist states and the imperialist powers has become overlaid with intense conflicts and tensions inside the imperialist camp. Attempts to overcome these conflicts under Ford and Carter failed. From 1979 the US embarked upon a high risk (for every body) strategy of 'neo-globalism', seeking to hem in the Soviet Union, score victories and achieve some 'roll-back' in the Third World and assert its control over the external policies of the other main capitalist states.

In the early 1980s, in response to this emerging strategy, some coalitions within and between West European states sought to form the embryonic beginnings of an

imperialist 'third force'. These efforts were failures and for the foreseeable future they could only seriously revive if an all-out economic war on West European capitalist interests was launched by the US, thus generating a violent political response from bourgeois circles in Western Europe.

The Reagan administration is seeking to avert that possibility, but remains unable to both govern the behaviour of the West European states and simultaneously avoid undermining the legitimacy of the state leaderships within their own constituencies.

What then are the alternatives for solving this problem of controlling Western Europe's external activities without a devastating internal political backlash in one, two or many West European countries? Two alternatives are being openly canvassed in Washington and a third can easily be envisaged. The first is to revive European imperialist blood-lust by drawing the main



Gaddafi

West European states into military adventures with the US in the Third World. This could be called the 'French option' or indeed the 'Falklands option'. We have seen how a strategic majority of the British population thrills to their own troops killing Third World peoples, providing of course they can get away with it successfully.

In Britain in the wake of the Libyan affair we can be sure that this option is being strongly canvassed inside the Ministry of Defence by elements in the Navy. *The Times* already floated the idea back in 1982 after the Falklands of pulling the British troops out of West Germany (so much for the 'Soviet threat') and projecting military power outside the NATO area. It's excellent domestic politics and it fits perfectly with US strategy: if only those F111s has been British!

The second alternative option is to move in exactly the opposite direction, tying the West European military capability exclusively to the European theatre, forcing an increased West European effort in central Europe by withdrawing large numbers of US troops, saving US resources for application outside the NATO area while ensuring

ultimate military control in Western Europe through Star Wars, the US euro-missiles and so on. But the dangers with this option are also great: the danger of greater West European military-political integration, the danger of West European unilateralism in its relations with Moscow and the danger that if the US got bogged down somewhere in the Third World it would be stuck there alone.

The third and final option is for the US to direct its efforts not to changing Western Europe's basic orientation to the outside world but to changing the region's internal politics. To a degree this option has already been in operation in Washington's drive against the traditional social democratic institutions of north western Europe over the last five years, an operation in which the Reaganites could count on an alliance with the right in the countries concerned, notably in Britain and West Germany. But more would be needed for Washington to feel really secure. It would be a matter of moving down a continuum of direct intervention that begins with penetration at an Italian level, moves on through Greek levels to Turkish levels and then on to various grades of Latin American levels.

Outlines of a Left Alternative

The basic obstacles to unifying Western Europe are not 'national antagonisms' but capitalist antagonisms. The basic task of the western left in the face of the increasingly barbaric and potentially catastrophic crisis of the imperialist system is to raise the banner of a *united socialist europe*. Such a task means first of all the double process of removing American power and local capitalist power from Western Europe through socialist transformations. It involves a struggle against militarism which is also a struggle to socialise and rebuild the economic life of Western Europe.

In the struggle to carry through this transformation, the left cannot expect any active support from the Soviet leadership in the face of the American and West European counter-revolution.

But it *can* expect support from very wide sections of the peoples of Eastern Europe and the USSR if the left here really appeals to them on a principled socialist basis championing socialist democracy.

The transformation of Western Europe is a gigantic task, made possible only by the scale of the threat to humanity posed by the militarist paroxysm of imperialism of which the Libyan raid was simply a tiny symptom. In this historic struggle the left must link up with all those forces opposing nuclear weapons and the American bases, it must seek links also in the unions and all the struggles against attacks on working people's living standards, it must make links in the Third World and seek principled anti-militarist joint action with the Soviet leadership on issues such as Star Wars, chemical weapons and so forth. It must also seek links with the American left in an overall internationalist struggle to take the world through and beyond the hysterical violence with which imperialism in crisis seeks to terrorise us.

'All left wing comrades have a right to be in the party'

Interview with Eric Heffer

ERIC HEFFER has been one of the champions of the left of the Parliamentary Labour Party since 1964, and has recently been an outspoken critic of the witch hunt and the move to the right.

JANE KELLY and **DAVE PACKER** spoke to him.

What do you think of the new 'Freedom and Fairness' campaign launched by the party leadership?

I went to the launch of the campaign, because I'd read various newspaper reports saying that we were dropping our historical red flag, and our party emblem and at the annual conference we were going to stop calling one another 'comrades' and so on. I was assured that the campaign logo was just for this campaign, and all this wasn't true.

I watched the party political broadcast on the 'Fairness and Freedom' theme by Neil Kinnock and John Cunningham. I don't think anyone could disagree with what they said, it was what was *not* said that is important. What's far more important than that campaign is for us to press home our basic socialist policies. More to the point than a slick campaign is what sort of policies we're going to campaign on up to the next election.

So what do you think those policies should be?

I think that we have to say clearly that the issue now, to solve the problems of unemployment, poverty and the threat of war is a clear socialist alternative. That doesn't just mean more investment in the construction industry and so on — you need that, but you also have to have a totally different approach. We've got to talk about control of the economy, about extending public ownership, about planning the resources of the nation. We have to argue for self-management by the workers in industry. We have to argue not just for the removal of all American nuclear bases, we have to argue for the removal of *all* American bases. We have to talk in terms of eventually getting ourselves out of NATO. We have to push for nuclear energy to be replaced in time by other forms of energy. We've got to argue for proper conservationist policies.

Now we've heard a lot about the necessity of Labour being a 'party of production'. Well I never thought we were anything else! The question we have to ask is 'production for what' — production for use, or



Carlos Cuatrecasas

production for profit? And all those people who've argued over the years that the choice is 'socialism or barbarism' are right. The current alternative is socialism or destruction. I don't believe that you lose votes if you tell that to the people, I think you lose votes if you pretend to be something that you're not.

What role do you think the Campaign Group ought to play?

Well the Campaign Group is doing quite a good job, introducing a series of Bills in parliament. They've no hope of being passed of course, they're propaganda measures. But I think we ought to do far more than that. I've thought for some time we ought to pick out debates and get all our people in there arguing for a socialist line of action. We used to say this in the early Tribune group. But the Tribune group in this House is not the Tribune group that was. We haven't quite latched on to the importance of using parliament as a propaganda platform.

In the country we definitely ought to do more than we've done, and I'm going to advocate that there should be a series of big meetings organised by the Campaign Group with people like myself, Tony Benn and Dennis Skinner speaking, to show a presence and argue for socialist policies.

So you think it should be more than a parliamentary caucus?

Well I think it should be in essence a parliamentary caucus, but it's got to have its roots throughout the entire country. That's increasingly happening. We should coordinate the left in the party far more, and that would, I assume, include a variety of groups and tendencies, as long as they were generally on the left. I think if we fail to do it

it will be very serious for the party in the long run.

You know there are people who say that we shouldn't do anything until the general election, and then after the election we'll all come out from our little holes and fight for socialist policies. Well I don't think we're going to win unless we fight now for socialist policies.

How do you see the refusal of people like Blunkett and Meacher on the NEC to support the minority in the battle against the witch hunt?

Well they're contradictory. On the general principle of the witch hunt they seem to be going along with the majority of the NEC. But on the specific questions, like whether Pat Wall should be endorsed as a candidate or not, they voted the other way. But I have to tell you, and I'll be quite blunt about it, the people you mention are a great disappointment to me. Once again I've seen people come onto the NEC, and I've seen it in the past in parliament, with great left wing reputations and within a short period of time they've abandoned their positions.

Since I rejoined the Labour Party I've never considered myself to be on the 'ultra left' of the party. But I've had a left position and I've maintained my position, and simply because of that I'm characterised as part of the 'ultra-left'. Well so be it. I just believe that all left wing comrades in the party have a right to be in the party. If you don't agree with them, you argue against them politically, and try to outvote them. But you don't say one thing one year and when you get a position of responsibility turn your back on all your basic ideas — for purely opportunistic reasons and in some cases undoubtedly for reasons of personal advancement. If you do that there's no future for any movement, certainly not for the Labour Party.

The pressure on the left to fall into line and no rock the boat is very great. It is creating a drift to the right. Do you think this is going to continue?

I think we are in for a difficult period, and this year's conference is going to be a difficult one. Some people on the NEC might not maintain their position. But I'm encouraged that in the constituency parties there is a lot of unease and concern at rightward developments.

I've been in Parliament for 21 years, and I've always taken a view that if you have to differentiate yourself from the party leader on a particular issue, then you should do so. It's the correct thing to do, it's the moral thing to do. If you disagree and you keep your mouth shut, then you're saying that

you'll go along with things you know to be wrong. And I don't believe that because the leader is Neil Kinnock, or because we suffered a terrible defeat in the last election, which wasn't the fault of the left incidentally, we should keep quiet, forget everything, keep your trap shut, don't oppose things that are wrong, just hide away -- well it's wrong! I've read that Ken Livingstone has made this kind of statement. Well it's opportunist and fundamentally wrong. You'll see when my book comes out that I haven't pulled any punches about what I think, or where the party should be going.

If there's a hung parliament, what should Labour do?

I think it's quite clear. If we are the largest party we should take control, pick out socialist policies that are popular, let ourselves be defeated in parliament on them, and go for another election. If you make deals with the other parties you get sullied by them and in the end they win and you lose.

Nearly 70 per cent of the population were against the raids on Libya. But in Labour's opposition the leadership has not raised the question of NATO. What do you think of this?

I think it's very interesting that opposition to the bases is much more credible to the people than it was before. A lot of people now see what we're arguing about, whereas before it often seemed like a theoretical question. To that extent I think the party's position about the bases has been more credible. But the party position is a compromise because there are some people on the right who don't want us to get rid of the bases without nuclear weapons and who now see that it's popular.

I had a discussion with an old Tribune comrade who is in the shadow cabinet, who I'm still friendly with, although we don't see eye to eye on political issues any more, and he said that he was sorry to hear me raise the question of getting rid of all bases, because that only gave people like Dennis Healey the chance to raise support for nuclear weapons. I said no, they'll say people like me are on the looney left, but at least we'll be locked into a pledge to get rid of *nuclear* bases. The more we demand, the more policy will be accepted, and we still have the opportunity to argue for what is necessary -- getting rid of all bases and out of NATO.

I'm more convinced than ever that when Tony Benn and I put forward our paper against NATO to the NEC, which was immediately rejected, nevertheless it was a correct thing to do, and that opposition to NATO will grow. The Scottish TUC has gone on record against all bases. I regard that as a very important step forward.



Wendy Savage case

An Enquiry into women's rights

The inquiry into Wendy Savage's 'fitness' to be an obstetrician is minatory. The result will have ramifications for women's rights in childbirth extending far beyond the borders of Tower Hamlets.

ERICA FLEGG investigates.

THE FINDINGS of the enquiry into the competence of the consultant obstetrician, Wendy Savage, who was suspended by Tower Hamlets Health Authority, are to be presented on 10 July. The campaign to defend Savage has organised a demonstration in her support, and is also calling for protests at her suspension to be made to the Health Authority.

While the Savage case appears to be concerned with questions of professional competence, what is at issue is the approach to the management of childbirth today. This affects the rights of women, especially women from the working class and ethnic minorities, the standards of medical practice within the National Health Service, the cuts, and the accountability of doctors to society rather than to their peers.

In the view of many of her supporters, Wendy Savage has been victimised because she supports the right of mothers to partici-

'In Britain women's rights in childbirth are being eroded'

pate in decisions about the management of birth, because she defends the interests of the deprived residents of an inner city area — the Asian and working-class patients at the Mile End branch of Whitechapel Hospital — and because she is a female misfit in an elitist, conservative and male-dominated medical establishment.

Savage, it seems, is also too bright and too bolshy for the comfort of her more benighted and insecure male colleagues, and they are determined to make an example of her. If they daren't actually call her a witch, they nevertheless want her professional reputation burnt at the stake and her ideas discredited. The Royal College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists elected Savage to membership last year, a recognition normally extended to obstetricians of her seniority, but the professional bodies seem to be



Cuts in the NHS while £150,000 is spent on the Savage Enquiry

willing to allow her to be singled out without protest.

In Britain, women's rights in childbirth — to home births, to 'natural' births in hospital without undue technological or surgical intervention, to participate in the management of their labour and delivery — are being increasingly eroded. This is defended in the name of increased safety for mother and child, but evidence shows that greater medical intervention does not, on the whole, ensure safer births: in Holland, for instance, where the rate of home births is much higher than in Britain, the rate of perinatal mortality is lower. The rate of Caesarian section is also increasing alarmingly, although this practise is known to be detrimental to the health and well being of the mother. There is a tendency for Caesarians to be much more common in some parts of the country than in others, and also to be more commonly recommended on

a Friday, for instance, than on a Sunday, facts which Wendy Savage's detractors have yet to explain in terms of good medical practice.

Tower Hamlets Health Authority, at a time when health services are sorely pressed by the cuts, set aside £150,000 to finance the inquiry and moreover suspended Savage from duty before the inquiry reported, leaving the Mile End branch of the hospital without a named consultant obstetrician. The Authority is so short of funds that it also plans to close half of the 22 maternity beds at Mile End and move the rest to Whitechapel. Apparently the use of large sums of public money to remove a doctor like Savage is seen as the best way to protect the interests of expectant mothers of Mile End.

Savage has 26 years' experience as an obstetrician, and is a senior lecturer who has

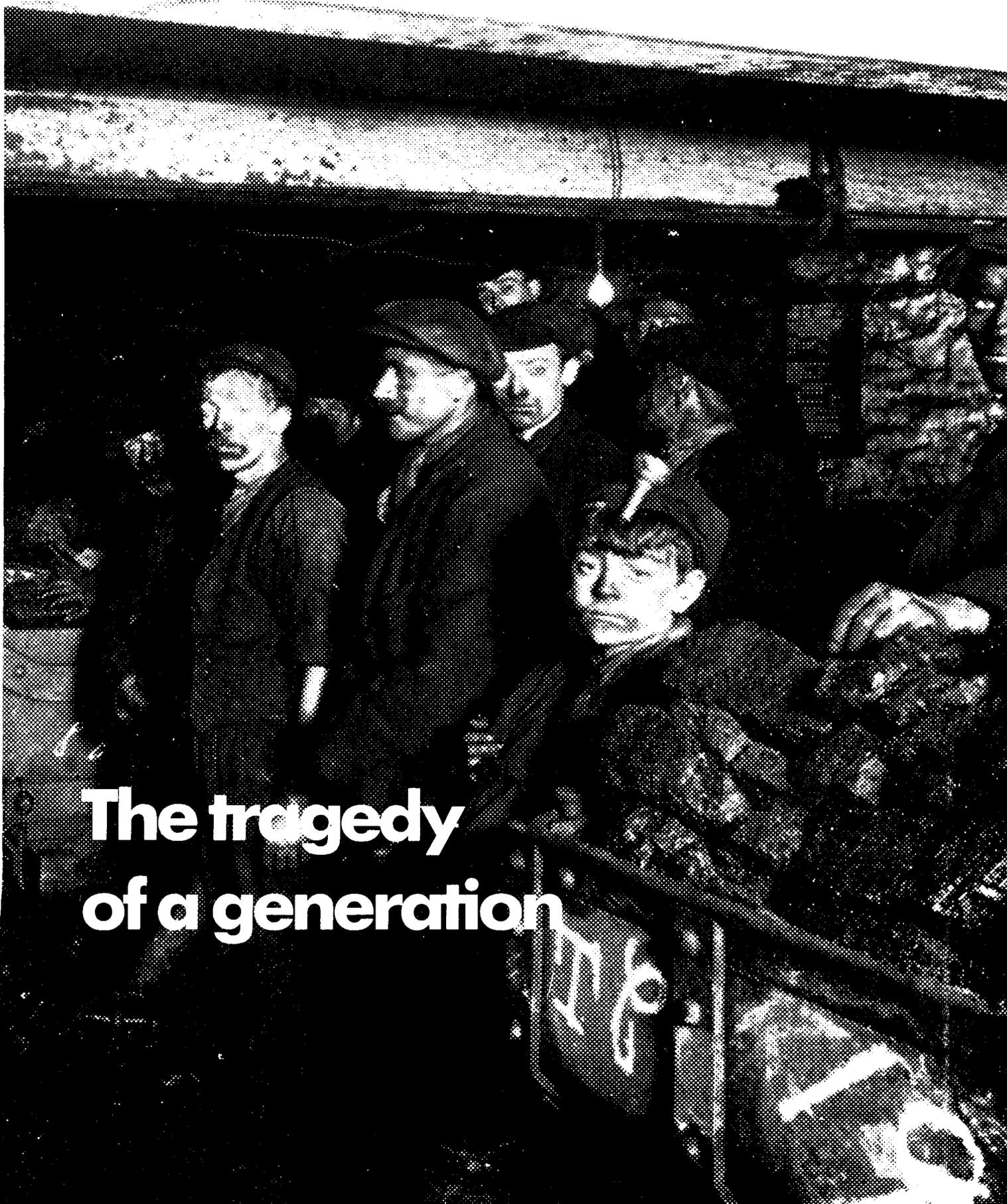
'Tower Hamlets Health Authority set aside £150,000 to finance the inquiry'

taught at the hospital without criticism for seven years. She enjoys the confidence of local women, so much so that one of the mothers whose case was used, without her permission, against Savage, came out publicly in her support. A highly committed doctor, Savage is also a member of the Socialist Health Association and of the Labour Party. Like most consultants, Savage does not belong to a trade union, but this does not prevent the unions in the health service, and all those concerned to defend the interests of women and public accountability in social services, from organising against her victimisation and to protect our own interests. The Savage case may indeed encourage a few alarmed consultants to join the ranks of the trade union movement.

Further information on the campaign can be obtained from Oxford House in Tower Hamlets, where meetings of the defence committee are held. The demonstration is called for 10 July at 2pm to march from Mile End to the London Hospital at Whitechapel. For the Labour Party, Peter Shore has spoken out in favour of Savage's reinstatement in the interests of his constituents in Bethnal Green and Stepney, but the party and the wider labour movement need to take a stronger stand before those with less courage and commitment than Savage will be prepared to put their reputations, and perhaps their jobs, on the line by speaking out against present trends.

S U P P L E M E N T

The General Strike 1926



The tragedy
of a generation

This month is the sixtieth anniversary of the general strike. The great strike has been recounted and argued about over decades. Here **BOB PENNINGTON** looks not at the detailed story of the strike, but why it occurred and why the working class went down to such a tragic defeat. Central to understanding this he argues, is the role of the TUC and the infant British Communist Party.

FROM BLACK FRIDAY TO RED FRIDAY

WITH THE ADVANTAGE of hindsight, the 1926 General Strike appears to have been inevitable — inevitable because the crisis of British capitalism after the First World War, and in particular because the crisis of the coal industry immediately posed a question which all such crises pose — who is going to pay, the working class or the ruling class?

In fact, immediately after the World War Britain went through a short economic boom. But this boom only temporarily concealed the fact that British capitalism was in decline, and had been for forty years. The coal industry was the country's largest single industry employing a million people, and exporting a third of its production before 1914. After the war Europe was short of energy and export prices were twice as high as home prices. But then in 1921 the bubble burst, export prices fell dramatically, and the government — which had controlled the mines in wartime — pulled out and left the coal owners to find a solution.

The coal owners' solution was simple — they called for a big cut in wages, which the miners rejected. On 31 March 1921 the miners were locked out. The Miners Federation invoked

the Triple Alliance — the alliance of engineers, miners and transport workers. The railworkers and transport workers agreed to begin sympathetic strikes on Saturday 16 April. But the day before, Friday 15 April, the railworkers leader JH Thomas demanded that the miners resume negotiations with the government. The miners, knowing that the government supported the coal owners, refused. So Thomas and Robert Williams of the transport workers called off the strike, and the miners were left out in the cold, on what has become known in labour history as 'Black Friday'. By the end of June, forced into submission by their isolation, the miners were forced to accept heavy wage cuts.

But the wage cuts did not in themselves solve the crisis of the industry. The coal owners belonged to the 'Neanderthal' faction of the capitalist class and were notoriously backward. A wartime government report had commented: '... we do not wisely commit hundreds of thousands of workers to the charge of ill-educated men'. The structure of the industry itself was anarchic. In 1918 there were 1500 companies and owners, plus some 4000 landowners who got royalties from every ton of coal that was lifted from their land. The fragmented character of the industry acted as a barrier to moder-

isation, and the British coal industry had far fewer mechanical cutters than its main rivals. As the short boom was followed by another slump, the owners used the uncertainty as another excuse for putting off modernisation.

By 1924 international competition was getting ever more intense — the writing was on the wall for the coal industry, indeed the wall was falling down. When Britain returned to the Gold Standard in 1925 coal took another body blow, as the effect of the move was to overprice British coal by another ten per cent. Earlier that year the owners had demanded another cut in wages; Prime Minister Baldwin said that 'the coal industry must stand on its own economic foundations' and added that there was no hope of government subsidy.

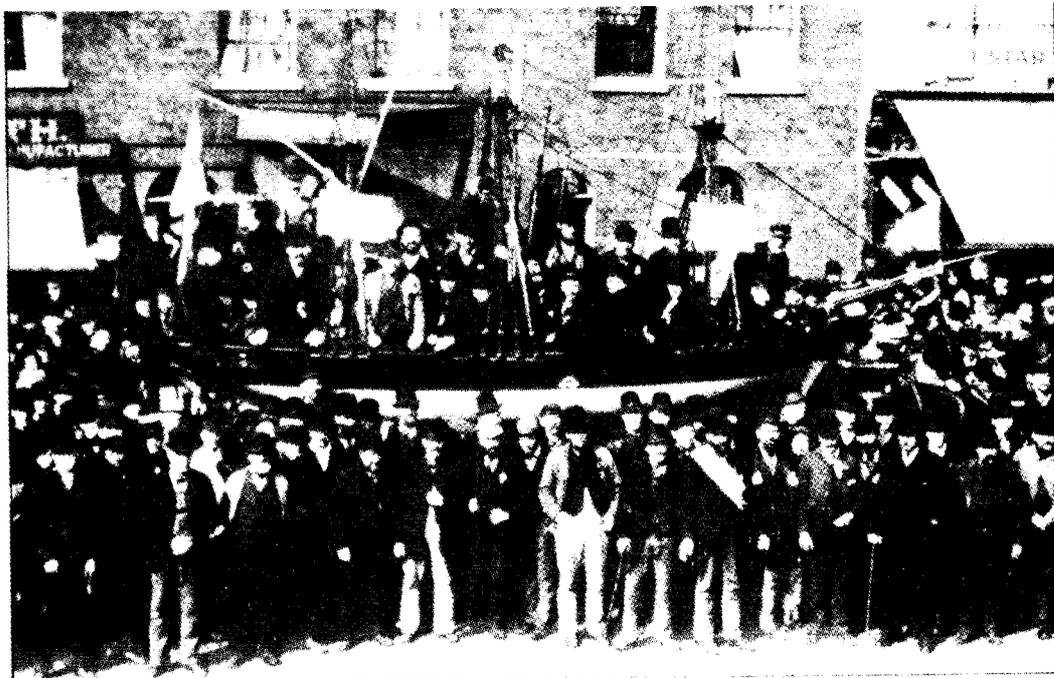
But by 1925 there was a new mood afoot in the British trade unions. The British Communist Party had begun to build the Minority Movement (MM), which organised left wing groups inside the miners union, the engineers and other unions. The MM

'The Minority Movement was not just a "rank and file" movement'

campaigns for the unions to fight the employers offensive under the slogan 'Stop the Retreat'. It aimed to build real unity inside the unions, and to build up the organisation in the workplaces, so that control lay at the base — stressing that this was the only way to avoid a repetition of 'Black Friday'.

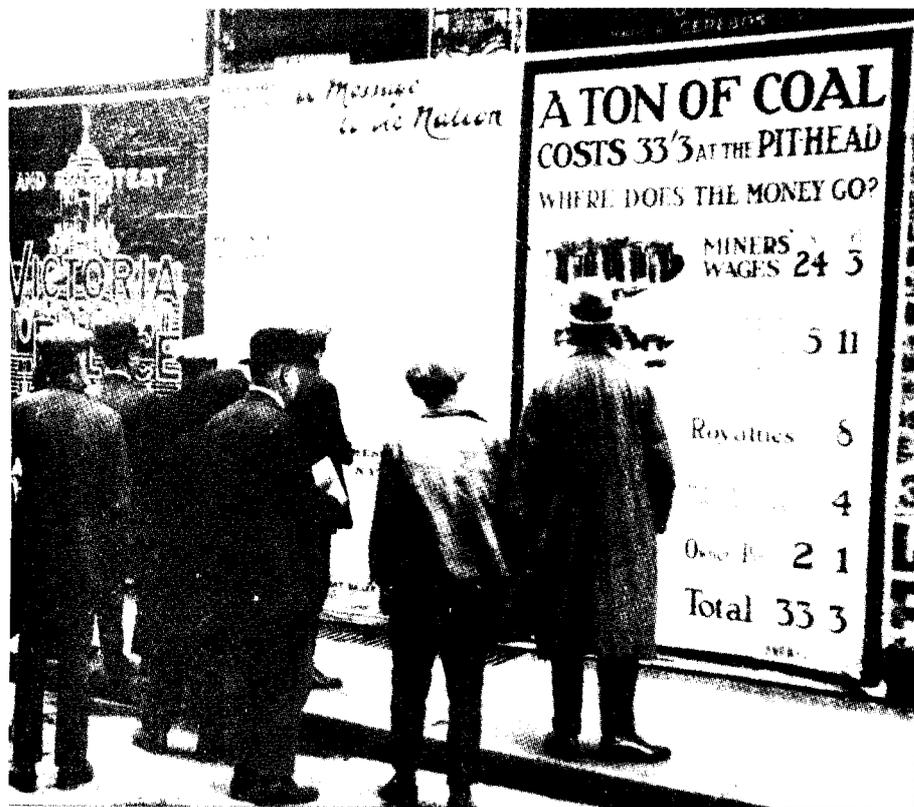
The Minority Movement was not just a 'rank and file' movement; it aimed to divide the unions not between leaders and led, but between *left* and *right*. Thus it numbered among its supporters miners' secretary AJ Cook, along with other left union leaders. The presence of the MM inside the most powerful unions, an awareness that the miners were only the first in line for wage cuts, and the general growth in militancy, all put big pressure on the TUC when the miners appealed for support.

On 30 July 1925 a conference of trade union executives attended by over 1000 people endorsed a proposal from the TUC to place an embargo on all movement of coal from midnight on 31 July. It also empowered the TUC to call a strike, on any scale necessary, should the deadlock continue. At the eleventh hour the government capitulated and agreed to pay a subsidy to the industry until 1 May 1926. The delegates at the 'Red Friday' conference had won — for the moment.



1889 docks strike

Government poster, 1920



THE RULING CLASS PREPARES FOR BATTLE

The ruling class had suffered a major rebuff on Red Friday, but as miners' president Herbert Smith commented, 'it was only an armistice'. From that day on the employers, their government and their state began preparations for the major battle that they knew was now inevitable. The tragedy was that their preparations were much more effective and extensive than those made by the working class leaders.

Home Secretary Sir William Joysson Hicks, who was to play a major part in government preparations, described the coming battle as 'this thing which has got to be fought out by the people of this land'. He asked: 'is Britain to be governed by parliament and the cabinet, or by a handful of trade union leaders?'

Meanwhile, railworkers leader Jimmy Thomas, who had sold out the miners on Black Friday was wringing his hands and arguing that 'nothing was more dangerous for the future of the country' than that the employers and government 'should be made to concede by force what they refused to concede by reason'.

Baldwin's concession on a subsidy to the coal industry had been made in the teeth of opposition from the Tory backbenches and Fleet Street. But the concession was not there to help the miners — it was to give the ruling class

time to prepare for the coming showdown.

Immediately after Red Friday the government started making ready. By August that year *The Times* was reporting: 'numerous suggestions have been made from various quarters for organising those citizens who would be prepared to volunteer to maintain supplies and services in the event of a general strike'. Such an organisation had already been set up and was at work in many London boroughs. This body, the Organisation for the Maintenance of Supplies (OMS) had been set up under the benevolent direction of the Home Secretary.

The OMS was a so-called private body including Lord Hardinge, one time Viceroy of India, Sir Rennel Rodd a former ambassador and Admiral Jellicoe, along with other retired personages from the high ranks of the military. These stout citizens who had spent their entire adult lives serving the state could be relied on to defend the national interests, which happened to coincide with those of the coal owners. The OMS got down to recruiting volunteers as special constables, as transport drivers, as messengers and so forth. When the government took over the OMS on the eve of the General Strike it had a trained army of strike breakers to hand.

The government itself organised an emergency supply and transport service and planned a detailed network

which covered the use of air, naval and army personnel.

Behind the government stood the Emergency Powers Act of 1922 which gave sweeping powers if a crisis was declared.

Although the government had the powers to take over broadcasting, Baldwin knew that was not necessary. During the strike Baldwin's judgement proved correct for not only Reith, the head of the BBC, refused Ramsey MacDonald permission to broadcast but even delayed an appeal for peace from the Archbishop of Canterbury. Reith was utterly opposed to broadcasting anything that encouraged the strike.

Nor did the government content itself with administrative measures to defeat the unions. When the Prime Minister agreed to the subsidy he also set up a Commission to inquire into the industry which was headed by Lord Samuel and included a host of ruling class personages. These gentlemen, like their colleagues who led the OMS, believed in defending the national interest and keeping Britain on a 'sound economic footing' — even if it meant cutting wages. The task of the Commission was to satisfy the public that there had been an 'impartial' and 'fair-minded' examination of the coal industry which needed now to reduce wages and/or lengthen hours.

A powerful alliance was coalescing against organised labour. It was an alliance made up of the government, the employers, the financiers and the state, the civil servants, the judiciary, the police and the military. What united these forces was expressed by Lord Balfour who said such people agreed over 'the foundations of society' which meant they thoroughly believed in, and absolutely depended on the continued existence of the present social order. On the other side there was a notable lack of preparation by the unions concerned, although the TUC president A Swales told the 1925 Conference at Scarborough 'We must now recover lost ground to re-establish and improve wages, hours, and working conditions'.

THE FAILURE OF THE TUC

Yet all proposals to prepare for the impending conflict were quietly referred back to the General Council. As the months passed, the TUC did not start to prepare. Proposals for setting up an Industrial Alliance were talked about, hung fire and then drifted into oblivion. Ernest Bevin later admitted it was not until 27 April 1926 that the TUC even set up an Advisory Committee. The lassitude of the TUC was not attributable to powerlessness. Their disinclination to act stemmed

from the fact that taking national industrial action against the government, according to their own beliefs was almost certainly illegal and probably morally wrong. Furthermore it meant rupturing and possibly destroying that network of class collaboration the union bureaucracy had constructed between itself and the establishment.

The fear of challenging the government's constitutional right to govern, and the desire of the union bureaucracy simply to be mediators between capital and labour, and not leaders of class struggle was eloquently expressed by JH Thomas. Speaking for the Opposition in Parliament he said: 'For ten days ... we said to the government: "You force the coal owners to give us some terms, never mind how bad they are. Let us have

'Also haunting the trade union leaders was their fear of "letting in the reds"'

something to go on ... I have never disguised that in a challenge to the constitution, God help us unless the government win"(!)' Thomas was expressing the convictions of most of his colleagues on the General Council and Labour's front bench.

This is why in all those months from August 1925 right into the spring of 1926, the TUC clung fervently to the hope that the Samuel Commission would offer some concessions and Baldwin would intervene and soften the blow due to be inflicted on the miners. Also haunting the trade union leaders, was their fear of 'letting in the reds and the wildmen'. After the Strike, Charles Duke of the Municipal Workers complained 'every day the strike proceeded, the control and the authority of that dispute was passing out of the hands of responsible executives, into the hands of men who had no authority, no control, no responsibility ...'

The government suffered from no such equivocations and doubts. It knew what was involved and set its sights accordingly. The preparations it had made and the powers already in its hands were unparalleled in a country not at war. For them, the issue was who was going to pay for the crisis — the working class or the ruling class? Because they recognised what was at stake, the ruling class remained impervious to all pleas for compromise. Baldwin would not budge an inch. The coal owners broke off negotiations on 13 April, saying nothing less than a wage cut would satisfy them, and insisted in future they would only negotiate at district level.

Prime Minister Baldwin



In face of this intransigence, JH Thomas, who was on the TUC's Special Industrial Relations Committee which was in charge of negotiations, still argued against 'organising and mobilising, and encouraging the feeling that war was inevitable ...' and suggested people 'concentrate on finding a solution honourable and satisfactory to all sides'.

But nothing came to the rescue of the TUC. The report from the Samuel Commission came out on 10 March and opposed the continuation of the subsidy after 1 May. On wages and hours the Commission favoured a wage cut, but not as much as the mine owners were demanding, and thought the extension of the working week was undesirable. Then came the sting in the tail. The report suggested the miners choose between bigger wage

'the TUC were told the Prime Minister could not see them, he had "gone to bed"'

cuts without an increase in working hours, or an increase in working hours without wage cuts. The miners rejected this.

At first the TUC opposed it, but eventually shifted its ground emphasising its willingness to help in anyway to reach a settlement — and told Herbert Smith there was 'no room for negotiations'. The TUC then had two choices. The hoped-for solution from Samuel's Commission gave nothing, so now they could either start organising for a show-down or they could go back to the table, begging bowl in hand. So, back they went to beg again. Right up to the



very end the TUC did everything it could to get a settlement, but all to no avail.

When they scurried round to see Baldwin they were handed the final insult. They were told the Prime Minister could not see them, he had 'gone to bed'. And so the reluctant TUC, under the instructions of the union executives, called a national strike. As the assembled delegates sat waiting for the votes to be cast they sang hymns like 'Break of Heaven', which was undoubtedly very British of them, but showed that they had more faith in the almighty than they did in the power and unity of the labour movement!



THE GENERAL STRIKE

General Strikes are qualitatively different to other industrial disputes, and the British General Strike was no exception. On one side of the divide stands the state, the government, the employers — all those who 'agree on fundamentals' — along with their allies in sections of the middle classes, and those groups of workers who falsely identify their interests with those of their rulers. On the other side is the labour movement and its allies. Both camps are confronted with momentous decisions if they are to win.

In Britain, in May 1926, the ruling

class knew if it defeated the strike there would be no need to compromise with the miners, the rising tide of working class militancy would be stemmed and the burden of the crisis would be put on the backs of working people. Despite declarations that they had no intention of ever challenging the constitution, the unions had no chance of winning if they failed to do just that.

The union leaders hated the situation. They would never dare to, or even want to, take the steps demanded for victory. Victory would demand breaking the law. It would undermine all the agreements, often unsaid,



Miners' president, Herbert Smith

invariably unwritten, which mediated their day-to-day relations with the employers and the state. A General Strike destroys normality. The power and assumed prerogatives of the old ruling class are brought into question, not just by small numbers of marxists and other socialists, but by whole sections of the working class. Who decides what trains shall run; what food shall be distributed and to whom; what services operate, and who has the mandate to operate them, is decisive to victory. The strikers can only leave these decisions in the hands of the state and government at their peril. But the moment the workers' organisations step in and start taking these decisions it has challenged the right of the ruling class to run the country.

A victorious General Strike in 1926 would have had three possible outcomes. Whatever else, it would have stimulated further working class militancy as it would have strengthened the confidence of trade unionists, and almost certainly strengthened the position of the left. Victory could also have led to the resignation of the Tory government and its replacement by a Labour administration very dependent on and much influenced by the working class upsurge that had put it into office. Finally, a victorious General Strike *could* have led to social revolution, in that the workers' organisations ejected the Tory government and took power into their own hands. In retrospect this seems a very unlikely variant, given the policies of the Communist Party in that period along with its lack of a really wide authoratative base inside the labour movement.

For the TUC leaders all these outcomes were repugnant. At best they involved an under-mining of their positions, and at the worst the nightmarish prospect that they might even lose those coveted positions. Thus from day one, the TUC entered the Strike with no desire greater than the one to get it all over with. Of course they would have liked a settlement that favoured the miners. After all it would have enhanced their own prestige and standing in the unions, and most of them were genuinely sorry about the hardship and deprivation being suffered by the miners and their families. Unfortunately, the price for a victory was too high for the TUC to pay.

THE STRIKE BEGINS

With this encumbrance around its neck, organised labour began the General Strike. The over one million miners that had been locked out were joined by another one and a half million striking workers, including all types of transport workers, many

printers, sections of the building trade, and those in the iron and steel, chemicals and power industries. Engineering and shipbuilding were only called out after a week had gone by. From the beginning the response had been magnificent. The Lightmen and Stevedores who were not then affiliated to the TUC immediately stopped work in solidarity. On the railways, less than one per cent of the engine drivers reported for work.

The Railway Clerks Union played a vital role in defeating the OMS plans to organise scabbing. Fifty one per cent of their members came out on strike, many of them senior grades like station masters who put at risk their jobs and pensions. As the National Council of Labour Colleges reported in their publication *A Workers History of the Great Strike*: 'It was the unexpected and heroic solidarity of the RCA responsible grades

'from day one, the TUC entered the Strike with no greater desire than to get it all over with'

which broke the spine of the Companies resistance. Any plans that they may have had for running an OMS service under skilled supervision were wrecked at once.' Many individual workers not in unions joined up — the RCA recruited 3000 new members on the first day — and then walked out on strike from their workplaces. In areas like Chorley in Lancashire, considered then a graveyard for trade unionism, there was a complete closedown.

In all the great cities and large towns the response was magnificent even areas like non-industrial Colchester, reported a 'splendid' response. Altogether over 82 unions had members out on strike — the proportion differed, according either to the instructions of the TUC, or the militancy of the members, as some told not to strike did so. A TUC Bulletin reported 'Never have the workers responded with greater enthusiasm to the call of their leaders ... They have manifested their determination and unity to the whole world. They have resolved that the attempt of the mineowners to starve three million men, women and children into submission shall not succeed.'

If only that determination had prevailed at higher levels! As the strike grew in strength — there were more workers out on the ninth day when it ended, than when it began — so did the bureaucracy grow ever more desperate to bring it to an end. From 6 May, Sir Herbert Samuel had been in



Troops in India Dock Road

contact with JH Thomas, and the next day a series of meetings began between him and the Negotiating Committee of the General Council. These were held in the home of Sir Abe Bailey, a South African mining magnate who owned a string of race horses and whose house was presumably considered to be ideal 'neutral' ground! The talks were secret and the miners were kept out of them. Meanwhile Ramsey MacDonald was assuring everybody that he '... was in continual touch with the government side ...'.

A new formula produced by Samuel, which again did not rule out wage cuts, was rejected by the miners. Undeterred the TUC pressed on. On 11 May they told the miners they must accept the Samuel proposals which had not even been endorsed by the government. The miners executive refused, insisting they were not prepared to accept any cuts. They also knew if the Strike stopped for new negotiations it would be more or less impossible to restart it if the negotiations broke down. A unanimous decision of the TUC then decided the Strike could no longer be carried on. Their representatives then trooped off to Downing Street and without mentioning the Samuel proposals, offered



what Ralph Miliband in his book *Parliamentary Socialism* aptly describes as 'unconditional surrender'.

The outbreak of 'proletarian distemper' was over, business could now get back to normal for the trade union bureaucracy. The miners were now alone and isolated. Every single left

'meetings were held in the home of Sir Abe Bailey, a mining magnate who owned a string of racehorses'

winger on the TUC voted for the ending of the strike and doomed the miners to an eventual crushing defeat. In their capitulation to the policies of the right wing, the left had behaved no differently then they had done on the rest of the nine days, or for that matter in the period between Red Friday and midnight of 3 May 1926.

In his book *The General Strike*, Julian Symons writes: 'The left trade union leaders played what seems in retrospect a strikingly timid part.' He explains that while they were in a minority on the General Council...

they occupied important positions. One of them Purcell, was chairman of the Strike Organising Committee; George Hicks, Ben Tillet, John Bromely and AB Swales were all leading figures on various TUC committees.' Swales who had been president of the TUC the previous year must bear a heavy responsibility for not resisting and fighting against the downright failure of the TUC to make any preparations for the inevitable showdown due for May 1926. Symons reports '... there is no suggestion that opinion in the General Council was severely divided at any time.'

The apparent unanimity of the General Council with the left raising no criticisms of the traditional leaders, helped to stifle any criticisms that might have emanated from the ranks. Worse still, the Communist Party who had done so much to build a left inside the unions with its launching of the MM, not only failed to criticise the complicity of the left leaders, it actually encouraged the idea that they were the ones who would represent and campaign for the interests of the rank and file. In 1925 the *Sunday Worker*, the paper of the Communist led Left Wing Movement in the Labour Party, was enthusing about

Swales, describing him as a person with 'the simple and rugged strength of a far-seeing and courageous leader.'

On 7 August 1925 the Communist Party paper, *Workers Weekly* said: 'The leadership (of the events of Red Friday) passed into the hands of good proletarians like Swales, Hicks, Cook and Purcell. And this proletarian leadership and the proletarian solidarity it was capable of organising and demonstrating was the real big thing that came out of the struggle.' The Communist Party therefore encouraged the idea that a left alternative existed in the TUC and that the workers should put their confidence in these 'proletarian leaders'.

CP leader Harry Pollitt spelt out the implications of this line when he wrote: '... the new General Council will simply have to pursue more vigorously the fight on behalf of the

'Every single left winger on the TUC voted for the ending of the strike'

workers'. Reliance on the TUC left meant that the Communist Party through the MM urged the workers to subordinate everything to the TUC and in practice their slogan of 'All power to the TUC' meant exactly that. George Hardy who was at the time acting secretary of the MM wrote in his book *Those Stormy Years ...* we sent out from the MM headquarters instructions for our members to work for the establishment of Councils of Action in every area. We warned, however, that the Councils of Action under no circumstances were to take over the work of the trade unions ... The Councils of Action were to see that the decisions of the General Council and the union executives were carried out ...

The MM was not therefore seeing the Councils of Action as a means of extending the Strike, and as potential alternative means of carrying on the struggle in the event of a betrayal from the TUC, instead they were given the job according to Hardy, of policing the workers on behalf of the TUC.

THE ROLE OF MOSCOW

The subordination of the Communist Party and the MM to an alliance with Purcell *et al*, may have been a policy applied by the British Communist Party, but it was a policy that had been elaborated in Moscow. In 1925 the British and Russian TUC General Councils formed the Anglo-Russian Committee whose aim was to promote world trade union unity and



AJ Cook

bring about closer relations between British and Soviet trade unions. Purcell, Hicks and Swales were members of this committee and got a reputation as being lefts, more or less because of their alleged friendship for the USSR. Left or not, unlike Cook the miners' leader, these worthies were not members of the MM. But that mattered little to the Stalinist clique that was beginning to establish its ascendancy over the Russian Communist Party and the Soviet state. They saw the Anglo-Russian Committee as a bridge to establishing better Anglo Soviet relations. Zinoviev even boasted 'it's one of the surest guarantees against intervention'.

Most likely the leaders of the British Communist Party were less personally enthusiastic about Purcell and company — after all none of these lefts had lifted a finger when the Labour Party conference of 1925 had decided to ban from membership members of the Communist Party. Nevertheless, the British Communist Party was beginning to grasp that under Stalin their first task was work for co-existence between their own country and the USSR, and they assumed that the Anglo-Russian Committee could help in that respect.

So in the interests of Soviet diplomacy, the Communist Party endorsed the Anglo-Russian Committee lefts, awarding them credentials as proletarian fighters, an accolade concocted up in the party editorial offices, but certainly never earned in the class struggle! The blank cheque handed to the TUC lefts was eventually cashed by the right-wing TUC leaders, and the people who made the ultimate gain was of course the British ruling class.

When the General Strike did take place the policies of the Communist Party made sure that it could never use the Councils of Action as an alternative to stop the TUC sell out. You just cannot say, month in and month out — as the Communist Party had been doing — give 'All power to the TUC' then at the last minute confess you were wrong and argue you need a new leadership. Although the Communist Party did not want to end the

Strike, its previous policies made sure that it could do nothing to stop the TUC's instructions for a return to work being carried out.

This does not mean that if the Communist Party in the period prior to the Strike, and during the nine days of the Strike, had had correct policies victory would have been assured. But their uncritical attitude to the TUC lefts — a left, whose past history gave an almost certain indication of where they would stand in a class conflict of such a dimension as a General Strike — precluded any hope of victory.

The task of the Communist Party and the MM, in the days from May 1925 to May 1926 was to demand, and demand again, of the lefts that the TUC *organise*. It should have insisted that the TUC lefts report to the unions what preparations had been made and once it was clear that the right were not preparing then it should have called on the left to themselves take steps for preparation. This would have divided the TUC and doubtless there are those who would have claimed it would disrupt trade union unity.

The Communist Party could have answered that by pointing out that the unity which existed in those vital 12 months was a unity of torpor and inactivity — a unity the labour movement could not afford.

It is more or less certain, that even given correct policies, the still relatively weak base of the Communist Party among the ranks of organised labour, would have ruled out their stopping the TUC sell out. That, however, is not a justification for not advocating what had to be done. Their

failure to do that made sure their own members were miseducated in the greatest class struggle in Britain during the 20th century. It also made sure that all those new people brought around the Communist Party because of the individual work of its militants — the Communist Party rank and file were invariably the most dedicated and hardworking members of the local strike committees — were also miseducated.

The role of a Marxist party is to be the *historic memory of the workers' movement* and it has to examine objectively, and it need be ruthlessly, its mistakes. At every big turn and change in its existence it needs to draw a balance sheet of its past work. This is the way it learns from its mistakes and prepares for the future. The Communist Party could never draw up a true balance sheet of its work and activity immediately prior to, and during, the General Strike because to do so would have shown that it put its loyalty to the Soviet bureaucracy above the waging of the class struggle.

The trade union bureaucracy had put its loyalty to the constitution, and all the paraphernalia of British bourgeois democracy above the interests of the working people. At great cost to the miners in particular, the labour movement in general, and to all the working class for many years to come, the Strike had demonstrated the need for the workers movement, along with its allies, to build organisations and parties that put the interests of the anti capitalist struggle above all other considerations. Without that happening, we shall have repeats of 1926 over and over again.



All photographs in the supplement courtesy of Judy Groves

hours a week on top of the basic week remains the norm for most men working in manual jobs in Britain because of the low wages paid if those hours are not worked. Thus not only the gap in hourly pay has to be taken into account but also the enormous difference in hours worked outside the home each week.

Self-employment is also on the rise in Thatcher's Britain. Not self-employment to launch successful small businesses, but the growth of casualisation of cleaning and catering work, with its low wages, few benefits and lack of job security. In 1979, 600,000 workers were employed like this; temporary and fixed-term contract work is on the increase as well.

Nor has the much heralded new technology brought interesting, better paid work to women: new office hierarchies are being created which place women in repetitive jobs in the lowest grades. According to recent surveys, women just do not have the necessary 'promotional characteristics' — post-entry qualifications, an unbroken service record, geographical mobility — to take advantage of the new administrative and managerial opportunities, or to gain access to high-level training in computer science. VDUs are even being set up in the home to rake huge profits off women, many of whom are black or disabled and are tied to young children in their own homes.

Given the large numbers of women in waged work and the gender segregation in employment, employers seek not to shed female labour but to substitute female labour on a part-time, casual basis for male labour on a full-time, permanent basis, as part of their response to the economic crisis. In carrying through the restructuring and lengthening the dole queues, the employers are deepening the segregation of the workforce on the basis of gender as well as of race and age.

Women now have greater access to employment than at any time since the industrial revolution (other than the war years). With improved control over their fertility, more women are choosing to go out to work to gain economic independence. But their access to paid employment is limited to the lowest paid, least-skilled jobs with the worst promotion prospects, and it is getting harder for women to escape the female employment ghetto.

A fresh look at Engels

What are the implications of these new features of the employment pattern of female workers for the predictions Engels made about the basis for women's liberation? 'The first premise for the emancipation of woman', wrote Engels in *The Origins of the Family, Private Property and the State*, 'is the reintroduction of the entire female sex into public industry; and this again demands that the quality possessed by the individual family of being the economic unit of society be abolished.'

Too often, feminist critics have reduced Engels' statement to a banality. Heidi Hartmann, for instance, says that the early Marxists argued 'that capitalism would abolish sex differences and treat all workers equally' in her essay 'The Unhappy Marriage of Marxism and Feminism'.

The problem with Engels' statement, however, is that while the family has *not* been abolished as the economic unit of society, women *have* been integrated into the workforce. The patriarchal family has structured the options in women's lives and their position in the labour market. As a strategic goal, Engels' challenge to the family remains valid, but it is inadequate in answering the debates of the feminist movement on solutions for the struggle to end women's double exploitation.

More attention must be paid by the Marxist movement to the issue of the unpaid domestic labour that women perform in the home. Men absent themselves from domestic labour partly because it is conceived of as women's work and partly because of the long hours that men work. Demands for a shorter working day can begin to challenge the sexual division of labour in the home; paternity leave does the same.

But it is crucial that, within the framework of achieving the goal of the socialisation of domestic labour, demands are articulated which make it clear that men must share and not abrogate these responsibilities. The socialist movement has given support to programmes for positive action in training and employment for women, but it has been slow to tackle the

questions raised by feminists about domestic labour. This is one of the reasons why the women's movement has always put such stress on the fact that women *do* work in the home and that they produce use-values there that go unrecognised and unrewarded by a male-dominated society.

The response of labour leaders

There have been numerous struggles by women workers over the last two decades — and specifically under the Tory government — for equal pay, against low pay and in defence of women's jobs. There was a huge response from female trade unionists, particularly in the public-sector manual unions, when the TUC sponsored a demonstration in October 1979 against the John Corrie anti-abortion bill. There have also been consistent campaigns by women workers to make the unions more representative of women. The recruitment of women workers has prevented a *dramatic* decline in trade union membership of the kind experienced during the 1930s. (Nevertheless, according to the latest figures, over a seven-year period trade union membership has fallen by 2.2 million.) Despite women's pressure from below, however, the conservative leaders of the

'the patriarchal family has structured women's lives and their position in the labour market'

unions in Britain have failed to halt the employers' offensive and have proved incapable of producing a strategy to challenge the institutional divisions the employers are attempting to drive through the labour movement.

The initiative within the trade union movement, with the exception of the miners' strike, has lain with the right-wing leaders of the FTUWU and the AUEW. They have been allowed to plough ahead with their single union, no-strike deals that they defend in terms of the 'realities' of modern capitalism. The employers have consequently been given the green light to go ahead and walk over the more vulnerable sections of the workforce: if you accept the logic of Thatcherism, you cannot solve the problems of the most oppressed sections of the working class.

As each group of workers has moved into struggle against the Tories, the TUC has come behind them — not to support, but to get them back to work. Such misleadership by the TUC has produced a crisis of political perspective not only in the trade unions but in the movements that were allied to them, in this case the women's liberation movement. The unity and consensus among women in the 1970s around the first four demands of the women's liberation movement has gone forever. (Even that unity was rather tenuous as it avoided the specific demands of lesbians and black women.) Today, the women's liberation movement is fragmented: it is no longer one, organised national movement.

New forms of organisation by women

However, while the organised feminist movement fragmented, the cadre of the feminist movement remained active: and the ideas of feminism penetrated ever more deeply into the consciousness of the mass of women. This was graphically demonstrated with the birth of the women's peace movement and the Women Against Pit Closures during the miners' strike, and the support these campaigns received from thousands of women. The 1983 election results confirmed that a gender reversal had taken place in voting patterns: more women than men were now voting against the Tories. Unfortunately, the Labour Party only attracted half of the anti-Tory vote among women; nevertheless, this confirmed that women, exploited at work and bearing the brunt of the cuts, were moving to the left.

Socialist feminists began to address themselves to the labour movement's complacency over women's issues by challenging its domination by men. An entry project took place into the women's sections of the Labour Party. Quite spontaneously, from 1980 onwards, women started to join the



Carlos Augusto Guarnita Rex

party to try and feminise it. This project was linked to the Bennite revolt against the Wilson/Callaghan record in government which called for the leaders of labour — and the Parliamentary leadership of the Party — to become accountable to the ranks of the movement.

Women, led by the Labour Women's Action Committee, quickly won the case for positive action and greater representation among women. Left Labour administrations locally also responded, in most cases, by establishing women's committees. It was to prove a much harder battle to convince the men on the

'The unity around the first four demands of the women's liberation movement has gone forever'

NEC and the main trade union leaders, who wielded the decisive conference votes, that they should give way to women.

This brings us to discuss what solutions are now necessary. Feminists in the Labour Party are confronted by a leadership moving further to the right each day. How can we fight for a policy that really tackles institutionalised discrimination against women at work and in society?

Some false starts

The blank wall that women have usually come up against encourages support for the idea that it is not a problem of confronting the male bureaucrats but men in general. Bea Campbell has developed this idea since her first articles on a feminist incomes policy in *Red Rag* in the late 1970s. Her solution is simple: take from the privileged males and give to the underprivileged females.

Campbell's approach falls neatly in line with the arguments of the centre, right and now 'left' leaders like Ron Todd, who say Labour's *only* chance of power lies in an agreement that puts jobs and low pay above incomes. The experience of Labour's

'social contract' of 1974-79 is pushed under the carpet. The position of low paid workers deteriorated, the gap between women's and men's pay widened and unemployment rose dramatically, because the labour leaders agreed not to challenge the priorities of capitalism in crisis.

Sections of the Marxist left have responded to Bea Campbell's ideas by rejecting feminism itself. This is clear with the *Militant* tendency but, with the closure of *Women's Voice*, it is also now the case with the SWP. In the name of Marxist orthodoxy (which they misrepresent) these groupings recruit women because of the general radicalisation only to inoculate them against the ideas of 'middle class feminism'. Inevitably, this also encourages feminist women to turn away from Marxism.

Three areas therefore seem important for the attention of the feminist wing of the hard left if the employers' offensive and both reformism and false orthodoxy are to be countered: policy; self organisation; and mass action initiatives.

A Ministry for Women's Rights

Jo Richardson has circulated a discussion document on the work of a new Ministry for Women's Rights. It argues that Labour's commitment on women's rights must be central to our next General Election Manifesto and must have the full backing of the leadership. 'Modelled on the French example and the GFC experience, the document demands a new high-powered Ministry with representation in the cabinet. Richardson proposes new equality legislation, a minimum wage; free childcare for all three- and four-year-olds; an end to discrimination in social security benefits; abolition of the married man's tax allowance; reduction of the male retirement age to 60, and a more flexible working week with shorter working days and better paid parental leave.

Much of this will be welcomed by women, but there are omissions and areas of concern. Labour and trade union policy on fertility control and abortion rights is completely left out. No positive action programme on employment is laid out which would compel employers, through quotas, to hire women and



Women organised autonomously during the miners' strike

ethnic minorities. The introduction of the minimum wage appears dependent on TUC agreement. The provision of day-care for three- and four-year-olds only is inadequate. The proposal for a shorter working day is good, but what about pay levels? And how is job segregation to be tackled if no quotas in training and employment are called for. Above all, the

'how is job segregation to be tackled if no quotas in training and employment are called for'

references to 'support' from the party leadership and 'adequate resources', when Kinnock is doing his utmost to re-assure capitalism that he isn't going to implement Clause 4, seem unduly optimistic.

A fighting strategy

We need an offensive strategy against the employers in order to roll back gender segregation in employment. Such a strategy would have to have totally different priorities from those of the capitalist class. To create jobs and resource welfare services, we need to have a maximum wage as well as a minimum one; we need a wealth tax and control of the banks and finance houses to stop capital fleeing the country. Feminists much turn their attention to the debate on economic policy to make Labour tackle women's oppression effectively and ensure that our demands aren't ignored by the left.

Secondly, as the majority vote by Labour MPs in favour of Powell's embryo rights bill clearly expressed, the Parliamentary

leadership remains committed to ignoring what women and the Party want. Similarly, trade union bureaucrats voted down the NEC recommendation at last party conference to put at least one woman on every shortlist. This year's Labour Party women's conference will elect a shadow slate of women for the five places on the NEC. The left must campaign for this slate to make the case, not only for women to choose women, but for the trade union block vote to be democratised. This will give WAC an opportunity to establish strong links with women activists in the unions — an opportunity missed during the miners' strike, because most of WAC's leaders have been too keen on waiting for crumbs from Kinnock's table.

Finally, the left must continue to participate in the initiatives and debates of the feminist movement, arguing for a presence on the streets to counter the backlash against the gains in sexual freedom and women's rights won in the late sixties and early seventies. The offensive against women controlling their own fertility is growing, and the mobilisation against some of these attacks must be stepped up. The new reproductive technology is being used against the interests of women in the case of surrogacy. The institutionalisation of pornography as a central feature of mass culture is offensive to women, and the left — which has opposed censorship — has to work out alternatives.

The political crisis on the left has produced an internalisation of all sections of the movement as the inspiration of 1968 and the hopes of the Bennite revolt of 1981 have faded away. The left cannot afford to turn its back on women or the debates of the feminist movement for women will play a central role in the political recomposition now taking place in the labour movement because of their increasing participation at all levels. That is the new reality, and the left has to come to terms with it in every aspect of political debate.

From dutiful daughter to fearless feminist

Simone De Beauvoir, 1908-1986

Simone de Beauvoir died in March this year. **JUDITH ARKWRIGHT** pays tribute to the woman who, with the publication of her book *The Second Sex* in 1949, laid the foundation for the modern women's liberation movement.

THE MAIN characters in Simone De Beauvoir's first novel, *L'Invitée*, written in 1943, are women. Six years later, in 1949, she published *The Second Sex*, the book in which she challenged the whole female condition. So it is as a fighter for women's rights and a feminist that she will be chiefly remembered.

Her death on 14 April at the age of 78 brought tributes from feminists all over the world and 5,000 people, mainly women, turned out to her funeral procession in Paris to pay their respects.

Across the political spectrum everyone was claiming that her contribution through *The Second Sex* was more important and more lasting than all the philosophical works of her life-long companion, Jean Paul Sartre. When the book was published, though, it provoked a great deal of hostility from some quarters. And well it might, for with tremendous vision De Beauvoir had set out,

'De Beauvoir embodied the fearlessness by which the women's movement is characterised'

almost twenty years in advance, the main ideas upon which the women's liberation movement was to stand.

The principal arguments in the book were new and shocking (and are by no means accepted today). She explained that the majority of women have always been excluded from running the world and have been denied an autonomous existence. Cultural myths have been perpetuated to back this up and regenerate the subjection of women through generations. The family and marriage are oppressive institutions. Taboos and absence of sexual freedom are also the results of this. The position of women is not given but comes from society itself; in the famous phrase from the book, 'We are not born women, we become it'. The book ends



on the notion that since the idea of 'eternal feminine' is nothing but a trap, nothing is pre-determined and *everything is possible*.

When she wrote the book, De Beauvoir claimed that it was not meant to be an agitational or propaganda work and confessed herself 'perplexed' at the hostile response even from some of her closest collaborators.

When the women's movement did finally emerge De Beauvoir embraced it with open arms for it gave true meaning to what she had written. She praised that movement because 'it wanted to act without waiting'. And this is the key to De Beauvoir's contribution. From her books there is a sense of this being the age of woman. Once you reject the notion of womanhood as given and static, then everything and anything does become possible and women can act. Of course existentialist themes are brought in but these do not contradict a Marxist and feminist strategy in this context. Women are objects, according to De Beauvoir, and they must become subject and object, they must transcend their position through action.

De Beauvoir's female characters are not victims, they act. Sometimes they act blindly and mistakenly and in great solitude and isolation but they change and develop. *The Woman Destroyed*, published in 1968, shows most clearly the search for feminism in day-to-day life. In an interview with Francis Jeanson published by Gallimard in 1966, De Beauvoir had already explained how she saw feminism as 'a way of living individually and a way of fighting together'.

In this regard De Beauvoir embodied the fearlessness by which the women's movement is characterised. No subject was taboo for her, including her long standing relationship with Sartre. The *Letters to Castor* published after his death reveal, of course, that the couple's theory of contingent and main relationships favoured his needs more than hers and must have caused her some pain. But whatever the successes or failures De Beauvoir continually strived in public and in her private life to reject the institutions of marriage, the family and given womanhood.

From 1968 onwards political activity became more and more important for De Beauvoir. With a small group of women she publicly declared that she had had an abortion when it was illegal in France. During the Algerian war she spoke up not only against the war but in support of the

'When the women's movement emerged De Beauvoir embraced it with open arms'

NLF and, along with many others some of whom lost their jobs and livelihoods, was banned from the media as a result. In 1974, she founded the Mouvement du Droit des Femmes and was closely involved in drawing up legislation with the ministry for women's rights, established by the Socialist Party in government. (The new government of the right have abolished this ministry and instead set up a ministry for the rights of man!)

Finally, what Simone De Beauvoir offers us as feminists and as socialists is hope. At a time when the forces of reaction seem to be on the offensive and contemporaries of De Beauvoir have renounced their left-wing or feminist past (as is the case with Betty Friedan, author of another seminal work of the women's movement, *The Feminine Mystique*), she remained a feminist and a socialist to the end. This is testimony itself to the fact that the women's movement will carry on and will not die.

Appreciations of De Beauvoir came from across the political spectrum in France including from Prime Minister Jacques Chirac, who claimed that her death marked the end of an era. As feminists we know how wrong he is. What De Beauvoir stood for will not be buried with her. Her writing and her activity in life marked the end of an era — the beginning of the end of male domination.

Wapping assault

As we go to press the printworkers continue to fight for their jobs. DAVID JONES looks at the negative consequences of the print union leaders' 'sweet reasonableness' in their conduct of the strike.

MAY DAY demonstrations, organised to support the sacked printworkers, erupted into violence as the police ran riot at Wapping. Even the normally cautious Brenda Dean was heard to denounce the police for their vicious attacks on the pickets, their families and supporters. Yet despite the genuine outrage voiced by Dean, the print unions were back in court that very week to purge their contempt. This act was almost symbolic of the 'softly-softly' approach adopted by the print union leaderships in the vain hope that this would curry favour with 'public opinion'. It is precisely this approach which sees the print unions staring defeat in the face.

The possibility of such a defeat would have been inconceivable five years ago. The mighty print unions seemed impregnable, with massive financial reserves and the strength to force the Fleet Street managements to accept high wages and restrictive practices. Yet now they seem about to allow a multinational media baron to chuck them unceremoniously out of 5000 jobs and recognition rights on key daily and Sunday titles, in return for miserly compensation and a worthless, uneconomic printing plant.

This sorry state of affairs is another blow to the labour movement as a whole, still reeling from the defeat of the miners. Whatever brave face may be put on the eventual 'deal' with Murdoch, it will be a major defeat. It is clear that the bottom line for Murdoch is refusal to grant recognition rights to the NGA & SOGAT in the Wapping plant or to take back any of the militant workforce that have been sacked. The result has already been felt throughout Fleet Street with each management in turn imposing drastic cuts in the workforce, the introduction of new technology and an end to traditional work practices. Each workforce has felt powerless to oppose their employer, fearing that walking out on strike would mean walking out for ever.

The carrot dangled in front of the print union leaderships is the 'gift' of the Grays Inn Road printing plant to start their own paper. But without massive investment or subsidy, such as News International could provide if it so

wished, any labour movement paper produced from the plant, especially one born from such inauspicious conditions, would be bound to falter. The union management would end up sacking its own members and the whole idea of a labour movement paper be discredited in the process.

Needless to say the most keen on the idea of the union selling out their members in return for the plant has been the Labour leadership. Kinnock's office immediately issued a statement cautiously welcoming the idea, when even TUC chief Norman Willis had attacked the notion. Such an approach is entirely consistent with the Labour leadership's 'support' for the print unions over Wapping. This has been as unstinting and inspiring as the 'support' given to the miners strike. Labour has a



sorry record on the media. Instead of campaigning for its stated policy of breaking up the media monopolies, the Labour leadership kept silent when Robert Maxwell launched his bid for the Mirror. A press statement from Kinnock's office attacking the bid was abandoned after pressure from Hattersley and a 'phone call from Maxwell. Maxwell has returned the favour by vicious campaigns against the party's left wing, and of course numerous sackings, lockouts and threats against his workforce.

The Labour Party's wretched role in the Wapping dispute was not entirely unexpected, nor was the capitulation of the TUC. Faced with the open connivance of the EETPU leadership in Murdoch's union-bursting operation the only serious defence of the union movement would have been to expel the EETPU from the TUC, and if necessary organise those loyal to the TUC into a new affiliated union. There is evidence that the EETPU leaders were not fully prepared for expulsion from the TUC, fearing a revolt in their own ranks and a damaging split with their other

right wing allies in the TUC. It is possible that such a move would have influenced the balloting in the AUEW elections against the right's candidate Bill Jordan, possibly further isolating the EETPU in the labour movement. But the principle of unity of the union apparatuses was placed above the principle of basic union solidarity in struggle, and the EETPU has been given further breathing space to foster business unionism within the TUC.

More disappointing has been the pathetic response of the print union leaderships to the dispute. Years of inter-union bickering and job-poaching had weakened the potential for a united response to the Murdoch gauntlet. His heavy-handed style of threats and sackings was a public relations gift to the print unions, whose public image was somewhat tarnished by the legendary wages and conditions on Fleet Street. Yet their obsession for staying within the law and sweet reasonableness resulted in the central tactic of a boycott of Murdoch titles. This has been a complete failure, with some titles actually registering an increase in sales since the dispute began. Alternative approaches of encouraging broad labour movement mass pickets, or drawing in the rest of Fleet Street have been dismissed and discouraged. No one would pretend that the latter course of action would have been easy given the climate of fear amongst other Fleet Street workers. But a determined campaign for escalating solidarity action from the union leaderships would have generated much greater confidence than the empty calls to stop reading *The Sun*.

Now another traditional bastion of the trade union movement stands on the verge of defeat, as a ruthless employer threatens it with naked class warfare. Union leaders will no doubt conclude that even greater capitulation to the employers is the only answer. Others in the labour movement will draw the opposite conclusion and begin to organise within the unions for an equally ruthless class response against the employers. Meanwhile with the print unions weakened we can look forward to our daily newspaper diet being served up by ever fewer and more powerful press barons freed from any pressure from their workforce over media standards and impartiality. We can expect more *Gotcha's*, *Mein Fuhrer's* and *Thrilled to Blitz's* and more anti-union press crusades. We must make sure that any future Labour government not only repeals the Tories' anti-union laws which have been used against the print unions, but also takes radical measures to reform the media itself.

Just how far rightwards is *Marxism Today* prepared to go? The evolution of Britain's two-bit 'eurocommunist' sect would be irrelevant were it not for the support for their pernicious ideological 'innovations' in wide sections of the labour movement. **PHIL HEARSE** looks at the issues.

MARXISM TODAY has become a by-word in the labour movement for putting forward right wing ideas as a new and 'creative' strategy for the left. Typically *Marxism Today* has polemicised not only against far left groups like the SWP, but also against a whole range of left wing forces, including Eric Heffer and Tony Benn, the Campaign Group of MPs, Arthur Scargill and the NUM leadership and others.

But *Marxism Today* writers have often been coy about the precise political conclusions of their analysis. In some of Eric Hobsbawm's articles it has seemed that a coalition with the SDP was being advocated, and indeed *Marxism Today* recently carried an article by Mike Rustin which explicitly advocated such a course. Now it has begun to spell out the consequences of its ideas for the trade unions, in articles by John Lloyd (March '86) and Communist Party industrial organiser Pete Carter (April '86).

John Lloyd, a writer for the *Financial Times*, discussed the problems and opportunities for the trade union movement in the light of the print dispute at Wapping. Lloyd suggests that there is a straight choice facing the unions — either the road of Arthur Scargill and confrontation class struggle or, alternatively, the road of Eric Hammond and the FEPTU — what Lloyd calls 'market based trade unionism'. The strong implication of Lloyd's argument, since he makes it very clear that he regards Scargill-style class struggle as an unmitigated disaster, is that the trade union movement has no alternative but Hammondism with all that it entails. Lloyd adds that since Kinnock wants innovation and efficiency on the Japanese model, then there is no alternative to Japanese-style trade unionism as well — business unionism. He says:

'In embarking on a productivist crusade whose slogan is efficiency, productivity and output, and whose role model is the Japanese, Kinnock... will need as an indispensable, but far from sufficient condition, a collaborative style of industrial relations which — as the Japanese one seems to do — subordinates nearly all economic needs to the needs of the company, and above that, to the needs of the country.' (p.16)

This may well be the logic of Kinnockism, but is it the position of *Marxism Today*? Indeed it seems almost obscene for a journal which claims to be Marxist to publish, at the



The miners' strike created a real broad popular alliance

Marxism Today's 'New Axis'

height of the print dispute, an article which appears to suggest that Hammond and the FEPTU have the only viable way forward.

Evidently fearful of this, CP industrial organiser Peter Carter weighs in to give Lloyd's ideas a vaguely left gloss in the next issue. No, says Carter, Hammondism and Scargillism are not the only viable alternatives: there is a 'third way'. This third way between the right and the ultra-left is 'the broad left of British politics'. This group, which has 'an urgent need to assert itself' includes the Labour Co-ordinating Committee, and a host of personalities like Bickerstaffe, Sawyer, Knapp, Livingstone and Blunkett. This group is central to winning the central ground of the labour movement.

This broad left, according to Pete Carter constitutes a 'new axis' against the ultra-left which includes the 'Militant tendency, the Campaign group of MPs, the Communist Campaign Group and the *Morning Star*' — an ultra-left coalition which has 'no concept of broader alliances outside the labour movement'. Carter suggests that the broad left of which he talks will have the quality of 'generating popular struggles'.

No doubt Carter's idea of creating a 'third force' against the hard left and the extreme right of the labour movement is one which many, including the Tribune group of MPs, the new-style *Tribune* newspaper and even Neil Kinnock himself might agree with. But our objection to it is not basically that; our objection is that putting this third force forward as a viable grouping to lead the movement in a socialist direction (we assume

that Carter wants some sort of socialist direction) lacks any basis in facts. Indeed it contradicts all known facts about the forces he names and the way in which ideas and consciousness develop in the labour movement.

Let's take the question of generating popular struggles. Does Carter seriously think that the Labour Co-ordinating Committee, Tom Sawyer, Rodney Bickerstaffe *et al* are genuinely interested in 'generating popular struggles'? The LCC, being faithful supporters of Kinnock, want to close down popular struggle in order to concentrate on electoralism. Bickerstaffe, Sawyer and Knapp will run a mile from the first sign of struggle among the members of their respective unions. And Ken Livingstone helpfully suggested recently, in an interview with *Marxism Today* writer Bea Campbell, that the hard left in the Labour Party should be shot. He and Blunkett are two of the main people responsible for heading off the struggle against rate capping.

It might also seem a little bit strange to Carter, if he thinks about it, that the most gigantic popular struggle in Britain in recent years was led not by the motley crew of his 'third force' but by the 'hard left' ultras round Arthur Scargill!

The miners' strike is worth pondering on. It created the broadest popular alliance outside the labour movement and the trade unions seen in recent years. It involved an alliance of political parties, tens of thousands of women, whole communities, hundreds of support groups encompassing people from

every walk of life. This was *par excellence* a broad alliance stretching beyond the trade union movement. This was not because Scargill is a strategic genius, but because the struggle and the alliance were indissoluble. The alliance was created by the exemplary character of the fight put up by the miners, its obvious justice and moral superiority over the government, and the fact that the miners, unlike so many sections of the 'broad left', were actually prepared to raise the banner of struggle against the Tory government.

The miners' struggle also involved an openness to support from other sections of the community, including womens groups, lesbian and gay groups, and black organisations, which was very far from the insinuations of sectarian narrowness and crude workerism which *Marxism Today* makes about the very large group of people in Britain it calls the 'narrow, sectarian left'.

Since Carter mentions Sawyer, Knapp and Biekerstaffe, it is worth making the point that only the NUM leadership has voted in favour of black sections in the Labour Party, while Carter's 'broad left', so keen to make alliances, did not.

The thing which really unites the personalities listed by Carter as being the core of a third force is that they are all furiously accommodating to Neil Kinnock. This of course reflects *Marxism Today's* own accommodation to Kinnock. This accommodation has been signalled in two recent articles in the February 1986 issue: one by Michael Rustin advocating a coalition with the SDP/Liberal Alliance in the event of a hung parliament, and the other by Sam Aaronovitch saying 'goodbye' to the Alternative Economic Strategy — from the right.

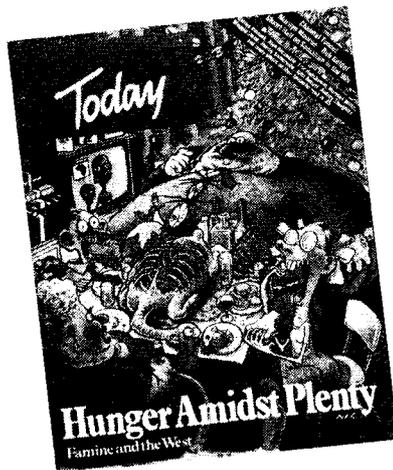
'there is a straight choice facing the unions: Scargill or Hammond'

Rustin takes the same line as Anthony Barnett in a recent *Guardian* article — that Labour should be a bit tougher in the policies it puts forward in order to be in a better bargaining position when the time to create a coalition with the Alliance comes. Such a coalition is advocated as much superior to 'glorious opposition'.

Rustin's strategy, again not contradicted by *Marxism Today's* editors and echoing a series of articles suggesting coalition, is hopelessly utopian. What on earth moves Barnett and Rustin to imagine that the Alliance will be in the slightest bit prepared to take on board any radical, anti-capitalist elements from Labour's programme if a coalition is formed? Surely the price for such a coalition would be the ditching of every last remnant of radical policies? The picture of messrs. Steel and Owen bargaining with Kinnock over which radical policies will in fact be implemented by a coalition is one of the least convincing scenarios to be dreamed up by even *Marxism Today's* broad range of contributors.

Sam Aaronovitch, one of the CP's key theorists of the AES during the 1970s, puts

forward a new economic strategy which makes significant concessions Kinnockite thinking. Stressing the limitations of what any Labour government could have the resources to achieve, he argues for the trade unions to police their own incomes policy; for 'investment and modernisation' without any measures of social ownership of industry or the banks; and for a 'reconsideration' of the left's opposition to the EEC. Space does not permit a detailed discussion of Aaronovitch's positions, but they obviously involve a sharp shift to the right on the positions on the AES defended by much of the Labour left and CP for the past fifteen



years. Compared with Aaronovitch, Andrew Glyn's *Million Jobs a Year* pamphlet published by the Campaign group of MPs looks like the last word in ultra-leftism on the economy (which is doubtless what Aaronovitch thinks it is).

The pro-Kinnock logic of what *Marxism Today* is now saying couldn't be clearer. On the one hand you have the bashing of the hard left as unrealistic and sectarian, on the other hand a stressing of the policy objectives of job creation and welfarism through investment in the existing structures of British capitalism. And on the international level you have, through Aaronovitch's explicit questioning of opposition to the EEC, and a thoroughly false analysis by Jon Bloomfield (*December '85* issue) that Europe is standing up to Reagan, a promotion of the 'European' option for British capitalism.

Despite Pete Carter's invocation of the 'broad left' of British politics, it is obvious that *Marxism Today* and through it the 'Euro' wing of the CP is expressing a marked shift to the right even in its own traditional positions. In fact they now occupy a political position well to the right of a really broad swathe of the British left. And let it also be said that in addition to providing the theoretical ammunition for a rightward moving section of the labour bureaucracy, their chosen allies — the LCC, the NUPE leadership and so on are among the leading witch hunters of the hard left in the Labour Party and the trade unions.

The agenda for the ever-more-right wing thinking of *Marxism Today* was set by Stuart Hall in his article 'Realignment — for what?' (*December '85* issue). Hall says that 'the ritual expurgation of the "hard left" is not

what realignment is all about'. Neither, he says, is it about supporting Kinnock. It is about making socialism more relevant to the era in which we live, and particularly to the realities of modern day Britain. This operates on a number of levels. One is the need to 'feminise' socialism. Another is recognising the constraints under which any Labour government would realistically have to operate. But most of all it is about creating the alliances which correspond to the real character of society today, and the workforce which actually exists. We have to break with a conception of socialist strategy which corresponded to a period when the majority of workers lived in nuclear families, worked in heavy industry, and lived in a period of capitalist boom and prosperity.

Stuart Hall knows as well as anyone I suppose that Marxists judge individuals and political currents not by what they say about themselves, or even what they think about themselves, but what they actually do. So one response to his 'manifesto of realignment' might be to say that, despite his protestations, *Marxism Today's* rightism is obviously about bashing the hard left and supporting Kinnock. But we can't leave it there, because the problems of making socialism relevant that he mentions are real ones. It's self-evident that there has been a recomposition of the workforce, with more intellectual labour, the rise of a new, and certainly not impoverished white collar proletariat. It's also true that the old nuclear family is no longer the pre-eminent and unique form of family of the working class. Likewise, the struggles of women, black people, lesbians and gays — and consciousness of their oppression — have become more central to socialist thinking.

These changes of course pose many challenges on the level of analysis and strategy for socialists. Above all they pose the challenge of building an anti capitalist alliance which can articulate the needs and

'bluntly, Stuart Hall is engaged in a con job'

demands of broad sections of the population who are neither industrial workers, male or white. All that is true. But what is not self-evidently true, and what amounts to a gigantic *non sequitur* in Hall's line of reasoning, is that such a reworking of socialist analysis and strategy leads to a slift to the right and to an endorsement of Kinnockite political themes.

To put it bluntly Stuart Hall is engaged in a con job. If you *define* the 'hard' left as inherently incapable of coming to grips with new realities, and you *define* the creative application of Marxism as moving to the right, that as sure as night follows day, that you arrive at the neat equation coming to grips with new realities — moving to the right, QED. The irony is that a Kinnock government, or a coalition, will have some rude shocks for anyone who wants to champion the interests of the oppressed. They'll have an awful lot of 're thinking' to do.

Why we left Socialist Action

The need for principled politics

The polemic below is published in response to an article in the 7 February issue of *Socialist Action* to which the editorial board of *International* asked for the right of reply.

THREE ISSUES of *International* magazine have appeared since October 1985. The magazine was launched by members of the editorial board of *Socialist Action*, who left the journal after differences had developed on a range of fundamental issues.

An account of these differences was given in the 7 February *Socialist Action* by James Francis. Francis claimed that *International* supporters' departure from the editorial board was due to tactical differences on such matters as whether a left candidate should have run against Neil Kinnock for the post of party leader and that our supposed accusation that *Socialist Action* were guilty of 'Stalinism' or 'proto-Stalinism' was merely a cover for our real reasons for leaving.

This account is as ludicrous as it is false. First we have never characterised *Socialist Action* as 'Stalinist'. Secondly, we have never proposed in any meeting of the left of the labour movement like the Labour Left Coordination or within the *Labour Briefing* editorial board or in the pages of *International* to support the running of a candidate for the post of Labour Party leader against Kinnock at this time. This is anyway of course a purely tactical decision.

Among those who left to launch *International* were a number of comrades who have been active for two decades in support of revolutionary socialist policies in the labour movement, including a majority of *Socialist Action*'s former editorial workers, design and layout workers. The idea that they would have suddenly decided to fold their tents and leave the editorial board of a paper which they had played a large role in actually launching and producing over questions of tactics should have made readers of Francis's article pause for thought.

The sad fact of the matter is that *Socialist Action* is no longer the paper it was when it was launched three years ago. Then it was a paper which declared its aim as fighting to unify the left in the labour movement around a line of class struggle, rather than class collaboration. At the same time it combined this line for unity with a patient explanation of revolutionary Marxist ideas drawn both from the history of our own labour move-

ment and from the experience of the world revolution.

It was a reasonably successful experiment. While the newspaper's sales never exceeded 6000, it drew a range of contributors into a serious debate on the future of the Labour left, and started a systematic polemic with the supporters of the ideas of *Marxism Today*, at that time developing its ideas of coalitionism. It aimed to involve its supporters in the life of the paper, and at that time could count on many hundreds of organised paper sellers throughout the country.

Today the number of sellers for the paper has declined dramatically. The paper, which was launched as a 16 page weekly, now is an irregular 12 pager consisting largely of reprinted material and lengthy articles written by John Ross under various *noms de guerre*. Just before the departure of the supporters of *International* the sales of the

'political and organisational factors lie behind the decline of *Socialist Action*'

paper were reported to the editorial board as having fallen to 1400.

A combination of political and organisational factors lie behind this decline.

In the first place the newspaper had radically changed its project of organising a united left on the basis of class struggle action in the labour movement. Its new position was most clearly spelt out in its 10 January issue. Under the headline of 'The paper the left needs', John Ross concludes that it is not *Socialist Action*. But the real interest of the article is its analysis of the left inside the labour movement.

The article divides up the left into what it called the 'Kinnockite left', the 'class struggle left' and the 'ultra left'. The article correctly castigates the 'Kinnockite' left for its capitulation in front of the Labour leader, and also notes the contradictory elements in the position of such figures as Ken Livingstone and David Blunkett.

The author has more problems in his definition of the 'class struggle' left, evidently from the nomenclature his preferred choice. As he confesses, he can't decide where to categorise the Militant tendency (nor in fact can he find the right slot for the *Morning Star* wing of the Communist Party, a rather more significant omission).

But he reserves his special ire for what he calls the 'ultra left' — who by definition are not class struggle forces. Ross singles out in

particular *Labour Briefing*, *Socialist Viewpoint* and *Socialist Organiser*. Neither is this list exhaustive. In previous issues it has also taken in tendencies outside the Labour Party, such as the Socialist Workers Party. Yet all these forces, whatever differences exist between them have systematically organised in support of the miners and other working class struggles.

Accusations are made against this current, in particular, that; 'Politically all accommodate to British imperialism to varying degrees'. Now those are familiar with the history of the international working class will know that you can't make a much more serious charge than that. The great crossroads of the working class movement in August 1914 turned precisely on this question. Such an attitude (social chauvinism) has always been the line which has marked the divide between reformism and revolutionary Marxism. But in Ross's schema all the far left currents accommodate to imperialism, while the honest left reformists who inhabit the 'class struggle' current do not!

Now until very recently *Socialist Action* was very prominent in *Labour Briefing*. Supporters of *International* still are. It is clear why *Socialist Action* has pulled out. To be in any way associated with what you consider accommodations to British imperialism would be intolerable to anyone who considered themselves a revolutionary Marxist. But of course this is not the real reason that *Socialist Action* has withdrawn from *Briefing* as we will explain.

But first we would propose an initial question to comrade Ross et al so that we can establish the ground on which we are debating; are the supporters of *International* part of this group which supposedly capitulates to imperialism? If we are, of course, there can be no serious basis for any reunification with *Socialist Action* or anybody else who holds such positions and the appeals from comrade Ross to rejoin are simply humbug.

But there is another aspect to comrade Ross's views which is very dangerous. As every commentator on recent events in the Labour Party has remarked, Neil Kinnock's efforts to drive out the left have a deadly logic. He first aims to isolate the *Militant* and expel their leadership and then proposes to deal with what has been called the 'patchwork' left, so-called because of their support for many different issues and campaigns on the left. He then proposes to move on to the hard left, in other words the time-honoured 'salami tactic' of slicing a powerful block into smaller slices.

Now the problem is that Francis, whatever his intentions, plays into Kinnock's hands on this count. The original project of *Socialist Action*, which remains that of *International* today, was to fight for the unity of the whole left in action, defending the struggles of the oppressed against the Thatcher government and, within that framework, fighting for socialist policies in the labour movement. At the same time, noting the proliferation of Marxist journals within the labour movement, we were in favour of encouraging the greatest possible unification process.

Ross cuts across both these important objectives. By erecting a schema of the divisions on the left, he militates against unity where it is most needed, an attitude reflected in the more and more disruptive tactics of *Socialist Action* supporters in united left bodies. In doing this *Socialist*

'To build unity against the Tories you have to fight against the Kinnock leadership'

Action plays into the hands of Kinnock and his Labour Coordinating Committee supporters who, as we have mentioned, have a similar analysis of the left.

Our attitude to unity on the left should be governed by the time-honoured united front approach of judging people by what they do, not on whether they belong to a category called 'ultra-left' or 'class struggle left'. We should be fighting for the unity of that whole left which supports the working class in struggle and fights for an alternative to the disastrous course in which Neil Kinnock is leading the Labour Party.

There is no contradiction between these two things as Ross would pretend there is. To build unity in the struggle against the Tories today you have to fight against the Kinnock leadership, as the miners' strike and what has happened in the amnesty campaign since has demonstrated so graphically. Furthermore you have to explain that is what you are doing to the many rank and file activists in the labour movement who supported Neil Kinnock's election as party leader and who are puzzled or demoralised by his violent switch towards the right.

Neither is there a contradiction at the level of the next general election between calling for a vote for Labour and explaining that unless an alternative left is built in the labour movement now which is ready to confront Kinnock, the experience will be an even greater disaster for the left than that of Mitterrand in France.

All this was evident even a year ago for the majority of the editorial board of *Socialist Action*. The fact of the matter is that the majority have, along with the general mood in the labour movement, taken a sharp and quite decided turn to the right in their politics. That is the reason that they avoid a direct clash with the Kinnock leadership and mouth platitudes about the main enemy

being Thatcher not Kinnock. That is also why they see the Marxist left, *Briefing*, as the main obstacle to their politics.

The swing to the right on domestic politics has its counterpart in *Socialist Action's* changed approach to international questions. In particular, with the new upsurge in South Africa, the now supporters of *International*, along with others, proposed to the *Socialist Action* editorial board that we should not only build support for the struggle of the South African masses and especially for the independent, non-racial trade unions in the British working class, but also we should explain that the victory against apartheid in South Africa could only be finally and definitely established with the overthrow of capitalism in that country and a socialist revolution.

There was not a majority on the editorial board for this view. Instead the largest current of opinion on the editorial board proposed that we should explain the necessity of a bourgeois parliamentary republic in South Africa under the leadership of the workers and peasants.

What eventually appeared in the paper was an editorial which took a halfway position between the two counterposed views, but with which the pro-parliamentary democracy current had no problems agreeing. This was only the last in a series of debates on the editorial board around central questions of world revolution.

Among the views put forward were those which can be properly described as Stalinist. In particular the view that the world today can be divided into two camps: the reactionary imperialist camp and the progressive anti-imperialist camp. This view, originated by the Kremlin ideologists, casts such reac-

'Among the views put forward were those which can be properly described as Stalinist'

tionary regimes as those of Khomeini, and Iraqi leader Sadaam Hussein as being in the progressive camp, because of past or present disagreement these regimes have had with US imperialism.

At the same time, in calling for unity of the 'anti-imperialist' camp, this view is antagonistic to, or plays down, the struggles of the working class and oppressed against such regimes. Not only that, but to maintain the unity of the 'progressive' camp, it is either openly hostile or fails to support dissident movements in Eastern Europe or the Soviet Union, even when, as in the case of Solidarnosc, these movements are based on defence of the workers own interests.

It is interesting that Francis leaves out of his account of Stalinism's essential features this world view of the Kremlin. Is it because it was one of the central debates in the *Socialist Action* editorial board over the last period? Contrary to Ross's view that none of the essential ideas of Stalinism are supported by anyone associated with *Socialist Action*

this one is, and by the largest current on the editorial board. Another such idea is the 'stagist' view of the revolutionary process in the semi-developed countries, again defended by this current in relation to South Africa.

Now it is not true that holding a 'campist' view of the world or a 'stagist' view of revolution makes you a Stalinist and contrary to what Francis says in his article

'editorial board meetings have been characterised by unprincipled blocs'

supporters of *International* have never made such a claim. However it does demand a fight against such views. And here we come to the real causes of the split.

None of the very substantial differences outlined above would necessarily lead to a split in a journal. However unity is conditional on being able to continue to seriously debate the issues in question. In the past *Socialist Action's* traditions have always been to urge freedom of discussion, but unity in action on the basis of a majority vote.

But instead of honest debate, the editorial board meetings have been characterised by unprincipled blocs, erosion of rights of democratic discussion and autocratic editorial decisions. Major articles have appeared in the paper without discussion on the editorial board. Editorial board members turned up to editorial conferences to be confronted with enormously long documents on which they were required to vote immediately. Worst of all the papers' supporters were never given the opportunity to express their opinion on the line of the paper that they toiled to sell. It is principled politics which has been the major casualty of the decline of *Socialist Action*.

It gives us no pleasure to record these events. In fact we would have preferred not to enter into a public discussion with *Socialist Action* and to try and sort out our differences without recourse to public polemics, which damage both journals. However the Francis article has given us no alternative but to ask for the right of reply.



'supporters would turn up to editorial conferences to be confronted by enormous new documents'

Narrow lapels



IAN HAWKINS

NOWADAYS, teenage kicks ain't what they used to be. When a young one's options are YTS or broke it's little wonder we want to look back to more cheery days. The search for nostalgia has fixed here on the late fifties: small-time, snob-

bish, Tony Hancock Britain where its teenagers create their own style and colour amidst the post-war drab.

Julien Temple's *Absolute Beginners* is crammed with the bric-a-brac of the day. Narrow lapels, cappuchinos, Vespas, Strand cigarettes — the trinkets have as leading a role as the characters. The film is based on Colin MacInnes's novel of the same name and has as its hero Colin, nineteen-with-a-Rolleiflex and out to enjoy the last year of his teens. Colin makes his money with his camera and is not particularly scrupulous about the photos he takes to do it. He is in love Crepe Suzette and spends his long, hot summer wandering the streets and jazz-dens of a vibrant if down at heel Soho.

It's a new and heady excitement that the film tries to capture. From the opening shot the camera makes giddy swoops through Soho's neon-drenched streets, music seeping from the alleyways. The pace and colour is non-stop all the way through to the closing race riots. Quite a spectacle but unfortunately a lot has been sacrificed to do it. For in the tumble of scenes very little is explained.

There are a host of celebrity appearances — Tenpole Tudor's hilarious Ed the Ted, Ray Davis as Colin's Dad, David Bowie as marketeer Vendice though the film hinges on these cameos and rather

loses sight of our teenager. In the novel Colin's carefree days are upset by the brutality of the Notting Hill race riots, by his horror at his friend Whizz turning out to be a fascist, the uncertainty of his romance with Suze and, very importantly by the death of his Dad. It's sad that this last relationship, written in such carefully measured prose as Colin tries to brush over the tangle of his emotions, has virtually been omitted from the film. For it ignores the thought that the heartache and creeping responsibilities of these events mark the end of Colin the teenager.

So what of the music? Colin loves jazz but despite arrangements by Gil Evans (whose name is usually preceded by the word 'veteran' like some old Bentley), there's actually very little of the stuff. Nattily-dressed but routine songs from the Style Council, Sade and Bowie don't distract from this omission. Except for Jerry Dammers's 'Riot City', the best is only snippets of Charles Mingus, Slim Gaillard's short appearance and some Evans' horn pieces, while Smiley Culture does something dreadful to 'So What'.

Air-brushed colour and furious dance there may be but with such little explanation of the motives and emotions that shape the story the overall effect is confusion. MacInnes's novel's sharp insight is lost in the hubbub of 1986-style image. It deserves a more thoughtful film.

Ran

DAVID GRANT KIER

RAN IS possibly one of the most interesting and thought provoking films that you could ever wish to see. Brilliantly crafted, it is in every sense of the word a great film — 'the sum of my life's work' according to its director, Akira Kurosawa, who is generally accepted to be the pre-eminent director of Japanese cinema.

Set in the civil wars that wracked sixteenth century Japan, *Ran*, which translates into English as 'Chaos', draws heavily on Shakespeare's *King Lear* for its inspiration. Studying the impact of a fateful decision taken by the great Lord himself, *Ran* unfolds a tragic tale of despair, madness and death.

A story that is rich in complexity and interest, despite the fact the whole audience is aware of the inevitable end that awaits the main characters, true to the style of the theatre of *la machine infernale*.

The critical error the great Lord Ichimonji commits is the division of his only recently unified domain between his sons. His regal disregard for the criticism of this course of action, proffered by the only son who truly loves and respects his father, seals his domain's fate, as well as his own destiny and that of those around him. His position as absolute ruler prevents him from accepting a more rational alternative to that of dividing his kingdom.

Scorning true loyalty and respect, he embraces the false praise that hides the corrupting ambition of his two eldest sons. Banishing his youngest son, Saburo, he undermines the possibility that his domain will be governed by a more just, rational, benign form of absolutist rule, under one enlightened ruler.

Civil war inevitably follows. Chaos breaks out as society is deprived of a central source of authority. Chaos also ranges in the mind of Lord Ichimonji. He is driven mad through defeat, humiliation and betrayal. The forces of destruction and vengeance sweep on, personified in the Lady Kaede's desire to avenge her

family's humiliation at the hands of the Ichimonji's.

The battle scenes conjure up the essence of the 'blind forces of history' unleashed by the great Lord Ichimonji's original sin. His transformation into a madman, lead around by a fool, the scheming and the dilemmas that absorb his friends and foes alike, really involve the audience in the whole experience of the film.

Hour-and-a-half into the film, Ichimonji has suffered every humiliation imaginable. Forced to rely on his fool and a blind man for company, he is a figure for whom we feel genuine sympathy and pity. With the return of his youngest loyal son, a possible resolution to the terrible conflicts opened up in Ichimonji's mind and kingdom presents itself. Saburo will save the great Lord through a combination of deft political negotiation with neighbouring warlords, and a demonstrative assertion of respect and loyalty to his father.

But fate has the final word yet to say. Kurosawa leaves us in no doubt that the fate of humanity, when it finds itself incapable of asserting rational thought

over misguided absolutism, is to blindly stumble towards the precipice. But is this a prediction of a fate Kurosawa believes to be born out of the human condition, and therefore inevitable, or a call for a rational intervention into the process of history to prevent such an outcome?

And what of the nature of this rational intervention? Kurosawa in a recent interview as much as admitted that *Ran* had

been 'taken over' by the message of *King Lear*. Now it is one thing for Shakespeare to advocate a benign form of rational absolutism as the answer to English society's problems in the early seventeenth century. But the transposition of this idea to twentieth century Japan is another matter entirely. What was historically progressive in Shakespeare's day is entirely reactionary under the con-

traditions currently facing Japanese capitalism.

It is the mark of a major film such as *Ran* undoubtedly is, that it should raise fundamental questions about the conditions of humanity and the great political and moral dilemmas that face us. *Ran* is a film everyone should take the opportunity to see.

Disillusioned with Mao

VERONICA HELD

I COULD NOT find out what Mao had for breakfast with Alan Winnington, but in reading Winnington's book, *Breakfast With Mao, Memories of a Foreign Correspondent*, I was reminded of the momentous influence of Maoism in making the greatest single breach in capitalism since the Russian revolution of 1917. The revolution, led by Mao Zedong and the People's Liberation Army, ended a century of imperialist intervention into China that had begun with the Opium War of 1840, and liberated a quarter of the world's population from capitalism.

The Chinese Communist Party was formed at a time when the whole Third International was already in the grip of Stalinism. Unlike the Russian revolution which was born in isolation, the Chinese revolution became a member of the 'Socialist Camp', with the USSR as its ally. Whilst the Soviet Union had to contend with the invasion of 14 capitalist powers, the Chinese, with the benefit of Soviet military aid, did not. China could also look to the Soviet Union for lessons in socialising the means of production, whilst the Bolsheviks took this course with no other revolution to turn to.

In China, the civil war with the bourgeoisie was waged before the revolution, whilst in Russia, it was carried out post 1917. The Chinese masses could therefore blame the Kou Min Dang for their misery, and saw the revolution as the conclusion to hostilities. The Bolsheviks had to fight the civil war as a ruling party and bear the brunt of the people's horror at the destruction caused by the war.

Despite the difference in revolutionary development, and especially the Maoist strategy of 'country to town', Maoism was always, and remains, thoroughly Stalinist. This aspect of Maoism is, unfortunately, avoided in Alan Winnington's book.

Breakfast with Mao is Winnington's autobiography, a life-long Communist Party member and one-time foreign

correspondent for the CP's *Daily Worker* in Beijing. He witnessed the closing stages of the Chinese revolution, entering Beijing with the People's Liberation Army (PLA) in 1949. He assisted Mao Zedong, Zhou Enlai and other leaders with press and information work, helping to set up the Yinhua News Agency. Gradually, however, he became openly critical of Mao's positions and disillusioned with the Chinese revolution.

Breakfast with Mao traces Winnington's early, working class life and rise through the ranks of the CP bureaucracy, to become a full-time press officer for the Party, prior to World War Two. When asked by Harry Pollitt, the then CP General Secretary to go to China as an advisor to the Chinese Communist Party's information services, he ecstatically agreed.

Smuggled into China via the Soviet Union on the trans-Siberian express, he describes on entering the country the state of the CP's forces after the defeat of Japan, and the precarious balance of power held by the nationalist Kou Min Dang troops and the People's Liberation Army led by the CPC.

He watched the CPC consolidate its power in the early 1950s. In Korea he exposed the British Government's support for UN action there — a mere cover-up for American atrocities. For this he lost his British passport, was dubbed a 'traitor' and subsequently remained stateless until he died.

After the Korean War he was posted back to Beijing, where he worked in the Chinese News Agency. He mentions Khrushchev's denunciations of Stalin at the Soviet Congress of 1956 but states: 'despite his errors which were terrible, and the cult of his person which he encouraged, Stalin had creatively applied and developed Marxism'.

Interspersed with clear statements of his thoroughly Stalinist world view, Winnington attempts to describe the vividness of Beijing before its cultural destruction during the Cultural Revolution unleashed



by Mao. He also begins to analyse the reasons for his growing disenchantment with the CPC which began after Stalin's death.

After publically attacking Mao's open war on the Chinese intelligentsia during the One Hundred Flowers Campaign of 1956, Winnington found his lectures on journalism at Beijing University 'cancelled'.

The rest of the book remains a personal tracing of Mao's near downfall. Winnington describes, but does not analyse, the challenge for leadership, launched by the defence minister Peng Dehuai in 1958. Dehuai favoured a modern army, sophisticated weaponry and close technical and military alliance with the Soviet Union.

After openly criticising Mao's positions, Winnington could no longer accept Maoism and was rejected as foreign spokesperson for China by the CP leadership. He ends inconclusively, with his exile from China to East Germany arranged by the British CP. This event, he states, coinciding with the death of Pollitt, was the end of an era. Which era, the Stalinist era or the Maoist version of it, remains unclear.

I cannot recommend this book for theoretical analysis of the birth of the Chinese Revolution. But if you want a gripping, lively and descriptive account of Beijing in the 1950s, Tibetan feudalism before Chinese intervention and a Stalinist's disillusionment with Maoism, then this is a book worth reading.

Alan Winnington, *Breakfast With Mao, Memories of a Foreign Correspondent*, Lawrence and Wishart.

Word Rhythms

PETE ROBERTS

AT A time of great debate and argument over education, class and language, the publication of two collections of poetry, *Because The Dawn Breaks* by Merle Collins, and *Word Rhythms From the Life Of A Woman*, by Elean Thomas, is an important event worthy of note for socialists. For if the interest in poetry in Britain is marginal, then perhaps this is because a poetic expression that is popular and recognisable to the majority has never been produced. Yet the writings that appeared during the British miners' strike indicate the presence of material born out of the experience of struggle though this is not still recognised as 'real poetry'.

Ken Worpole, writing in *New Left Review*, in reference to the poetry of Tony Harrison, notes that, 'the discourses of science and other technical languages, the discourses of state bureaucracies, have almost inflicted upon many people, a felt sense of inadequacy that drives them towards silence'. Silence certainly does not inhabit the poetry of Elean Thomas and Merle Collins, however, who are both very much in the tradition of African performance poetry.

I hate the system
Which sucks our blood
I will one day
with my people
Overthrow that system
I am a Black, African, Caribbean
Communist Woman
Elean Thomas

Elean was born in Jamaica where she is a writer and political activist. This collection of her work is a combination of poetry and short stories set in Jamaica, southern Africa, Cuba and Nicaragua.

Merle Collins, as a Grenadian, suffered the trauma of the American invasion, and expresses a close yet defiant understanding of the colonial mentality.

You use their words
to call
your sister
your brother
terrorist
learnt so well
the lessons of your conquerors
that now you, too
feel certain
you are too ignorant
to determine your destiny

So you welcome their invasions
echoing their words
you call their rape
deliverance . . .

Merle worked as a teacher and later as a research officer on Latin American affairs. She is presently a member of African Dawn, in London, a group whose work incorporates use of the traditional art forms of poetry, music and mime.

Benjamin Zephaniah and Linton Kwesi Johnson are more familiar to us, but the work of these two Black women deserves to become just as well known. These two books, which are highly recommended, are from Karia Press. This press, based in



the Black community in Hackney, has been established to publish works of history, poetry and linguistics, and novels to give expression to afro-caribbean culture and struggles. Read these works, but also order them for public libraries and book shops as Karia Press, without the backing of the money that the Maxwell's and Murdoch's of this world possess, will find it difficult to get the support that they so richly deserve.

Because The Dawn Breaks, Merle Collins and *Word Rhythms From The Life Of A Woman* by Elean Thomas published by Karia Press, BCM Karia, London WC1N 3XX.

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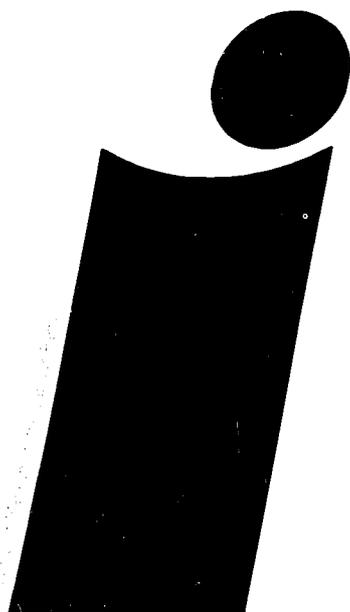
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