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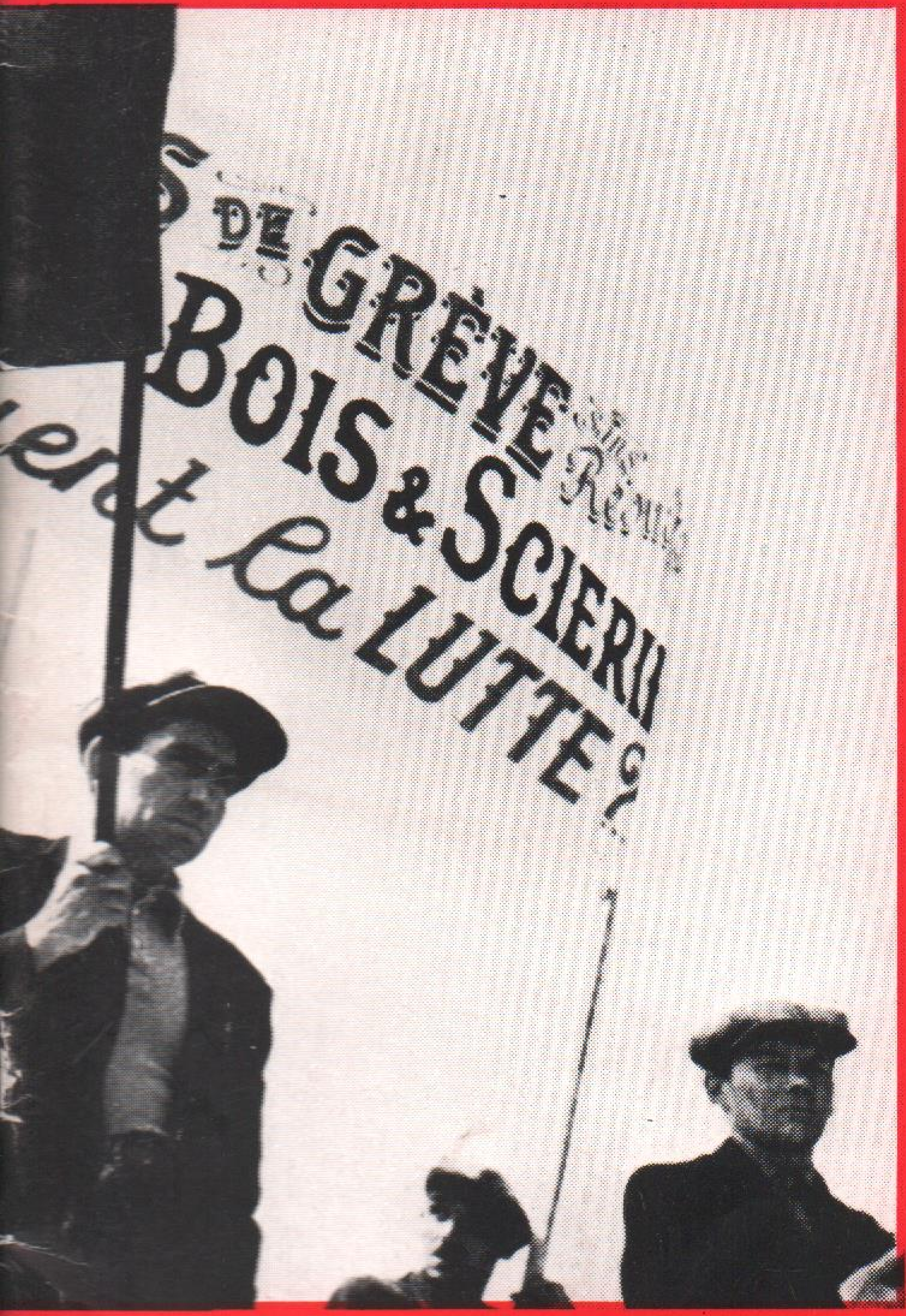


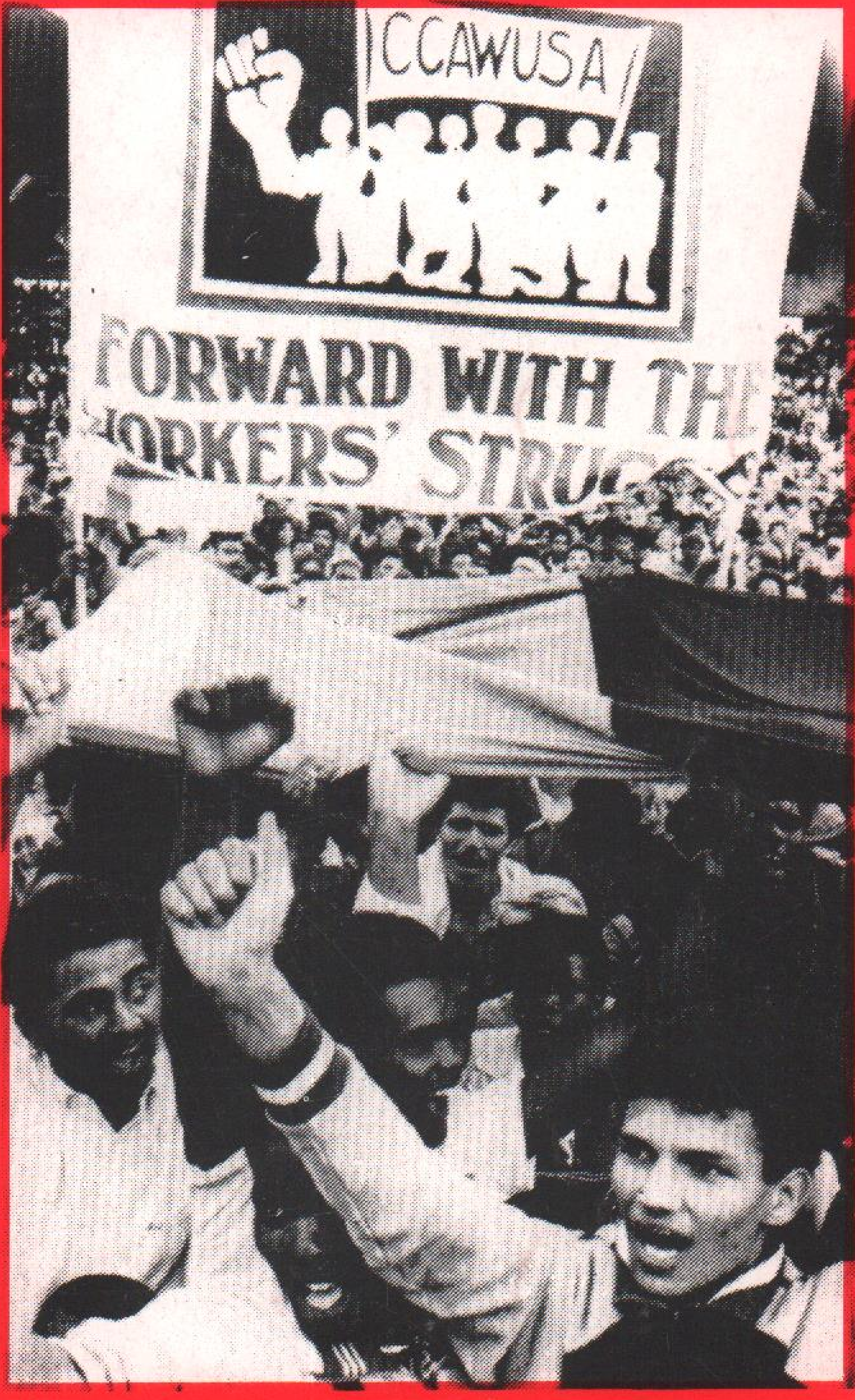


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**Permanent Revolution**
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# PERMANENT REVOLUTION
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theoretical journal of the **Workers Power** group

British section of the **Movement for a Revolutionary Communist International**


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# South Africa since the State of Emergency

## by Sue Thomas

IN RECENT MONTHS the apartheid state has stepped up its efforts to claw back the ground lost to the working class and liberation movements over previous years. Its onslaught, launched with the June 1986 State of Emergency, succeeded in pushing the trade unions, township and youth organisations onto the defensive; but after eight months, the regime could still not claim to have inflicted a decisive defeat on the mass movement.

The measures of the 16 June State of Emergency (measures which increase the Bonapartist character of Nationalist Party (NP) rule in South Africa) were forced on the regime by the revolutionary situation which confronted it. The reform programme of P W Botha was designed to head off the revolutionary situation by co-opting a layer of 'responsible blacks' into coming to terms with apartheid. Removal of forms of 'petty apartheid', eventually leading to participation in a fourth (black) chamber of a powerless parliament was the stated aim of Botha. Instead his tinkering with apartheid only served to spur on the masses to achieve a root and branch destruction of the apartheid state, beginning in the late summer of 1984.

The rebellion in the townships (the rent strikes, 'the peoples education' programme in the schools, the growth of the boycott movement) and above all, the formation and growth of the COSATU trade union federation induced panic in the ranks of the white rulers. In the first half of 1986 the strike movement reached new proportions with half a million days lost, the vast majority through the activity of the NUM and MAWU. All this led the *Financial Mail* to bemoan the fact that the country was 'sliding towards anarchy'. [1]

Faced with this challenge the Afrikaner whites began to desert the NP. Defeats in by-elections at the hands of the ultra-rightist HNP in turn gave way to the emergence of the fascist AWB leading dissatisfied white workers and petit-bourgeois, penetrating the armed forces and capable of disrupting the meetings of the NP itself.

So, using the planned activities around the anniversary of the Soweto massacre of blacks in 1976 as an excuse, Botha acted on 16 June 1986. A direct military coup proved unnecessary for the South African ruling class because of the ability of the apartheid state and its presidency to unleash massive repression. In the ensuing months the NP has succeeded in stemming the drift of support to the right, to the extent that Botha now feels confident enough to call a general election (for the whites only) for 6 May this year. Botha hopes that with a renewed mandate the Nationalist Party can begin again the process of reform. In this sense the State of Emergency did not signal the abandonment of this project but a necessary precondition for its acceptance by a layer of the black population. In the words of Jannie Geldenhuys, Chief of Defence Forces, the state of Emergency is *'a mechanism to create that measure of stability to carry on with the process (of reform) and not to get cold feet and say we've gone too far.'* [2]

Botha is intelligent enough to know that such a process of 'reform' is the only long term hope of the South African white imperialists to retain at least their economic domination of southern Africa. Behind the rhetoric of the 'retreat into the laager' Botha knows that a healthy South African economy depends on social stability of some sort; and that 450,000 members of the SADF, no matter how brutal and well armed can not permanently subdue seventeen million blacks. In the words of Joe Slovo 'they can occupy but they can't govern'. The white business community recognise this more than most and are in the vanguard of those who aim to tame the ANC through negotiating with it.

The South African economy is the weakest link in the imperialist chain. It has only had an average of one per cent per annum growth since 1981; unemployment is growing even among whites. Profitability of apartheid has fallen dramatically in the 1980's leading to an escalation of foreign companies halting new investment and even selling off their plant in SA (General Motors, Honeywell, Barclays, Xerox are just a few of the companies that have pulled out in the last year). While supplies and trade continue despite the change of ownership, nevertheless SA imperialism is becoming more and more narrowly based and increasingly dependent upon the fluctuations in the price of gold. To overcome these weaknesses in apartheid capitalism a political settlement, based on the success of the repression, is sought after.

## THE EFFECT OF THE REPRESSION

The brutal repression since June includes the detention of an estimated 25,000 individuals (about forty per cent youth) including in some cases whole shop steward organisations as well as key community leaders. Most of the detainees identify with the United Democratic Front (UDF), the legal front for the ANC. Alongside invasions of townships, the bulldozing of squatter camps to atomise the resistance of the 'comrades', the unleashing of vigilante forces, the black masses have suffered the occupation and closure of the schools and the torture and murder of many prisoners.

At the same time, the 'shadow government' of the National Security Management System has been strengthened and its scope increased. In this, the security services have a network which reaches down to the most local levels of government and right up to the cabinet. The country has twelve Joint Management Committees, 60 sub Joint Management Committees, and 324 mini Joint Management Committees. On these bodies, security staff are linked to both the South African Defence Forces (SADF) and the South African Police (SAP) together with various public officials. They co-opt local elected representatives through a variety of means, in particular specialist subcommittees such as the Political, Social and Economic Committees (SEMKOMs).

Reports surfacing in the Autumn of 1986, especially from Progressive Federal Party (PFP) Cape Town councillor Neil Ross and ex-PFP reformer Frederick van syl Slabbert, highlighted the way in which the system gathers information, relaying it up through the National Interpretation branch to the State Security Council and thus to the Cabinet. They also revealed that these Committees actively intervene in local affairs in a way designed to build confidence in the discredited local authorities. In this way they help to stop the advance of the 'alternative authorities', the street committees, Peoples Courts and so forth.

The hope of the National Party strategists is that these measures will be the backdrop against which it can usher in constitutional changes allowing 'multi-racial' local and regional government where representatives of each racial group can meet together, but power remain firmly in the hands of the existing rulers.

Despite the repression Botha has not suceeded in enticing a significant layer of 'compromisers' from among the blacks to do business with him. The propping up of the township councils, the recruitment of 6,000 council police with 10,000 more to come, the creation of specials or *kitskonstabels* and the unleashing of vigilante forces based on corruption in townships or squatter camps, none of these are likely to provide a substantial enough base to revive the strategy of the creation of an African middle class, the strategy which the black youth and women of South Africa so successfully halted with the township uprisings and organisation of 1985-6.

Whatever role Buthelezi and the 'homeland' leaders are playing in sponsoring inter-black violence, they still cannot come closer to Botha until the ANC is recognised and Mandela is released without risking being totally discredited. The reaction of big business and the imperialist bourgeoisies outside South Africa to the State of Emergency have served to enhance the role of the ANC and thus make any attempt to go around the ANC even less fruitful.

During the last eight months South African imperialism supplemented its measures at home with further economic and military pressure on the front line states. The second half of 1986 saw it with 20,000 troops engaged in keeping the lid on the Namibian resistance. It has retained its commitment to propping up UNITA in Angola and whether or not Pretoria was responsible for the death of Samora Machel, it had become increasingly open about its attempt to end the independence of Mozambique through economic pressure, including the expulsion of migrant mineworkers, and through sustaining the reactionary MNR.

## HOW SEVERE IS THE DEFEAT?

The State of Emergency has not resulted in a decisive defeat for the South African black workers. It is not comparable to the major blow that was delivered in 1960 at Sharpeville which ushered in a decade and a half of unrelieved repression and retreat. What the decree has done is first and foremost to isolate the struggles of the townships from those of the workers in the trade unions; it has stemmed for a period the growing interpenetration of those struggles. In fact one of the weaknesses of the union movement was that it was not able to prevent the action that was taken against the townships. However, the repression has not atomised the workers in the trade unions, not destroyed their capacity and willingness to engage in struggle.

Certainly the biggest blows have been felt in the townships and the squatter camps. The attacks on the radical squatter organisations in the Western Cape in fact preceded the State of Emergency and were in one sense a testing ground for it. The state was able to unleash *Witdoeke* led by the old Crossroads collaborationist leaders against the more radical forces in KTC and satellite squatter settlements. The success of this 'clean up' revealed the weaknesses in community defence, and once the Emergency was in force, there was no possibility of preventing the bulldozing of KTC.

The wide net of detentions also struck at that bastion of township resistance, the Uitenhage townshsip of Langa. Over the summer at least 10,000 residents were forced into temporary retreat and suffered the forced removals they had battled against for so long. This pattern has been repeated in many areas and has allowed the state to pusue its policy of 'orderly urbanisation', which allows for restrictions on movement without the pass laws.

One response to the Emergency was an increase in the large numbers of communities withholding rent. By August an estimated 300,000 households in thirty different black townships were on rent strike. But the police and defence forces scored a victory when they carried out evictions despite community resistence, notably in the Battle of White City in Soweto.

The schools boycott was ended in December and the new term has opened with severe restrictions on the curriculum and political activism. But even here resistance continues. Stay aways were reported as eighty per cent solid in the hometowns of three MK militants executed on the 8 September. As recently as 21 November 1986 over eighty per cent of Mamelodi township went on strike to observe the first anniversary of the thirteen murders of residents by the SADF.

Within the union movement the main effect of the repression has been to behead the organisation at the local level as well as encourage the reactionary elements to promote inter-black violence. The detentions and raids in June and July succeeded in severely disrupting organisation and communication within the unions. The Emergency also made conditions for negotiation on future mergers more difficult, for instance among the railworkers.

In Natal, the COSATU unions have been under attack from Buthelezi's Inkatha and its scab union, UWUSA. In particular, MAWU militants have been put under seige by vigilantes. At the end of November, however, it could still mobilise 7,000 in its Chesterfield stronghold for the funeral of murdered trade unionist S'nonso Mcunu.

Reactionary vigilante forces have also been at work in the mines, where they are able to take advantage of the separation of mineworkers from local townships, a separation encouraged by the hostel system. In and out of the mines, right wing gangs known as 'Russians' reappeared.

Nevertheless, the resilience of the trade union movement was revealed, first of all in the mass observance of the Soweto Day Stay Away immediately after the State of Emergency was declared. One and a half million workers struck. On July 14 tens of thousands of COSATU members struck against the detentions in the particularly well organised workplaces. Strike action and occupations took place in the distributive trades where trade unionists were able to carry on the fight despite the detention of the Commercial Catering and Allied Workers Union (CCAWU) executive. The state was forced to arrest 999 members of CCAWU at a Johannesburg dairy and hold them for two weeks before it could break the back of the first wave of resistance. Without doubt, however, the wave of political strikes had ebbed by late summer.

Other indications that the trade union movement had survived the first phase of the State of Emergency came in the miners' response to the tragedy at Kinross mine. Besides the Kinross miners take over of the bosses insulting memorial service, 300,000 miners obeyed the NUM's stay away call on the day of mourning, the biggest strike in the NUM's history. This action brought forth some sort of solidarity action in 56 out of 60 MAWU organised plants as well.

The Metal and Allied workers Union (MAWU) continued to hold together the majority of the 900 workers sacked by the BTR subsidiary, Sarmcol, in 1985 through concerted activity in the local community and organisation of temporary co-operative work. A long and bitter dispute continued in the Clover food chain. General Motors main factory was occupied when they announced withdrawal without consultation with the unions, and when the strikers were expelled, they maintained their strike for another two weeks before returning to work in the face of threats of dismissal and vicious attacks from the police.

At the end of 1986, the unions organised in COSATU had an estimated membership of 700,000; that is the federation had grown by 200,000 since its formation the year before, by a combination of existing unions joining and new members being recruited. Further mergers between unions had taken place, such as the Domestic Workers Association, and others were under discussion.

The apartheid state has not crushed the unions by any means. Now a new layer of leaders is being trained to deal with the situation. What has happened over the last months has tended to confirm the analysis we put forward in *Permanent Revolution* 4. [3] The struggles of the townships is not inexhaustable; it can be isolated and repressed. But at the same time precisely because the trade unions had not been in the front ranks of the political struggle against apartheid before June 1986, the mass of black workers have not experienced this State of Emergency as a crushing blow.

For the same reason the South African bourgeoisie has not solved its crisis of direction. Because the trade unions

*Searching lists of detainees*

represent the strategic threat to apartheid capitalism, and because this threat remains and is consolidating itself in important respects, the Afrikaner ruling class has not overcome its disarray. The resignation of the ambassador to Britain, Dennis Worrall, and the demand from some in the ruling Nationalist Party to talk to the ANC indicates the continuing pressure for 'reform', while the actions of the military self evidently indicate the demand for more repression. In addition the divided perspectives of the ruling class are well illustrated in the series of rulings by the judiciary which have seen detainess released or reporting restrictions lifted only then to find them countermanded by the executive.

We can still expect the government to lurch from 'reform' to repression and back. Over the last months the government has steadily increased the media censorship. We may well see more measures; the banning of the UDF, the outlawing of boycotts, banning of certain leaders. And we may see them precisely because the measures so far have failed to inflict enough of a defeat as to lower the political aspirations of the black population.

### THE ANC: PERSPECTIVES IN THE LIGHT OF THE EMERGENCY

In *Permanent Revolution* 4 we stated that:

*The opening of a revolutionary situation by no means ensures the success of the revolution. This development will be accelerated, retarded or even reversed, depending on the strategy adopted in the coming months.'* [4]

We argued that there was a crisis of leadership within the working class movement of South Africa, all the more starkly revealed in the context of millions of blacks throwing themselves into the scales against the apartheid state. Increasingly, as 1986 wore on, the masses looked to the ANC for that leadership. Far from being to the advantage of the black millions this was a dangerous trend. As we stated in June 1986:

*The ANC, which is undoubtedly the major force within the movement, is pursuing its 'twin track' strategy. Declaring for a 'peoples war', for the setting up of 'Revolutionary Peoples Committees' to 'transform no go areas into mass revolutionary bases', whilst at the same time using the threat of 'ungovernability' to try and force negotiations and serious concessions from the Botha regime.'* [5]

The declaration of the State of Emergency in June revealed the weaknesses of the ANC strategy to 'Make South Africa ungovernable', which depended on continued ferment in the townships. This strategy envisaged that the apartheid state could not survive in a situation in which substantial township areas were out of its control. During 1986, the ANC developed this theory to include a recognition of the role of the popular committees, Peoples Courts and so forth that had sprung up, according them a key part in the development of Peoples' Power. The ANC also continued to propagandise for the armed struggle now seeing this as occurring predominantly in urban areas. But, despite talk of the 'leading role of the working class' and a recognition of the strength of COSATU, the ANC failed to explain to the masses the centrality of strikes, occupations and the seizing of the factories in the struggle to defend the mass movement and in the conquest of power.

Crucial in the fight to forstall Botha's repression was the mobilisation of the trade unions in a general strike which could have paralysed the South African economy, could have unified the union factory committees with the township committees and thus laid the basis for real soviet-type bodies in a massive united front against the state. By failing to advance this strategy the ANC contributed to the success of the repression. Criticism has been directed at the ANC and its legal front, the UDF, by activists for failing to politically prepare the youth and workers for the attack of the state. For example, the Cape Youth Organisation (CAYCO) has accused the UDF of egging on the spontaneous revolt without creating the solid forms of organisation on the ground capable of resisting state repression. [6]

Why then did the ANC fail and what lessons, if any, have they drawn? The ANC espouses a strategy, enshrined in the Freedom Charter of 1955, which insists that the main task of the South African revolution is to achieve bourgeois democratic rights (including property rights) for the black masses. As Nelson Mandela stated in 1956 the Freedom Charter is:

*'A programme for the unification of various classes and groupings amongst the people on a democratic basis...*[which]*...visualises the transfer of power not to any single social class but to all the people of this country be they workers, peasants, professional men or petty bourgeois.'* [7]

Precisely because of this strategy the ANC fears the independent mobilisation and organisation of the working class around its own demands because it threatens this 'unity'. But the ANC are in a dilemma. The peasantry in South Africa is almost non-existent, the urban black petty-bourgeoisie very weak, the proletariat is massive. Therefore, the working class must have a leading role in smashing apartheid; but this class must be politically subordinated to the petty bourgeoisie. This is the reactionary core of the ANC's programme. This class, because of its thousands of ties with private property in the means of production has a historic tendency to submit to the domination of the big bourgeoisie and deserting the side of the proletariat on whose shoulders it has climbed to shake hands with the bourgeoisie.

The determination to enforce this quest for bourgeois democracy in South Africa is fraught with dangers for the black workers. Over the last 70 years the history of 'democratic revolutions' from Mexico and China to Iran and Zimbabwe, shows that the possibility of a stable bourgeois democracy (even if called 'peoples power') is remote. In the imperialist epoch and in particular in the present period of intensified crisis, such a democracy could grant very little in the way of social reforms to the masses, if the main concern was to pacify the big bourgeoisie and promote the growth of a black exploiting class.

The consequences could be very bloody. A working class that has raised itself to its full height to bring down the apartheid state would have established much in the way of workers control in the mines and factories and the townships. To force the black workers to relinquish all this in the name of 'unity of the classes' could unleash a mighty civil war with the ANC at the head of the counter-revolution.

The ANC has renounced nothing since the State of Emergency. In fact the ANC continues to advance its popular front strategy of alliance with the 'progressive' wing of the bourgeoisie even in the face of the evidence of where that class's real allegiances lay. Where is the business leader jailed for his defiance of the State of Emergency? What happened to the 'progressive' General Motors when it called in armed police against its strikers?

The ANC met South African and overseas business representatives after the State of Emergency. Some evidence of what might be said at real negotiations was revealed in the Round Table discussions broadcast by the BBC on 22 June involving ANC leading members Thabo Mbeki and Mac Maharaj together with Neil Chapman (Southern Life), Chris Ball of Barnat, Tony Bloom (Premier Group) and two Afrikaner academics.

Ball revealed the dangers for the South African working class in both the negotiations and in the imprecision of the ANCs programme, the Freedom Charter by saying:

*'I think this discussion is a brilliant example of the very virtues of negotiation because we are able to take such emotive terms as "people's power" and "redistribution of land" and try to define more specifically what we mean so that people can understand clearly whether there is fear in the results of our discussion or not...let us accept that something like three quarters of the revenue of the mines goes directly to the state now. Now what does nationalisation mean? It doesn't mean anything's very different from the current situation. We need to put flesh on that term.'*

In a recent interview, Joe Slovo (Chief of Staff of MK and leading cadre of the ANC and South African Communist Party) insisted that all that was need for negotiations to begin between Botha and the ANC was the acceptence by the whites of the 'principle' of majority rule in a unitary democratic state. If accepted then:

*There is much that can be tossed around, including constitutional mechanisms for safeguarding the rights of the individual, the relationship between private and social property.'*

While Slovo retains the achievement of socialism as an

*The dreaded 'necklace'*

'ultimate' goal (*'and I emphasise the word "ultimate"'*) he believes: *'...that there will be a mixed economy in the post-liberation period, in which in particular the black middle class and small black bourgeois will come into their own.* [9]

The real danger that the ANC poses to the success of the proletarian revolution in South Africa is that since June 1986 and the retardation in the revolutionary situation the ANC has consolidated its position; its politics have become more hegemonic as the mass movement has receded. On the one hand, the 'liberal' bourgeois in South Africa have seen that with the mass movement thrown back for the moment, that now is the time to draw in the ANC, in the hope of moderating it. In August 1986 Tony Bloom, a leading white business figure, told the New York Times that he was:

*'desperately concerned that both Pretoria and Washington are making a historic mistake in refusing to negotiate with or recognise the ANC...lasting stability will never be created without it'.* [10]

He need not have worried. The imperialist bourgeoisie was taking advantage of the same situation. Within months of the State of Emergency Oliver Tambo was being wined and dined by the best of them, a marked reversal of attitude from earlier in the year. Ronald Reagan insisted in August that there were, after all, 'sound people' in the ANC who could be separated off from the communists. In September Tambo met with Geoffrey Howe and Crocker (of the US State Department). Further meetings with US Secretary of State George Schultz are planned for 1987.

All this attention has not been without its own reward. In January this year Tambo stretched out the hand of friendship to the whites if they would renounce apartheid and announced an amnesty for state agents the ANC had captured. Such moderation is in direct contrast to the militant sounding radicalism that has come from the ANC when it it speaking directly to its supporters or to leaders of the front-line states. In an interview in ANC News Tambo pushes aside the setback of the state of emergency and argues that in 1987 the people must move *'from ungovernability to peoples power'*. He even calls upon the masses to be armed and for the struggle to be stepped up by taking the armed struggle into the white urban areas.

In fact what is happening is a classic response of petit bourgeois nationalism to an ebb in the mass struggle. They are preparing not for the revivification of the mass working class struggle (strikes, occupations, etc) but for an intensification of the elitist armed struggle which leaves the masses passive. While the 10,000 trained by the MK is few enough to topple the might of the SADF only about 500 of these are in South Africa. In an interview with Radio Freedom in Addis Ababa in October 1986, Chris Hani (a leader of MK) illustrated well the disdain for specifically working class form of class action when he replied to a question which doubted the ability of the factory worker to participate in the peoples war *'when they are only in the factory'*. Hani said:

*'Well, the workers...must use revolutionary violence, they must plant mines, they must deal with all managers, directors and captains of industry who display hostility to the workers demands.'* [11]

He went on to argue for economic sabotage in the factory as a form of protest, but nowhere was even the perspective of workers control or strike activity. The truth of the matter is that the ANC leadership in exile, having exploited the period of mass struggle in 1985/86 to refurbish its ranks with armed fighters intends mainly to take the war into the white suburbs in the hope, not of defeating the SADF, but of building up pressure from within the white community to come to an acceptable settlement through negotiations of the kind that Slovo, Tambo and others have been outlining.

## THE POLITICAL RESPONSE OF THE TRADE UNIONS

In the period preceding the 1986 State of Emergency, the class had consolidated its unions and shop steward organisations. It was engaged in intense debate about the extent to which the unions should be involved in politics and the nature of the political programme they should adopt. Within FOSATU (and subsequently COSATU) the

*Founding conference of COSATU*

debate became polarised between the so-called 'workerists' and the 'populists'. The former wished to concentrate upon everyday trade union issues (wages, safety at work, hours) issues which did not consciously confront the question of the apartheid state. From one side this emphasis at least recognised the importance of building the new unions as mass organisations of struggle. They also remained sceptical about the degree to which the Freedom Charter outlined adequate demands for the workers and insisted that strong trade unions were necessary to protect and promote the interests of workers in the post-liberation period.

The great danger of this 'workerist' position was that it surrendered the intiative on the political struggle now to those who looked to the ANC with all the dangers that we have described earlier. Given that in the current crisis-wracked situation it is impossible for the trade unions to be apolitical it allows the political agenda to be set by those COSATU leaders who lean towards the ANC/UDF such as Jay Naidoo, Sydney Mafumadi and Elijah Barayi. Given this it was hardly surprising that by the spring of 1986 the pro-ANC forces had increased their influence considerably. This was confirmed by the March 1986 statement in which the ANC and COSATU recognised each others role in the struggle. At the same time it was a testament to the success of COSATU that the ANC had had to change its early sectarian stance to the independent union movement.

The State of Emergency has if anything strengthened the hands of the 'populists' in COSATU. The repression at the very least has encouraged the union activists to concentrate their energies upon the problems of wages and conditions in a manner unconnected to the struggle to bring down the apartheid regime (for example the NUM pay claim in 1986). In addition, after the intial burst of strikes against the detentions there has defintely be a tendency in COSATU to confront the political issues of the emergency through the methods of the popular front.

In the autumn, COSATU joined the United Democratic Front, the National Education Coordinating Committee and others to form the National Unity Against Apartheid and the Emergency. This popular frontist body was formed by the UDF after it had called for 'all patriots' to show national unity by uniting with all other forces opposed to the Emergency. The dangers of this in sowing disunity in COSATU were shown when CCAWU protested at the Christmas against the Emergency call being made using the COSATU logo, but without it as a major affiliate having been consulted.[12]

Nevertheless, there is resistance still within the ranks of COSATU to hitching the unions onto the cart of the popular front; activists and leaders within the metal workers union MAWU, led by the detained Moses Mayekiso, still outline the need for an independent political programme and party for the working class. For example, in the July 1986 issue of MAWU's paper, *Umbiko we Mawu*, it was argued that:

*'MAWU is totally committed to the principle of workers' control. This is non-negotiable. But workers must not only control their union—they must also lead the struggle for liberation in South Africa. If workers are not at the head of the liberation struggle, then there is no guarantee that the Botha government will be replaced by socialism.'*[13]

At the first national MAWU Congress, held between 3 and 5 July, 300 factory delegates confirmed this stance in resolutions passed at the Congress. One of them restated the socialist objectives of MAWU and said that it will 'participate fully in all COSATU discussions on the political programme of the workers'. In the September issue of their paper, MAWU President Maxwell Xulu insisted that:

*'A long time ago, some people used to say that there was no need for a workers programme, because we have the Freedom Charter...*[but] *many things have changed since then...There are thousands of workers organised in trade unions. they are pushing to make the working class stronger. One very great step forward for the struggle is the workers' programme. It will also speak of what kind of*

*Addressing a mass meeting of OK chainstore strikers*

*society workers want to see after apartheid.'* [14]

Revolutionaries in South Africa should relate positively to these developments. Trade unions are not adequate for carrying out political tasks, but they are mass organisations and the revolutionary vanguard should call on them to play a key role in building an independent class party of the working class. In fighting for a workers party it is clear that at the start of the process there will be much disagreement as to the programme of it; the outcome of its structure and programme should be as a result of democratic internal debate and the free competition of tendencies.

The conditions in which such a workers' party could be formed, and in which there could be a clear and open fight for a revolutionary working class programme, these conditions are rapidly disappearing, although every last chance for propagandising for such a party must be taken, while the unions remain legal. The working class and youth will continue to debate the way forward by whatever means they have. It must ensure that it has all the information possible from the leaders of the unions and the liberation movements. They should insist that all negotiations are reported down the ranks, even in conditions of illegality and censorship.

Of course, it is even more urgent that preparations are made now for the construction of underground structures and propaganda organs to carry forward this debate alongside legal structures. We are under no illusion that Botha will stand idly by watching with interest the outcome of a struggle to build an independent workers' party!

## A PROGRAMME OF ACTION

It is without question that all the struggles of today in South Africa start from immediate and democratic demands. The black masses suffer exclusion from the land that was theirs, from massive super-exploitation at work, non-existant social services and terrible and enforced education.

Even outide of the State of Emergency the blacks have long been deprived of the basic democratic rights which those in more developed imperialist bourgeois democracies have enjoyed; the right to live where they choose, citizenship, the right to vote, the right to marry and live with whom they choose. The State of Emergency has increased the numbers subject to arbitary arrest and detention, subject to rent evictions, to censorship. But 16 June did not not introduce arbitary arrest, rent evictions, or censorship into the lives of the black people.

Clearly, however, working class action to get the State of Emergency lifted, to unban organisations, for the release of the detainees is important and urgent, and only serves to underline the fact that the South African revolution starts as a democratic one. Beyond the need to fight the present State of Emergency the burning tasks are to fight for universal, direct, equal and secret suffrage for all men and women over the age of sixteen. The working class must lead the fight for the total abolition of all discriminatory laws and the smashing of every aspect of the racist bureaucracy through the means of an armed militia of the urban and rural workers.

Does this mean that we are fighting for a 'democratic stage' in the revolution? By no means. A 'bourgeois democratic' revolution does not await South Africa. No lasting period of capitalist stability awaits ahead in which the institutions of bourgeois democracy can flower or capitalist private property function sweetly to lift up the masses out of their suffering. As we said in *Permanent Revolution* 4:

*'The programme of permanent revolution alone can fuse the struggle against apartheid with a battle to destroy capitalism and create a workers' state...What we reject is the notion that the solution of the democratic tasks necessarily predates the fight for socialist revolution and that only democratic slogans can be advanced in the present stage. We must fight to give the democratic struggle a proletarian direction and content.'* [15]

Although only a proletarian dictatorship (a workers' state) can guarantee these democratic aspirations, many millions of black people—deprived for so long of bourgeois democratic rights—have deep illusions in 'democracy' of this sort. In the present situation it is vital to use *'whatever is progressive about these illusions'* (Trotsky) as a battering ram against the apartheid state. Thus we call for a sovereign constituent assembly. It is imperative for the revolutionary workers to insist on full sovereign rights for such an assembly. Too often—in Nicaragua, Zimbabwe—petit-bourgeois nationalists and Stalinists have kept real power within a tiny ruling council; too often have the new rulers sold the democracy short by agreeing instead to a national convention, which bargains with and provides safeguards for the old white exploiters. In order to prevent this a fully accountable, recallable constituent assembly, elected by direct and equal suffrage only is acceptable.

Within the context of the constituent assembly, with full and free clash of programmes, the revolutionary communists must fight for the creation of workers councils and militias. The democracy of these councils is far superior since they are fully accountable to the workers. They can deliberate, legislate and execute their own decisions without the need for a mass of unaccountable bureaucrats.

In the fight for consistently revolutionary democratic demands, communists must link them at every stage to the class demands of the working class. Such demands must include partial economic and political demands concerning wages and conditions, an end to job inequality, for full trade union rights, for decent housing. Moreover, these in turn must be linked to a series of transitional demands which link the struggles of today with the struggle to establish working class power. Thus in the workplace we must fight for workers' control of production, of hiring and firing, of the speed and intensity of work, of safety, of the length of the working day. In addition the black workers need to struggle for committees to formulate demands on wages which themselves establish, with the backing of committees of women, the real nature and level of price and rent rises and oversees a sliding-scale of wages to protect the workers from inflation.

This fight will run up against the resistance of the bosses who will insist that they can not afford these concessions. in these circumstances, the committees of workers must demand an end to business secrecy and the nationalisation of individual or whole sections of industry.

The advance of these demands is the real measure of the success of the working class in the South African revolution. Along this path lies not only the overthrow of apartheid but the destruction of capitalism itself. If this is not done then the workers gains will be short-lived and constantly threatened. The State of Emergency has resulted in a retarding of the tempo of the revolution, but the ruling class has not solved its crisis; the workers are regrouping and debating the lessons of the last period. The future outcome of the revolution depends on how soon the working class breaks free of the noose of popular frontism and charts its independent course for power.

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1 *The Financial Mail* May 23 1986

2 *Weekly Mail* No 2/45

3 *Permanent Revolution 4: The Apartheid State; from resistance to revolution* (*PR* 4) June 1986

4 *PR* 4 p2

5 *ibid* p3

6 see *Inqaba* September 1986

7 Mandela *In Our Lifetime* June 1956

8 *Inqaba* September 1986

9 *Marxism Today* December 1986

10 Quoted in *New Left Review* 160 p15

11 *ANC News* No 43 26 October 1986

12 *Weekly Mail* 2/49

13 *International Viewpoint* No 111 22 December 1986

14 *ibid*

15 *PR 4* p20

# Keeping recession at bay; but for how long?

## by Keith Hassell

THE YEAR 1987 opened with a renewed skirmish between the USA, Europe and Japan. Frustrated by the failure of the US economy to turn upwards as a result of the fall in energy prices and the lower dollar, the USA once more engaged in unilateral actions against its imperialist allies. Brinkmanship with the EEC over trade and a renewed exchange rate battle with Japan were but the latest outward signs of an international capitalist economy teetering on the edge of recession.

The 1980's has been a gloomy decade for the major capitalist economies. World trade (i.e. the total value of imports and exports) peaked in 1981 and was not surpassed in the recovery of 1982-5. The average rates of growth, in many sectors or countries, continues to decline. For example, in the USA, the average annual growth rate in the 1960's was 4.1%; in the 1970's it was 3.1%; in the 1980's, even if the USA avoided another recession and enjoyed growth rates of 3% between now and 1990, the average for the decade would still be under 2.5%. In West Germany GDP grew by a total of 64% between 1970-76, by 31% in 1976-80 and by only 18% in 1980-4.

The decade opened in the midst of an international recession (1979-82) and the subsequent recovery of 1982-6 did little to solve the deep rooted problems of the world economy. The locomotive of this recovery was the US economy. A change in monetary and fiscal policy stimulated demand; this increase in spending attracted foreign imports and so stimulated the recovery in WG, Japan etc. Exports to the USA accounted for between 25% and 40% of GNP growth in Western Europe and capitalist eastern Asia. While the USA's volume share of world exports remained steady between 1972-83, this share plummeted in the recovery. Despite the 10% increase in industrial productivity between 1981-4 it was eroded by the disadvantages of the high dollar. Its been calculated that US exports prices in the recovery were about 25% above the OECD average. The major effect was to adversely effect the US balance of trade. US trade went from a $17 billion surplus in 1980 to a $200 billion plus deficit in 1986, as imports far outstripped exports. For the first time since 1914 the USA owes more to the rest of the world than it owes to the USA. In the space of five years (1981-6) the USA has gone from being the world's biggest creditor nation to being the world's biggest debtor nation.

In order to attract funds into the USA to finance the deficit (i.e. to match income to spending plans) the US government was forced to keep interest rates high so as to tempt the rest of the world to lend it money. In turn, this kept the dollar at a high level. This meant that US exports were expensive and not very competitive on the world market.

### LOSING GROUND

As a result US industry was being eclipsed during the course of the recovery by West German and Japanese industry in particular. Industries and markets where the USA was dominant have fallen to these two over the last few years. Japan has penetrated the USA itself in a way never seen before. In 1985 there was a 60% increase in Japan's capital investments over the previous year. Much of the US debt is held by Japan too. Japan has been the winner in the recovery without doubt even in relation to Europe; it more than doubled its capital holdings in EEC in 1984 over 1983 and has since maintained that level. Japan is the world's leading exporter of capital. Another feature of the recovery has been the emergence of a powerful Japanese finance capital, as the latter has used its surplus capital to establish a strong banking sector to challenge the UK and USA in this area too.

European imperialism has not benefited greatly by the USA's decline. If anything the EEC has slightly lost ground to the USA in the recovery. Since 1980 the Pacific basin has replaced the North Atlantic as the USA's chief trading partner; Taiwan is now more important to the USA than the UK in trading terms. Europe's lack of a super-state structure to unify its interests has seen its independent states follow disparate policies in commercial terms. Between 1980-3, for example, of the fifty major mergers or joint ventures in information technologies, only two were intra-European. Half were US-Japanese and half were European-Japanese. Accordingly, the ability of Europe to be a powerful rival independent imperialist bloc to USA and Japan is diminished.

In short, during the recovery, the relative hegemony of the USA in the world economy has continued to be eroded across the board. Its unquestioned mastery in the industrial sphere is confined now to one or two sectors only; its financial strength is declining; the dominance of the dollar in world trade and as reserve currency has continued to fall away. As a consequence of this decline the equilibrium prevailing in world trade at the start of this decade has been dramatically disturbed. Leaving aside the inherent inequality between imperialism and the 'third world', it was the case that relative equilibrium prevailed between Japan, Europe and the USA. The US deficit in manufactures with east Asia was balanced by its surpluses with Europe; US surpluses in trade with Latin America were matched by it capital exports there. For Europe, its deficits with the USA and Japan in trade were compensated by its surpluses with the third world. And Japan's surpluses with Europe and the USA were offset by its imports of raw materials and energy on the one hand and its capital exports to the Pacific on the other. This equilibrium has now been thrown wildly out.

For the last two years growth has been hovering around the 2-3% mark for most of the major economies, which was barely enough to absorb the new numbers coming on to the labour market, never mind cut down the existing ranks of the unemployed. The savage cost demanded of the USA for 'sponsoring' the recovery was becoming intolerable by mid-1985. There was an urgent need to reverse this deterioration.

Consequently, the US government embarked on a policy of 'pushing the dollar down' to make US exports competitive and reduce import penetration; it would also reduce the dollar value of the debt it had built up. This process began in the spring of 1985 with the lowering of interest rates (this reduces demand for the dollar thereby lowering its 'price', i.e. the exchange rate against other currencies). In September 1985 a meeting in New York of the Big Five (USA, Japan, West Germany, UK, France) agreed to a policy of co-ordination to lower the dollar. As a result, the value of the US dollar fell by 40% against the yen and the mark in the period March 1985-September 1986.

## FALSE HOPES

In early 1986 US commentators were confidently looking forward to a strong recovery in the economy. The lower dollar would give a boost to exports, reduce imports and so narrow the trade deficit. Inflation was at low 1960's levels; the price of oil had plummeted thus reducing energy costs across the world. The USA believed that it could thus revive its own economy and do so in a way that would shift the equilibrium of the world economy back in its favour while keeping the world recovery going. It has not happened. The USA has continued to falter; the measures taken have failed to revive it but they have ensured the choking off of the recovery in Japan and West Germany and through them progessively in the rest of the world. Why has this occured?

First, it is necessary to look at the productive base of the US economy. The recovery in the USA was never dependent for it real momentum on a revival of business investment in industry (which was still 6% below its 1981 peak in the summer of 1984). The real boost came from an expansion in 'services', which among other things provided about 85% of the new jobs. This, taken together with a $23 billion cut in incomes and benefits form the workers and a $35 billion boost in tax cuts to the middle and upper classes fueled a consumer durable led 'boom'. The only sectors that enjoyed real benefits were those related to defence and the military.

Most investment was of the short-term restructuring type and not on new capacity. Revival in profits was short and sharp as a result. The mass of profits and the rate of profit peaked in the course of 1985. In themselves, they never reached the levels of the late 1970's. In its wake investment fell. Today, it is 15% below its peak of the summer of 1985. Naturally, with investment in plant and equipment falling it would only be a matter of time before industrial production fell. This peaked in the USA in January 1986 and fell for five out of the next six months.

By July industrial capacity utilisation was at its lowest for over 2 and a half years at 78.2%. Industrial output grew 0.2% in August, 0.1% in September and 0.0% in October. In the last twelve months output of durable goods has increased by 0.5%. Over thirty states in the USA are reckoned to actually be in recession (i.e. registering an absolute fall in output). General Motors now plans to close eleven of its thirty four US plants in 1987! The other states, dependent more on services, defence contracts and consumer durables, are keeping manufacturing afloat.

But for most of 1986 it is true to say that continued high incomes, a low level of savings, an historically high level of personal debt, low interest rates, and cheap credit from desperate companies all combined to keep the economy going. In short, consumer spending, which accounts for two-thirds of GDP, was the only reason the economy as a whole was registering growth at the end of 1986.

The much hoped for reversal in the fortunes of the manufacturing economy have not happened despite this buoyancy in spending. Where domestic demand is being met by domestic industry it is more often than not doing so from existing stocks. Domestic industry has continued to flag in the face of Japanese and European competition because the latter have cut profit margins in the face of an adverse exchange rate rather than lose market share. In addition, although the dollar has been lowered a lot against Japan and West Germany these countries do not account for the larger part of US trade. South Korea, Taiwan, Singapore, Canada do this, and in those cases the exchange rate of the dollar has hardly improved at all. Nor has the much hoped for stimulus from export orders had any dramatic effect on US industry for the same reasons.

And through it all the bench mark of the trade deficit has failed to substantially improve. Figures for the third quater (Q3) in the USA show that the average monthly deficit was worse (at $14.9 billion) than in either Q1 or Q2. By November 1986 it reached a new record, 20 billion dollars.

While there has been no real improvement in the USA's situation its measures have taken their toll on its rivals. In Japan, real GNP in Q1 1986 fell for the first time in eleven years. Unemployment, at 2.9% is a post-war high (the real figure is higher since there is a lot of hidden unemployment). This state of affairs is due to the appreciation of the yen against the dollar over the last eighteen months, which makes exports dearer and reduces demand. Since Japan has a small internal market, such a drop hits hard and quickly. Japan has responded partly by boosting domestic demand this autumn; but more importantly in the long term implications, Japan has responded by buying up US firms or starting up new plants in the USA as a way to get around the problem of dearer exports.

In Europe as a whole, the changes are less dramatic whether in one direction or the other. West Germany has enjoyed the greatest growth in the last four years; it is the world's workshop for capital goods. Nevertheless, its growth rates only indicate 2.6% increase in overall production since 1980, the figure mainly relying upon a 12% growth in capital goods. There have been a 19% drop in vehicles and 18% fall in electrical engineering. The growth that there has been has been unable to absorb new labour coming on the market. As a result unemployment has increased from 3.8% in 1980 to 9.3% in 1985.

For most of 1986 West Germany has not suffered the declines in output seen in the USA or more recently Japan. But in the last few months orders and output for machine tools have fallen away noticeably and this can be expected to make itself felt in production during 1987.

Given this creeping recession the US imperialists changed emphasis in the closing months of 1986 away from lowering the dollar still further (which would make the USA unable to attract funds to finance the deficit, spur on the Japanese takeovers in the USA and encourage inflation as higher priced imports keep coming in). Instead the USA constantly pressured the other imperialist powers to reflate their own economies more to take the burden of keeping the 'recovery' going. Japan has accumulated a $130 billion surplus, UK a surplus of $90 billion and Wesr Germany one of $50 billion, compared to the US deficit of over $100 billion. The USA insisted that the equilibrium is restored or else.

Or else what? The US imperialists wave the big stick of protectionism at its rivals both big and small. The protectionist lobby in the states, backed by sections of the Democrats (now a majority in Congress) and the unions, aims to put up barriers to imports and capital penetration. This is in no ones interest but the USA knows that it would damage those such as Japan who are most reliant upon foreign markets for their wealth. Nevertheless the contraction, depression and damaging political realignments that could come in the wake of such out of hand protectionism is something that the US bourgeoisie in its majority wishes to avoid.

On their part Europe and Japan do not wish to reflate their economies for fear of inflation and losing the competitive edge that they have. Small measures have been taken but not enough to please the USA, or enough to radically alter the balance of trade between the imperialist powers. In the opening months of 1987 the patience of the USA towards its European and Japanese allies ran out. With the deficit still growing the White House reverted back to its position of pushing the dollar down in an attempt to stimulate exports and make import penetration difficult. It has also found itself embroiled in a major row with the EEC over trade with the US administration threatening major protectionist measures if the EEC does not back down over agricultural imports into Europe.

## PROSPECTS FOR THE WORLD ECONOMY

What are the prospects for imperialism in 1987-8? The most likely development is a continuing slide into recession. There appears to be very little mileage left in the flagging consumer-led growth in the USA. The effect of the new tax laws from the spring may inject more life into consumer spending but it will also deprive the administration of a further $20 billion in revenues, thus exacerbating the deficit problem. Japan will continue to feel the effects of the fall away in demand and is in no position to replace that market. West Germany and the rest of Europe are also beginning to feel the effect of the decline in business investment in US industry as it translates in to a drop in orders for plant and equipment.

*Big seven leaders try to steer clear of recession; Tokyo summit 1986*

The strategic implications (i.e. the next five to ten years) of the present disequilibrium are quite enormous. If the current account deficits of the USA grow as projected, then by 1991 it will take 14% of the USA's GNP to service its debt. It will be Japan and Europe who will hold a large portion of this debt. The tensions and contradictions will grow as a result. Economically, the burden of this debt will first of all undermine the ability of the USA to pull the world out of recessions.

This greatly increases the chances of prolonged stagnation since the co-ordination and co-operation required between a bloc of imperialist powers to replace the previous role of the USA will, given inter-imperialist antagonisms, be all the more difficult to achieve (as in the 1930's). Just as importantly, the ability of the USA to undertake the cost of policing the world ('Star Wars', NATO, ANZUS, three hundred plus bases) will be severely tested; its military and political ambitions would have to be scaled down, fitted in within a new series of alliances and changed priorities or it could lead to a more adventurous and aggressive foreign policy as US imperialism refuses to adjust itself gracefully to its decline.

The tempo of the slide into recession could be effected either by a series of protectionist measures (failure at GATT, renewed clash between the EEC Common Agricultural Policy and the USA, refusal of Japan and the 'little tigers' to lower protective barriers). It could also be affected by a partial (or more) collapse of the banking system due to indebtedness getting out control. Since the depths of the debt crisis (1982) the situation has eased somewhat. The dollar value of the debt holding has decreased as the dollar has fallen; new lending by commercial banks to the worst cases effectively dried up in 1982; draconian austerity measures against the workers (especially in Latin America) have succeeded to a degree in reducing the real level of debt burden on debtor governments which has in turn relieved pressure on the banks.

In some cases a cut in imports and rise in exports has raised the necessary money for interest payments; the banks have built up their reserves set against bad losses and have proven flexible in rolling over debt. The institutional safeguards, involving central bank back-up to the commercial sector is greater too. There is no imminent prospect, therefore, of a generalised banking collapse connected to the debt crisis. Of course, a full blown recession, the refusal of the masses of the semi-colonial world to accept 'austerity', the coming together of a 'debtor's cartel' could change the picture but for the moment, the semi-colonial bourgeoisie depend upon imperialism for their own stability against the masses and are very short on anti-imperialist rhetoric.

It is as well to remember that there are no 'absolutely hopeless situations' (Lenin) for the bourgeoisie. A new 'boom' is out of the question without a major crisis; either a massive and generalised assault on the world's proletariat, or a major restructuring of the international division of labour and restoration of equilibrium based on a deep recession and destruction of capital. So what are the conditions for a continuation of the this pale, anaemic 'recovery' at its present levels? It would take significant reflationary measures in Japan and Europe, at considerable risk of renewed inflation, austerity in the USA (to cut imports). It would also need a bold writing off of US and international held debts in Latin America in order to ease their situation and so restore demand for US exports. The political obstacles in the path of these measures are considerable and even then would only hold out the hope of restoring the international situation to what it was in the early 1980's.

It is pertinent to ask how far the alliance between the USA, Europe and Japan will be strained in the coming period by the onset of a recession which throws the powers into economic rivalry. US global economic hegemony has declined further but no single power or alliance of powers is able or willing to challenge US imperialism's role in world politics. Those two powers who have strengthened themselves relative to the US during the 1980's—West Germany and Japan—have no independent military power and as such could not challenge the USA. Indeed, Japan and Britain have the greatest external assets of the world powers. They need a strong US world policeman.

The best they can hope for in the coming years is a greater sense of partnership on behalf of the USA. There are no indications of a fragmentation of the imperialist bloc into different alliances, although anti-Europeanism has grown to some degree in the USA as the 'Atlanticists' are increasingly challenged by the pro-Pacific wing of the US bourgeoisie. Only a major deterioration in the economic might of the USA could force it into painful choices (i.e. pro-Japan, pro-Europe); at the moment it remains a world force. Although its hegemony is increasingly relative, it remains hegemonic; it provides the political cement that binds the world imperialist powers together. For the existing alliances to be radically altered, however, we would have to experience a major recession of the 1930's kind, a collapse of world trade into regional blocs. For many months past bourgeois critics of Reaganism have pointed to the increasing parallels of the second half of the 1980's with the second half of the 1920's. What many are now asking is, how far away is 1929?

# *'Not everything is possible'*: French Stalinism and the Popular Front, 1936-38

## by Dave Stocking

FIFTY YEARS AGO in France the policy of the Popular Front was in full force. Today, many on the left in Britain, including Kinnock's backers in the pages of *Marxism Today*, faced with the prospect of a third Thatcher term are quick to recommend it to us. But an examination of the years 1936-8 show that far from halting the tide of reaction the Popular Front crippled the working class's ability to defend itself.

The immediate background to the original rightist turn of Stalinism in the 1930's was the disastrous effect of the so-called 'third period' on the official Communist parties. The French party had had 60,000 members in 1926 but only 28,000 in 1934—a direct function of the sectarianism of the years 1928 onwards.The most disastrous consequence of this policy had been the defeat of the German workers at the hands of Hitler in spring 1933. The Austrians succumbed after a fight in 1934. Stalin's intial response to this was to appease Hitler. But by late 1934 this was clearly not a possibility. Instead, the Kremlin endevoured to form a pact with French imperialism against Hitler.

Within France the pressures for a change of line increased after 6 February 1934. The fascist leagues (*Ligues*) had called a demonstration which led to the Radical Party government of Daladier caving in and handing power to the right-wing parties of the National Union led by Doumergue.

The French workers had responded by a general strike of 12 February 1934, pushing 150,000 communist and socialist workers together in a mass demonstration. But this elemental desire for a united front of workers was subverted by the French Communist Party (CP) into a push for a Popular Front of workers and 'liberal' bourgeois parties. In October the CP urged the Radical Party to break with the Doumergue government. Until the spring of 1935 they rejected these overtures. Meanwhile, the French Socalist Party (SFIO) criticised the CP from the left for being prepared to drop all 'socialistic' demands.

However, in March 1935 the introduction of compulsory military service in Germany alarmed the Radicals sufficiently to consider a pact with the USSR. In May of that year Laval signed the pact with Stalin in Moscow. While it did not commit France to any automatic defence of the USSR it did indicate, on Stalin's part a *'complete understanding and approval of state defence, carried out by France with the aim of maintaining its armed forces at a level commensurate with the needs of its security.'*

Trotsky had predicted these events for two years. As he put it: *'For the first time Stalin has said openly what is, i.e. in full view of the entire world, he has repudiated revolutionary internationalism and passed over to the platform of social patriotism.'* [1]

### THE POPULAR FRONT'S ROAD TO POWER

Despite Laval's role in signing the pact with Stalin, the French communists considered that the time had come to lead a vigorous campaign to get rid of the *Union Nationale* government he headed and to break the Radicals from their parliamentary support for it. Only thus could the road to a popular front be opened.

Meanwhile, street clashes were continuing between the fascist leagues and workers organisations. In Limoges in November blood was shed. Whilst Laval took out emergency powers merely allowing him to ban the *Ligues* he actually suspended communist mayors in towns where clashes took place. He remained on public good terms with Colonel de La Rocque, leader of the Croix de Feu which continued its marches and motorcades—growing to 450,000 members by the end of 1935.

On 6 August striking workers in the naval dockyard in Toulon and Brest held demonstrations. These turned into clashes with the *gardes mobiles* (armed paramilitary force). Certainly the communist party supported the demonstrations but their response to the riots was instructive. A nationwide wave of demonstrations against Laval's decree-laws was useful but violence threatened the CP's overtures to the Radicals. Jacques Duclos had been denouncing Laval in *L'Humanité* and calling for him to be 'chased out'. He called for Laval's government to be replaced by a 'left wing' coalition based on the Radicals and the SFIO.

The Brest and Toulon riots led to a fierce campaign in the right-wing press blaming the communists and their union federation the CGT(U). The CP immediately ceased its campaign against Laval blaming provocateurs for the riots and calling for 'calm and discipline'. It decided—in pursuit of the united and Popular Fronts to effectively dissolve the CGT(U) into the old reformist CGT.

The CGT(U) had a membership of no more than 220,000. The CGT had perhaps 600,000 members. In late September 1935 the CGT accepted unconditionally the harsh unity terms of Leon Jouhaux and the CGT bureaucracy. The CP was forbidden to organize a fraction in the unified organisation and the CGT continued its membership of the International Trade Union Federation (Amsterdam International). The ban on all forms of political office for union officials was maintained. In March 1936 a unity congress fused the unions under a firm former CGT majority leadership.

The CP further prepared for the popular front by abandoning its previous agrarian policy of support for the rural proletariat and the small-scale working farmer. In Autumn 1935 they dropped all talk of class struggle in the country-side and turned to the defence of the entire peasantry promising price support subsidies for farmers and easier credit. *Rassemblement Populaire* (Popular Rally) committees were formed throughout France but they were purely committees of party representatives for election propaganda rather than mass organisations for mobilizing action.

In October the Committee of the *Rassemblement Populaire* began discussing what was to become the electoral platform of the Popular Front. The first draft, presented at its first meeting proved contentious. The CGT and the Socialist Party representatives thought it too timid. The SFIO had, at its Mulhouse Congress in June, adopted a rhetorically 'left' platform. It had promised: '*...by resting on the support of the toiling masses, to break the resistance of big industrial and financial capital*'.

The CGT had similarly just adopted a seemingly radical new policy—a 'plan' based on that of the Belgian reformist leader Henri de Man. The CGT's plan proposed relief measures; a 40 hour week with no loss of earnings to expand employment and purchasing power, a large public works programme and rural relief measures.

Beyond these measures a series of 'structural reforms' were needed since the crisis also highlighted weaknesses in the structure of French industry. They included a call for expelling private interest from the Bank of France and 'nationalizing credit'; the need to 'liberate the state' from the plutocracy by nationalizing the war industries, the coal mines, the energy supply industry and transport—with compensation, of course. [2]

This reformist plan had nothing socialist about it. But it did include measures that most French capitalists were unwilling to accept. Therefore so were the communists. In the *Rassemblement Populaire* Committee the CP delegates made a point of siding with the Radicals nearly every time that the latter disagreed with SFIO representatives. Camille Chautemps a senior Radical suggested that all long term measures would create 'needless controversies' and should be excluded.

A year later Maurice Thorez was to boast openly '*It must be said...that the communists were seen refusing to write into the programme of the Popular Front the socializations which certain people urged*'. [3]

Thus the programme of the Popular Front which appeared in the newspapers of 11 January 1936 owed much to the Communist Party's wooing of the Radicals. It was divided into three parts: the defence of liberty, the defence of peace and economic demands.

*Daladier; forced out by fascist mobilisations*

The first section demanded an amnesty for political prisoners. Against the fascist leagues it demanded the '*disarmament and effective dissolution of all quasi-military organizations*' and the '*enforcement of laws against the provocation of rioting or against attacks on the security of the state*'.

When it came to trade union liberties the programme excelled itself in vagueness. It demanded: '*(a) Application of and respect for the labour rights of all and (b) Respect for the right of women to work.*' The programme also demanded a raising of the school leaving age by one year.

In the second section—the defence of peace—the proposals were even less precise. To appeal for popular support for peace, to work within the framework of the League of Nations for Peace, for collective security and the application of sanctions against aggression. In addition the programme called for a reduction of armaments 'generally and simultaneously', the nationalisation of the war industries and the repudiation of secret diplomacy. Last but by no means least for the CP, given Kremlin policy, it pledged '*to extend, notably in Eastern and Central Europe, the system of security pacts open to all, following the principles of the Franco-Soviet pact*'.

Thirdly, came the economic demands. The CGT were given a nod with the commitment to the '*restoration of consumer purchasing power destroyed or reduced by the economic depression*'. The measures to do this were however weak and vague in the extreme. They included a national unemployment fund, the '*reduction of the working* *week without lowering the weekly wage'*, 'adequate retirement pensions' to encourage older workers into giving up their jobs to younger workers and a programme of useful public works by central and local government 'and private capital'.

The programme made no specific or unequivocal promise to nationalize anything but the war industries. It promised no new legal rights for French workers who suffered a virtual tyranny within the factory. The disarmament of the fascist bands took the form of a dissolution of *all* quasi-military organisations and thus on the part of the CP was a renunciation of workers defence squads or the arming of the proletariat. That the fascists might be forced to deposit their arms with their police friends (who often gave them the arms in the first place) was little more than a minor inconvenience. Worse, in endowing the bourgeois state with extra public order powers it armed it against the class struggle of the workers.

If the programme was full of dangerous measures and half-hearted petty reforms the organisation of the Popular Front to assure its implementation was almost non-existant. Present day apologists have described it as a mass movement or an achievement of hegemony by the communists over a broad people's alliance. Nothing could be further from the truth.

The radicals and the SFIO refused resolutely to turn the local Popular Front committees into mass bodies. Individual membership was ruled out. Local committees were to be 'in the image of the national committee', that is, composed only of representatives of the member organizations. All decisions had to be made unanimously. The Socialists wanted the committees to have some sort of control over candidates in the coming election. They proposed a letter which the parties' candidates would sign pledging themselves to *'participate in a majority both disciplined and bound to the spirit of the Popular Front and to support the government constantly by your votes'.* The Radicals refused point blank to be bound by such provisions. The CP also promptly declared them 'inopportune'.

The exact scale of the CP's opportunism was shown in the remaining months up to the general election. During the second half of 1935 most of the Radical deputies in the *Chambre* (the French lower house of parliament) blithely continued to support Laval's anti-working class rule by decree. The CP's tactics were merely to coax the Radicals into deserting Laval. This meant courting Edouard Daladier the leader of the left wing of the Radicals and from October the president of the party.

In the succeeding months more and more Radicals did indeed defect from Laval's ministry and ceased to vote for it in the *Chambre*. He was finally obliged to resign on 22 January. The Communist party—meeting at that very moment in congress—decided that if an interim government was formed which was 'left-wing' (i.e. a purely Radical Party government) and it offered to dissolve the fascist leagues then the CP would vote confidence in it and support it in parliament until the elections.

A government under a Radical, Albert Sarraut, was formed—but in coalition with the conservatives. Regardless of this the communists for the first time *abstained* in the vote of confidence on a bourgeois ministry.

The interim goverment soon faced internal and external crises. Hitler, seeing the manifest weakness of French imperialism and its government, chose this moment to re-militarise the Rhineland—something forbidden by the Versailles Treaty and the Locarno Pact.

At first the government looked as if it might respond. The communists had their first opportunity to display their new-found social patriotism. Gone were the denunciations of the 'Versailles robber treaty'. Now it was the fascist violators of international law who were the main enemy. 'Long live the union of the French Nation!', screamed *L'Humanité*.

The CP now felt it could face the approaching elections with a new confidence. At its eighth congress Marcel Cachin, the party's veteran leader, announced that the membership now stood at 74,400—a gain of 45,000 over the 1933 figure. The congress launched a campaign for 100,000 members.

Thorez delivered the main political report entitled significantly 'The Unity of the French Nation'. Its theme was that all classes in France should unite against 'the 200 families', the very top bankers and industrial monopolists and the fascists. As a cover for its abandonment of class interests it adopted the demagogic slogan 'Make the rich pay!' How the rich could be made to pay whilst leaving intact their control over the whole workings of the economy he did not say.

The party's election campaign was marked by an unbridled patriotism. The communists stood for 'a free strong and happy France'. The fascists were stigmatized as the 'dividers of Frenchmen.'

As for its social programme the CP simply pillaged the waste basket of reformism for a list of reforms which were obviously not meant to be taken too seriously by their prospective Radical allies. The programme called for a 40 hour week, collective agreements in industry, paid holidays for workers, cheap credit for shopkeepers and price support for farmers. These were to be financed by a progressive capital levy on fortunes over 500,000 francs. This was the real content of the ubiquitous slogan, 'Make the rich pay!'.

It is plain that Thorez and Company, although they wanted a mighty increase in the CP's votes in the election really wished for a Radical government, under Daladier with the Socialists in a minority position squeezed between the goverment party and the communists. The election was to more than fulfil their expectations with regard to the CP's votes and seats won but it dashed their hopes for the Radicals.

The elections were held on 26 April and 3 May. In the first round all parties put up their own candidates. In the second round 'Republican discipline' was to prevail; supporters of all the Popular Front parties were supposed to vote for the best placed Popular Front candidate be they communist, socialist or radical. The results were a clear victory for the Popular Front. Its parties received 5,421,000 votes against 4,233,000 for the right.

The fate of the three main parties of the Popular Front was instructive. The Radicals lost 400,000 votes and lost 50 seats retaining only 106 seats. The SFIO lost 30,000 votes but with 1,950,000 votes and 147 seats, they were the largest single party, gaining fifteen seats.

But it was the Communist Party that scored the greatest triumph. Its parliamentary representation leapt from eleven to 72 seats. It gained one and a half million votes, more than doubling its previous total. But despite its joy in their own victory, when the dust settled an unwelcome prospect faced the CP.

As soon as the results were announced the SFIO rushed to declare its readiness not only to participate in goverment but claimed its right, as the largest party, to the premiership and to the lion's share of the ministerial portfolios.

The CP equally promptly disclaimed any desire for ministerial positions. It did so not on the principle of non-participation in a bourgeois government but in order to spare the nerves of the Radical ministers who would otherwise have to sit at the cabinet table with fire-eating 'communists'. Blum, however, refused to take office at first and Serraut was appointed premier.

## MAY/JUNE 1936: THE GREAT STRIKE WAVE

The working class was stirred to its very depths by the victory of the Popular Front. Equally it frightened and demoralized the autocratic French employers who were used to badly organised or often completely non-union workshops.

A series of strikes broke out from 7 May onwards in the metal industries. The demands were initially for the re-instatement of union militants who had struck on May Day. It started in the Le Breguet factories at Le Havre, spread to Latecoere in Toulouse and to Bloch in Courbevoie. All these works were highly modern aircraft factories. In each case the workers won. The autocratic *patrons* collapsed like a pack of cards.

Wider and wider sections of the proletariat went into action in the week of 22 May to 29 May. It extended to 100,000 workers in the heavy industrial and engineering belt around Paris. The initial demands were for the re-instatement of sacked militants and recognition of the union as the collective bargaining agent for the workforce. But as the strikes increased in number so the demands broadened to include wage increases and paid holidays.

Up to this point the Communist Party and its officials in the CGT had encouraged the movement. Their objective was a limited one: to gain recognition for the Association of the Metalurgical Unions in the Paris region as a legal bargaining agent. *L'Humanité's* call was for an industry-wide collective contract.

The caretaker government dared not use the *gardes mobiles* and was terrified that the strikes were getting out of control. They called in not only the CGT and socialists but for the first time the CP leaders. Jacques Duclos left the meeting saying the Communist Party wanted *'first of all to avoid any disorder, then to obtain the opening of negotiations as soon as possible to achieve a peaceful solution to the conflict'.* [4]

The CP rushed to fulfill its promise, scuttling the occupation at the huge Renault plant at Boulogne-Billancourt against heavy worker resistance. Such was the CP's authority that in two days only 10,000 strikers remained in occupation in Paris.

Yet things were not to go as smoothly as the CGT, CP and SFIO leaders hoped. The limits of their control lay in the fact that only just under one million French workers

*Renault factory occupation*

were unionised. But the factory occupations stirred up the great unorganized majority in thousands of factories and other workplaces where the workers had never felt the slightest union protection against their arrogant bosses.

The *patrons* had long maintained strict hierarchy and harsh discipline in the factory. Meticulous timekeeping, bans on smoking—all enforced by a well-organised spying system—saw to it that any trade union activist, militant socialist or communist or even the reader of a left-wing newspaper was sacked as soon as he or she was discovered. The factories were like army barracks. In addition the workers had economic grievances. Real wages had fallen by about 15 per cent between 1930 and 1935 under the impact of the depression.

The growing strike wave found an enthusiastic response only on the left-wing of the SFIO and amongst the small group of French Trotskyists. The former were grouped around a young teacher militant of the SFIO Paris region, Marceau Pivert. They called themselves the 'Revolutionary Left' although they were in reality only left centrists zig-zagging between the ideas of the two Leons—Blum and Trotsky.

Pivert did not manage to break with Blum until the great revolutionary wave of 1936-8 had passed. He never managed to join forces with Trotsky. But under the influence of the masses he became for a period the voice of the 'June days'. On 27 May he wrote in the SFIO paper *Le Populaire*:

*'In the atmosphere of victory, of confidence and discipline which is spreading over the whole country everything is possible to those who dare! Everything is possible and our party has at the same time the privilege and the responsibility to be carried to the head of the movement. Let it go forward, let it lead, let it take decisions, let it carry them out, let it take things in hand and no obstacle will be able to resist it. What millions and millions of men and women are calling for from the depths of their collective consciousness is a radical change and at short notice.'* [5]

*Sarraut and Daladier*

Within days of Pivert's article and the 600,000 strong 28 May demonstration in commemoration of the Paris Commune, the strikes broke out again, this time with redoubled force. On 2 June the metalurgical industry was in full occupation again. But now it spread repidly to other sectors—to the chemical, textile and food industries. The universal pattern was the sit-in strike. Even the sales girls in the large Paris stores 'sat down'.

By 4 June newspaper distribution was stopped, the clothing trade, the locksmiths, the jewellers, the gas and building industries were hit. On 6 June the miners—a bastion of hitherto right-wing SFIO influence—struck. Important sections of the petit-bourgeoisie took action. Farmers and shopkeepers supplied the strikers with food. By 10 June over two million were on strike!

Simone Weil, a journalist and participant in the movement, captures the mood of elation and good nature universal at the beginning of any great class struggle or revolutionary movement:

*'The strike is in itself a joy...Joy to enter the factory with the smiling permission of a worker on guard...Joy to hear instead of the merciless din of the machines, the sound of music, songs and laughter. Joy to walk past the bosses with your head held high...At long last, for the first time, and forever after this, there will be other memories around these machines than silence, compulsion, submissiveness.'* [6]

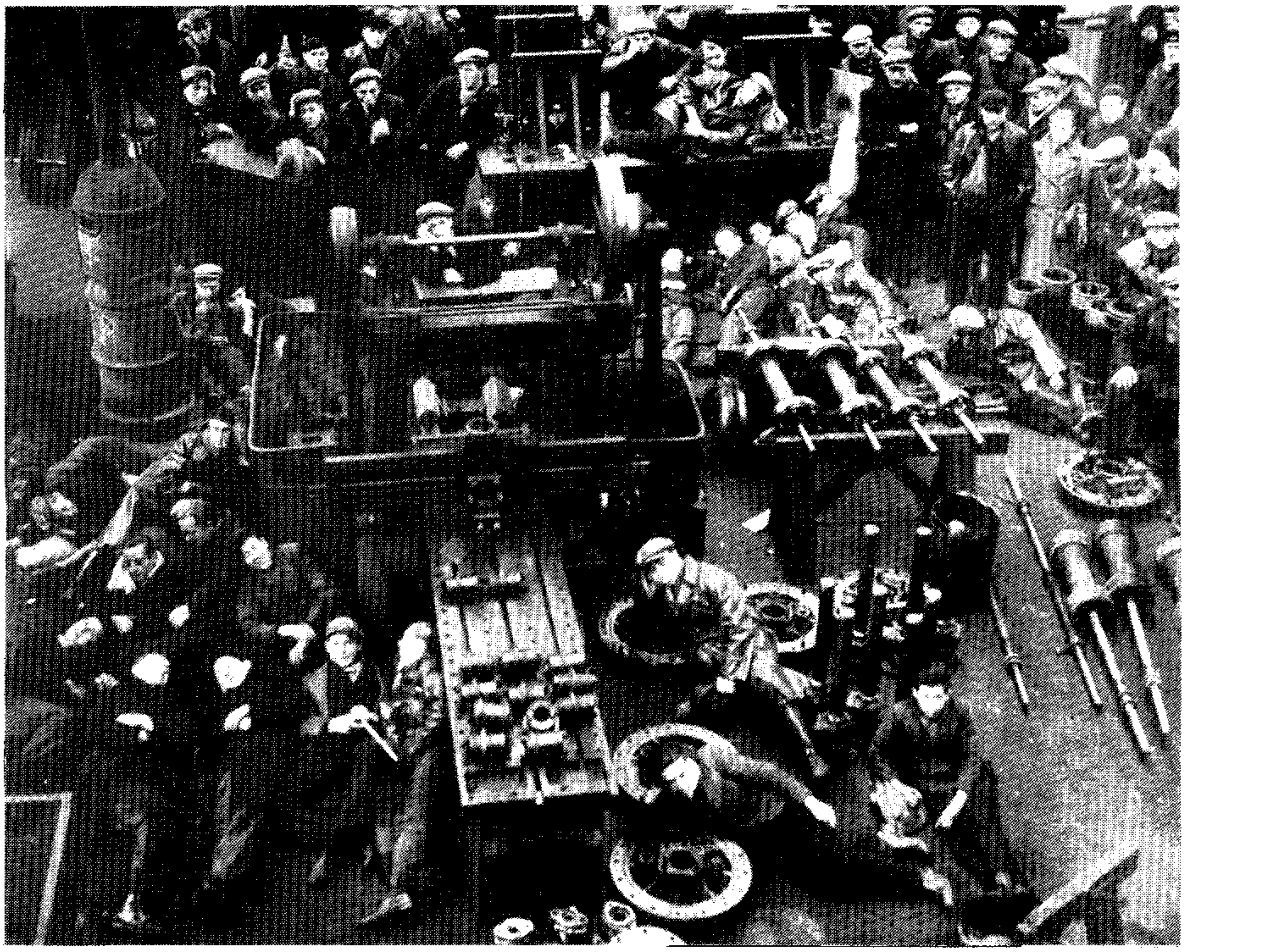
On the crest of this wave Blum was forced to assume office on 4 June. It has been argued that this mighty wave of working class miltancy was some sort of endorsment of the Popular Front or was a product of the election victory. Certainly the knowledge that the right had been defeated at the polls and that the *patron's* project of a more vicious anti-working class government had suffered a serious set-back encouraged the workers to take action. The Sarraut caretaker goverment could hardly be expected to take vigorous military or police action against the strikers. Also workers did not expect Blum to so. Nor indeed could he immediately given socialist and communist participation in the strike wave.

However, Trotsky rightly pointed out the massive strike wave was not primarily a vote of confidence in Blum and the Popular Front:

*'The sweep of the strike springs, we are told, from 'hopes' in the Peoples Front government. This is only one quarter of the truth and even less than that. If matters were really limited to hopes alone, the workers would not have run the risk of struggle. The strike expresses above all thedistrust or the half trust of the workers, if not in the good intentions of the government, then its ability to overcome obstacles and come to grips with its problems. The proletarians want to 'assist' the government, but in their own way, in the proletarian way. Of course, they still lack complete consciousness of their own strength. But it would be a gross distortion to portray matters as if the masses were guided only by pious 'hopes' in Blum.'* [7]

How little the workers should have placed any trust whatsoever in Blum would be shown by the record of his government. How little he welcomed this proletarian 'assistance' he revealed years later at his trial by the Vichy regime. He referred to the June days as *'that social explosion which, right at the outset, came as a slap in the face to his government'* [8]

Blum was not the only 'workers leader' alarmed and affronted by the actions of the proletariat. The Communist Party did everything it possibly could to limit, hold back and ultimately to demobilize the strike wave. In a direct answer to Marceau Pivert's article, 'Everthing is possible'



*Metal workers occupying the Crespin steel works*

in *Le Populaire* of 28 May, Marcel Gitton, leading CP journalist replied on 29 May in *L'Humanité* with an article entitled 'Not everything is possible'. According to Gitton all the workers wanted were 'more humane conditions of work' which an 'intelligent and understanding' management would now agree to negotiate. No 'wave of the wand' could solve all the workers problems. The Popular Front was the workers best hope. Its programme should be carried out *'in order, calm, tranquility and without a perfectly useless precipitancy'.* Worse still, *'rash actions could only lead to the alienation of an important part of the petit-bourgeoisie'.* Finally he added *'We consider it impossible in the face of the Hitler menace, to put in jeopardy the security of France for which the Popular Front is responsible'.*

But the workers' actions had already shown that a lot more was possible than the Stalinist and social democratic leaders thought. The proud and autocratic employers were terrified—their factories occupied by 'their' workers. Albert Lebrun, President of the Republic, pleaded with Leon Blum: *'The workers have confidence in you—go on the radio and speak to them'.*

Blum had an important role to play for the bourgeoisie. On 5 June at a meeting of the 'Delegation of the Left', the leaders of the Popular Front parties issued a unanimous call for an end to the strikes. The next day Blum condemned the strikes in parliament: *'I have been asked if I think factory occupation is legal. I do not regard it as legal.'*

On 7 June he invited representatives of the national management association and the CGT to a meeting at the premier's official residence the Hotel Matignon. The meeting lasted but a few hours. The haughty *patronat* were falling over themselves to make any concessions that would save private property in the means of production and evacuate their mines, steelmills, factories, offices and shops.

Union recognition, collective agreements, freely elected workers committees in the factories, paid holidays, a 10-15 per cent hike in wages, compulsory arbitration. If the lightening speed with which the employers swallowed these bitter pills was a wonder to behold it was no less marvellous to see them pass through the parliamentary talking shop and the reactionary senate with the speed of an express train. Truly reforms are the by-product of revolution, even the fear of it, and the 'Matignon Agreements' were a classic example.

The CP, the CGT and the SFIO now threw all their weight on the brakes to halt the movement. It was a difficult job. On 9 June in a front page article in *L'Humanité* Benoit Frachon, a CP member of the CGT delegation to the Hotel Matignon, called on the strikers to return to work. Yet the strikes continued with over one million workers still occcupying their workplaces.

On 10 June the government brought in the *gardes* *mobiles*, the armed assault police. Yet to use them would not be easy. The chief of police of the Paris region reported that he had not enough men to clear the factories. Indeed it would be necessary, he remembered sarcastically, to call up the strikers as special constables to do it!

The CP-led Association of Metallurgical Workers of the Paris Region called a mass meeting of delegates from the factories to put the Matignon Agreements to them and get a return to work. The CP leaders were—in their own words 'jeered at'.

The CP had to assert control over its own cadres. It held a meeting of its own party cell secretaries which voted a motion of confidence in the leadership. On 11 June a special rally of party members from the Paris Region was held. Addressed by Thorez, he told it *'To seize power now is out of the question!'*. He held before the meeting the spectre of a hostile peasantry and of the fascist threat. Nothing must be done he said to *'dislocate the cohesion of the masses'*.

The strike movement had to be limited to the *'satisfaction of demands of an economic character'*, and *'compromise'* was necessary even *'if all the demands have not yet been accepted but if victory has been achieved on the most essential and important demands'*. Then he uttered his memorable words, *'It is necessary to know how to end a strike as soon as satisfaction has been obtained'*.

The French Stalinists thus set their face resolutely against any revolutionary development of the massive strike wave. *L'Humanité* on 14 June carried the amazing, (but entirely true) slogan 'The Communist Party is order!'

Despite all this the Communist Party was a rapidly growing mass force within the working class. It had 163,000 members in May 1936 and by July this had risen to 246,000. By October *L'Humanité's* circulation had risen to 380,000. Why? Workers joined the party because its name, its claim to Bolshevism, its links with the USSR and its role on the left of the CGT implied militant class struggle. In fact, these appearances were completely belied by its actions; but it took time to discover this.

*Trotsky in France*

On the trade union front the workers flooded in a massive tidal wave into the unions. The CGT expanded enormously. With around one million members before the strikes its membership had reached 2,500,000 by mid-June. It was to double again within six to eight months.

This unionisation of the unorganised—matched in scale only by the great unionisation drive proceeding in the USA—was an expression of the new class combativity of the French proletariat. But the influence of the trade union bureaucracy joined the influence of the Blum Government and the PCF as a brake on the movement.

With all the major forces of the workers' movement now aimed at its dissolution the strike wave gradually subsided. On 26 June the number of strikers had fallen to 166,000. By early August there were only 4,800.

Only one small grouping had offered a radically different perspective for the French working class. The Parti Ouvrier Internationaliste (Internationalist Workers Party), that is, the Trotskyists, had only just been formed. The third issue of its weekly paper *La Lutte Ouvrière* (Workers' Struggle) contained an article by Trotsky headlined 'The French Revolution Has Begun!'

In this article Trotsky scathingly attacked the CP and the CGT's line that the strikes were simply economic or craft strikes. Trotsky's estimation was that *'these are not craft strikes that have taken place. These are not just strikes. This is a strike. This is the open rallying of the oppressed against the oppressors. This is the classic beginning of revolution.'* [9]

Trotsky looked with a cold eye at the perspectives of the class enemy and summed up their tactic and strategy faced with the workers' offensive:

*'The ruling class has a real staff. This staff is not at all identical with the Blum Government although it uses the latter very skillfully. Capitalist reaction is now playing a risky game, for high stakes, but it is playing ably. At the present it is playing the game of "losers win". "Let us concede today all the unpleasant demands which have met with the unanimous approval of Blum, Jouhaux and Dadalier. It is a far cry from recognition in principle to recognition in action. There is the parliament, there is the senate, there is the chancery—all these are instruments of obstruction. The masses will show impatience and will attempt to exert greater pressure. Daladier will divorce Blum. Thorez will try to shy to the left. Blum and Jouhaux will part company with the masses. Then we shall make up for all the present concessions and with interest." This is the reasoning of the real staff of the counter-revolution, the famous "200 families" and their hired strategists. They are acting in accord with a plan'.* [10]

How different was the policy of the workers' leaders. Trotsky pointed out that the actions of Blum, of Jouhaux and Thorez were helping the ruling class to recover, to launch a counter-attack and to triumph. If the 200 families had a plan for counter-revolution and a staff to carry it out then, said Trotsky: *'There must be a staff and a plan of proletarian revolution.'*

Trotsky forsaw a second wave of the struggle, one which *'will not have by far the peaceful almost good natured, spring-like character that the first has had. It will be more mature more stubborn and harsh, for it will arise from the disillusionment of the masses in the practical results of the policies of the People's Front'.*

Trotsky's voice rang out in the tone of Leninism and Bolshevism. The headline of the issue of *La Lutte Ouvrière* that carried his article also said it clearly, 'In the Factories—On the Streets, Power to the Workers!' This message was so explosive that the government ordered the paper's immediate seizure. The 'Republican freedom' of Blum and Thorez had no place in it for Bolshevism.

## BLUM'S FIRST MINISTRY

As Trotsky had predicted, once the strikes had ended and the factories emptied of their occupiers the bourgeoisie took up the campaign to limit and then reverse the concessions they had made to the working class. Their first resort was to a flight of capital abroad. The Radicals would not hear of exchange controls and since Blum and Thorez had no intention of alienating them, millions of francs left the country. The bankers of the '200 families' put a straight-jacket on the Government's borrowing. So Blum was obliged to resort to printing money, that is, to inflation of the currency.

The workers soon discovered that the dramatic wage rises of June were shrinking before their eyes. Despite Blum's reflation and stimulation of the purchasing power of the masses, the bourgeoisie failed totally to increase investment and step up production. Without a drastic jacking-up of their profit rates nothing was likely to make them do so. Yet the concessions they had just made to the unions in terms of union organisation in the plants and collective agreements made it difficult for the individual employer to lead an offensive.

An economic guerilla war thus intensified between employers and workers. At the same time the bourgeoisie checked the Popular Front's proposed recommendations and attempts to direct the economy. All this had the ultimate aim of discrediting the government, demoralizing the working class and preparing the road for an anti-working class government that would smash the reforms, crush the power of the unions, restore profitability and labour discipline.

The CP accepted a Blum-led government with ill-concealed gloom. Daladier had been their man. He, they thought, would pursue a vigorous pro-Soviet foreign policy, would curb the fascist leagues and keep the bourgeoisie happy.

The CP showed its discontent with Blum by launching a campaign for a broadening of the Popular Front *to the right.*

On 14 July, Bastille Day, *L'Humanité* urged Parisians to go and cheer the army at the Champs Elysees with the headline, 'The army is at one with the people'. In August Duclos, for the CP, proposed a 'French Front'. The programme for the new front was 'respect for the law', 'defence of the national economy' and the 'liberty and independence of the country'.

What did this mean? Since the Popular Front could only be extended by taking in the conservative Republicans, it clearly meant a retreat from the reform programme. All that concerned the CP was a vigorous anti-German foreign policy and the utopian project of persuading the bourgeoisie to respect the Matignon Agreements in return for the working class renouncing any further advances.

But a self-denying ordinance was no longer enough. The deterioration in the economy prompted Blum to attempt a full blooded anti-working class austerity policy. To start the year of 1937 a decree of 6 January made it illegal to strike without recourse to arbitration.

On 13 February, in a radio broadcast, Blum announced the necessity for a 'pause', that is, for a turn from niggardly reforms to actually clawing back the gains the workers had made. *Le Temps*, voice of the big bourgeoisie, gloated on 8 March, 'Its more than a pause, its a conversion'.

*Leon Blum*

The attempt to ban the fascists had proved a fiasco as well. On 18 June, 1936 the *Ligues* had indeed been banned. De La Rocque's Croix de Feu dissolved as a *Ligue* only to re-emerge as the Parti Socialiste de France (PSF). Previously it had 450,000 members; as the PSF it rose to 600,000 and then to 800,000. From September 1936 it resumed its provocative marches and motorised columns which descended on and terrorized left wing municipalities and helped the police to break strikes.

So the Popular Front had clearly not defeated fascism with its state ban. On the contrary only the working class was disarmed by it. The fascists with their many connections with the police, with the big bankers and industrialists had secret arms caches and could be armed *against* workers at a moment's notice. The employers who did not wish to see their factories occupied again carefully nurtured these organisations.

The SFIO and the CP meanwhile did nothing to train disciplined defence squads of workers to defend the unions, the factories, the party premises. Workers, of course, fought back but too often with bare knuckles, with improvised weapons against an armed para-military police force, backed up by fascist gangs and provocateurs.

The worst example of this occurred at Clichy a suburb of Paris in 16 March 1937. A joint SFIO-CP counter-demonstration was organised to stop a rally of de La Rocque's PSF. Eight thousand workers marched and clashed with the police defending the fascist meeting. The police opened fire on the demonstrators. At the end of the evening six were dead or dying, 500 were wounded.

The CGT called a half-day general strike in protest. But Thorez had gone to the scene late in the evening and refused to speak to the crowd from the town hall window. He rounded on a group of workers calling for a workers' militia with the angry outburst 'Filthy Trotskyists!'

When the issue was raised in parliament on 23 March Jacques Duclos for the CP actually presented the motion of confidence in the government for its handling of the affair. The Popular Front government now had workers blood on its hands and the CP was only too glad to help wash them.

Blum's ministry meanwhile was coming to an end. On 14 June 1937 Blum had asked for the famous *decrets-lois* (ruling by decree) to solve the economic crisis. The CP voted for these measures in the Lower House. But the Senate, in which conservatives and Radicals had a large majority, threw it out. Rather than precipitate a constitutional crisis which would pit the working class against the indirectly elected chamber, Blum resigned on 22 June.

His ministry was replaced by the second Popular Front Goverment led by Camille Chautemps—a Radical—and in which Blum served as deputy premier. The CP eagerly offered to serve in this ministry, the Radical-led one they had always wanted but were politely if firmly informed that now was not the time. *Their moment had passed.*

## THE LAST CHANCE

The working class movement reached its peak of growth in the spring of 1937. The CGT reached its apogee in March 1937 with just over four million members. Unionisation reached very high percentage levels in private industry.

Wage rises likewise saw a sharp increase in the first year of the Popular Front. In the two years 1936-8 average real wages and salaries rose by almost five per cent. This largely affected male industrial workers, however. Women workers, public service workers, and pensioners saw their real incomes stagnate or decline. This had a tendency to isolate the heavily unionised industrial workers from these other sectors of the proletariat and, importantly, from the peasantry.

*Defending what they hold...*

The political passivity of the working class imposed by the CP and the SFIO in pursuit of the Popular Front also left these sectors leaderless. They tended to move to the right seeking 'order'. The employers, seeing this, stepped up their combined economic and political offensive against the proletariat. In the big Parisian department stores the management unilaterally withdrew concessions made in 1936.

In particular they tried to dispense with the disciplinary councils which limited their right to sack and get rid of the sliding scale of wages that roughly kept workers abreast of the inflation. Employees immediately struck, occupied the great stores and forced local management to retreat—conceding a one year renewal of the previous agreements.

At the great tyre making works of Goodrich an occupation strike broke out. Chautemps sent the police to clear the works but the workers fortified the plant. Neighbouring factories struck and surrounded 'Fort Goodrich'. Up to this point the CP and *L'Humanité* supported the struggle.

The CP's national congress was indeed meeting at this very moment. Chautemps immediately put the CP and the CGT to a loyalty test. He gave them the stark alternative evacuate 'Fort Goodrich' at once or he and his cabinet would resign. The Stalinists immediately caved in and vacated the plant, seriously alienating and demoralizing the workers.

Meanwhile, Franco-Soviet relations were plumeting in the winter of 1937-8. Stalin and the CPSU politburo were losing all patience with the French Government over its failure to ratify any military aspects of the Franco-Soviet Pact. On 17 January Zhdanov, in a public session of the Supreme Soviet, asked 'if this pact exists or not?'

The French CP now tried to force Chautemps' hand in an attempt to 'correct' the government's policy. Their chosen method once more was parliamentarism. They began to embarrass the government by demanding an end to the 'pause' in reforms at precisely the point that the government was trying to launch a fully blown austerity programme.

The parliamentary manoeuvring worked badly. Chautemps, warned by the French-secret service of Hitler's imminent seizure of Austria, actually wanted to get out of the firing line. He suddenly resigned on 10 February 1938 and in the following days Hitler invaded and annexed Austria.

France was again absorbed in a ministerial crisis. Leon Blum, as head of the largest party, once more attempted to form a government. But this time using the war danger he called for national unity. To this social-patriotic call the CP loudly added its voice.

Like reformists before or since they were on a hiding to nothing if they thought they could use patriotism to appeal to the better nature of the bourgeoisie. Blum's emotional calls for all to rally to the defence of the fatherland were met by a complete rebuff from the right. In the Chamber the far-right deputies yelled 'Death to the Jews!' and the oft-repeated phrase in the right-wing press was 'Rather Hitler than Blum!' For them, at least, 'the main enemy was at home'.

The right rejected a fight against Hitler on two grounds. Internally it would mean a coalition with the SFIO, the CP and the CGT just when they wanted to launch an anti-working class offensive against them. Internationally it meant alliance with the 'red menace' and a risky one indeed since Hitler and Mussolini were arming for war. They much preferred an alliance *with* the fascist dictators *against* the USSR.

*Striking miners*

Hence, Blum's hope of a National Government was totally illusory and he put together another ministry with the unwilling Radicals. The latter were determined to break their links with the CP. They wanted a coalition including the 'moderate' (i.e. non fascist and monarchist) right and the SFIO to restore order and discipline the unions.

Here the class struggle intervened to bring all these hopes to confusion. A new strike wave comparable in size only to June 1936 was in the making. From the end of February 1938 to the end of March over 10,000 workers occupied factories in the big provincial cities, Lyon, Marseilles, Bordeaux and Limoges. In Marseilles chemical workers struck against their bosses renunciation of the sliding scale of wages. On 24 March the Paris Metal Workers—the heavy battallions of the French labour movement entered the fray. The Citröen factories were occupied and the struggle spilled over into other fronts. In two weeks the number of strikers in the Paris region rose to 100,000.

Again Blum called employers and unions to the Hotel Matignon. The unions tamely accepted his offer of a 'compromise' deal: a seven per cent wage increase and an increase in the working week to 45 hours in defence related industries. On 4 April the employers rejected Blum's deal. The strike movement grew and hardened.

By now the movement had developed its own momentum. Initially the CP and SFIO union leaders gave it encouragement as a counter-weight to the pressure of the bosses. But both realised that the bourgeoisie was in no mood for further concessions on the scale of June 1936. The CP anyway wanted massive re-armament and a 'patriotic' government.

Meanwhile Blum's government was coming to the end of its life. Putting forward his proposals to end the strikes in the Lower House, Blum won by 311 votes to 250. But in the Senate on 8 April, his proposals were contemptuously rejected by 214 votes to 47.

Neither Blum nor the CP were willing to create a constitutional crisis; both because they were determined not to turn the 'economic' strike wave into a political struggle and a potentially revolutionary crisis and because of their fear of finally rupturing the Popular Front. If the fatherland (and the 'workers fatherland') had to be defended then the workers had to be kept within the bounds of legality, they reasoned.

On 11 April Daladier, the Radical leader, formed a government and the CP voted for it. The employers readily conceded to Daladier, the very compromise they had refused to Blum. The unions who had been prepared to compromise under Blum did not dare to refuse Daladier the same deal.

On CGT orders the workers evacuated the plants, red flags flying but often grumbling bitterly against the union leaders. By 21 April nearly all factories had resumed normal working. At the mass meeting that ended the occupations the militants angrily called the bureaucrats to account and denounced the 'compromise' as a sell-out. Bourde notes:

*The minorities were listened to with greater attention when they denounced the treason of the Stalinists and the reformists. And the less committed workers turned away from the unions; in a few months the metal workers federation lost 80,000 members. The 'second round of June 1936' left an impression of malaise and opened a crisis inside the workers organisations.*[11]

Not only the CGT and its Metal Workers Federation suffered from the sell-outs of the first half of 1938. Certain Paris sections of the CP lost one third of their members. Overall membership stagnated and fell. The Communist Youth League fell to half its 1936 level.

The reward that the Stalinists procured for their demobilisation of the April strike wave was a ferocious anti-working class austerity drive and the trampling on the


*Blum as premier*

Franco-Soviet Pact. Yet they still would not mobilize the unions to resist the attack until it became absolutely clear that the French bourgeoisie was going all the way with Chamberlain in appeasing Hitler.

On 21 August Daladier announced that France had to be 'put back to work' by relaxing the 40 hour week across the whole of industry. The CP fulminated against the measures but again offered compromises. Daladier contemptuously granted them and proceeded to cut the 40 hour week to shreds by a series of decree laws.

But soon the Munich crisis was upon France. It came to a head on 22 September when Hitler rejected Chamberlain's proposals to hand over Czechoslovakia to him, because they would take effect too slowly. The Czech's ordered a general mobilization, France a partial one. Britain declared a state of emergency and mobilized her fleet. Trenches were being dug, the stations were full of reservists, gas masks were being distributed.

Then came the last minute meeting in Munich which gave Hitler what he wanted. The Munich Pact was a death blow to the sorry remains of both the Franco-Soviet Pact and the Popular Front. The Soviet Union had been ignored, Czechoslovakia dismembered and a four power non-aggression pact signed between the two leading fascist states and the two leading 'democracies'.

The CP loudly and bitterly denounced the pact, but in vain. Only the left wing of the SFIO led by Zyromsky sided with them. Daladier now took the opportunity to launch his final offensive on the bewildered CP and on the discredited *Front Populaire*. Paul Reynaud, his new Finance Minister, proclaimed a further series of decrees lifting all price controls and virtually absolishing what was left of the 40 hour week. It was a gauntlet thrown down to the CGT.

When announcing the decrees the minister had talked openly about 'restoring capitalist profit'. Daladier talked with evident pleasure about getting rid of the 'week with two Sundays'. The CGT now had to fight or succumb. Yet still the bureaucrats temporized. The Confederal Bureau gave an order for a one day general protest strike in 18 days time! Daladier used this time to prepare the crushing of the strike.

The Paris region metal workers however sensing the stupidity of the 18 days waiting jumped the gun and took action. Sit downs began on 21 November. A few days later 100,000 were on strike or in occupation with the Citröen, Bloch and Renault plants occupied.

But alas this time Daladier was ready. Two thousand riot police were sent into the Renault factories. A bitter barricade fight took place, workers hurling steel bars, crankshafts and bolts at the invaders. The police used teargas. After four hours the workers—upwards of 25,000—were expelled and 300 arrested.

Without workers defence squads and without immediate support from other plants, the *guards brigade* of the CGT was crushed. The effect of this defeat, in a factory where 7,500 workers were party members, was demoralizing in the extreme. The other factories were evacuated without resistence. Now only the general strike remained. The CGT pathetically promised the strict legality of its protest.

Daladier hemmed it in with laws and decrees. On the due day he requisitioned the railways, the underground, the buses and all public services. Workers in these were threatened with prison sentences if they struck. The unions passively complied; even the communist controlled railway workers federation yielded without a murmur and kept out of the strike. In private industry the strike was reasonably effective, with 50 to 80 per cent out.

Worse was to follow though. When workers returned in low spirits after what the Government press hailed as a fiasco they found lists of sacked militants posted on the gates. Union recognition was dismissed and collective agreements were torn up by the jubilant *patrons*. Workers, demoralized and humiliated, flooded out of the unions. The CGT, 3.5 million strong in 1938 fell to 2.5 million in August 1939. By May 1940 it was to have under one million members. The wheel had come full circle since June 36. Everything was lost.

What had been gained by breaking the great upsurges of the working class in 1936 and in 1938? Peace? War was to come nine or ten months later. The defence of the Republic and democracy? After the French military disaster of 1940 Petain was to install a bonapartist dictatorship in the southern part of the country while the Gestapo had a free hand in the north. The defence of the Soviet Union? In 1941 Hitler was to launch an onslaught which resulted in the deaths of 20 million Soviet citizens. The Spanish Republic? Franco finally smashed it in March 1939.

Yet in the name of these objectives and via the Popular Front strategy the workers were poisoned with chauvinism. The way was prepared for the 'democratic imperialisms' to lead the masses into another barbarous world war.

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1 Trotsky 'Stalin has signed the death warrant of the Third International!' in *Writings* 1934-5 p291

2 R F Kivel *Capitalism and the state in modern France* (Cambridge 1981) pp108-14

3 D R Browyer *The New Jacobins* p117

4 ibid p147

5 D Guerin *Front Populaire: Révolution Manquée* (1976) p117

6 Quoted in M Adereth *The French Communist Party - a Critical History* p77

7 Trotsky 'The French Revolution Has Begun' in *On France* p165

8 Cited in Guerin *op cit* p121

9 Trotsky 'The French Revolution Has Begun' *op cit* p164

10 Ibid p164

11 Guy Broudé *La Defaite De La Front Populaire* p37

# Divided class, divided party: the SWP debates women's oppression

## by Helen Ward

FOR THE PAST few years the SWP theoreticians have been arguing over whether working class men benefit from women's oppression. The answer seems fairly straight forward. Yes. They have higher wages than women, are more unionised, have more valued skills, they don't have to do much housework, and don't face problems of sexual harassment and assault.

Indeed, one of the leading contributors to the debate, Lindsey German, points out: *'The appeal of the argument that men benefit from women's oppression is a real one, and highly understandable. It appears to reflect reality.'* [1]

Yet she, along with Chris Harman, Sheila McGregor and in the background Tony Cliff, argue that to hold to such a view is non-Marxist, automatically leading to theories of patriarchy and separatism. Waging a battle on this powerful group is John Molyneux, arguing that it would be absurd to deny the benefits male workers receive.

### THE CONTEXT OF THE DEBATE

To understand the importance of this debate it must be seen in the context of the SWP's overall position on the woman question. In 1977 the SWP launched local Women's Voice groups around their women's magazine of the same name. Prior to that *Women's Voice* (*WV*) had simply been the women's paper of the SWP. With the launch of the groups, the SWP were responding to pressure from the Women's Liberation Movement (WLM). In an abrupt 'feminist' turn they tried, briefly, to compensate for their own history of years of totally ignoring the problem of women's oppression.

The new *Women's Voice* aimed at becoming a 'socialist *Spare Rib*', but rather than being the means of taking revolutionary ideas into the WLM it became a vehicle for bringing feminist theories and practice into the SWP. When the SWP leadership recognised this rather than fight to turn WV groups into organisations of militant working class women, armed with a revolutionary programme, they decided to clamp down on the groups, deny them any powers and make WV the 'sister organisation of the SWP' in 1979. At this stage Cliff was alone in wanting to completely wind up any women's organisation, but over the next two years he managed to win over the majority of the leadership to argue that any separate organisation for work on women was wrong in principle. This was won in 1981 and WV groups were subsequently closed down. The SWP followed its time honoured routine of centrist zig-zagging. When recruits looked likely from the WLM it gave free rein to the feminists within the SWP. But when Women's Voice looked like being an obstacle to recruitment a 'Bolshevik' attitude to the woman question was hastily restored.

### MALE BENEFITS AND PATRIACHY THEORIES

In 1981 as part of the campaign against feminist ideas in the SWP, Lindsey German published an article, 'Theories of Patriarchy': *'I would argue...that not only do men not benefit from women's work in the family (rather the capitalist system as a whole benefits), but also that it is not true that men and capital are conspiring to stop women having access to economic production.'* [2]

German raises this in the context of an argument against feminists who she quite correctly criticises for seeing men as the cause of women's oppression. But in her zeal to show that men are not the cause, and that working class men do not have any real interest in perpetuating women's oppression she ends up virtually denying the very existence of the inequalities between men and women in the family. Instead she says that the role of women in the family is part of a division of labour, without saying who does better out of this division.

German's analysis of the oppression of working class women glosses over the role played by male workers and the organised labour movement, in maintaining that oppression. In the past many skilled craft unions excluded women, and allied themselves with the bosses in order to 'protect' their trades. At the moment a significant number of craft unions still do this. Look at the NGA for example. But while it would be wrong to think that the working class and its organisations are automatically opposed to women's oppression it would be equally wrong to say that there is a 'conspiracy' between all men. Rather we must understand why male workers often perceive women as a threat to their own conditions, and are therefore prey to a reactionary alliance with the bosses.

This debate relates closely to the question of Women's Voice because if you conclude, as German, Harman and McGregor do, that male workers gain nothing from the oppression of women, then it leads to the programmatic conclusion that so long as we all unite in struggle the sexist ideas of male workers will simply fade away. They insist categorically that there is no need for women workers or women revolutionaries to build special forms of organisation. In contrast, John Molyneux, having satisfied himself that working class men do gain significantly from women's oppression, concludes that *'special efforts and special methods of agitation and propaganda' directed at working class women will be necessary to ensure that their interests are not 'neglected, ignored and forgotten'.* [3] But he has no strategy for building a communist-led working class women's movement. His position would lead to a re-run of Women's Voice with all the negative, potentially feminist, features of that project.

## JUST AN HOUR OR TWO A DAY?

To bolster the SWP leadership's arguments Chris Harman repeated German's position in an article in 1984. [4] He outlines a general understanding of women's oppression, within which he once again tackles the problem of the role of male workers. He does it in the form of answers to an imagined argument against the Marxist position—that *'working class men are involved in maintaining the oppression of women and benefit from it, so they can't be involved in the struggle to end it '.* Against this Harman states:

*'In fact, however, the benefits working class men get from the oppression of women are marginal indeed. They do not benefit from the low pay women get—this only serves to exert a downward pressure on their own pay...The benefits really come down to the question of housework. The question becomes the extent to which working class men benefit from women's unpaid* labour.'[5]

Harman goes on to try and measure the benefits men receive from housework:

*'It is the amount of labour he would have to exert if he had to clean and cook for himself. This could not be more than an hour or two a day, a burden for the woman who has to do this work for two people after a day's paid labour, but not a huge gain for the male worker.'* [6]

In this argument he says he is excluding the labour involved in bringing up children, an invalid, formal division since for most women housework is done for the whole family, whether there are children around, older relatives or anyone else she is expected to care for. But even if we take Harman's category of a couple with no dependents, the idea that 'an hour or two a day' less work for the man is not much of a gain is patently absurd. How many workers would accept one to two hours on their working day without a struggle? The fight for the eight hour day has been one of the working class's most determined battles, and now Harman happily adds two hours onto this for women when they get home, saying it makes little difference!

Harman lapses into idealism in assessing the relative importance of the marginal gain that he concedes men do get as a result of women's oppression. He argues:

*'...It cannot be said that the working class man has any stake in the oppression of women. Whatever advantages he might have within the present set-up compared with his wife, they are nothing to what he would gain if the set up was revolutionised.'* [7]

Socialism will be better for all of us. But the whole point is that outside of the context of major class battles that place class wide struggle and socialism on the agenda, advantages gained within the status quo by sections of the working class are very important to people. If the prospect for the dramatic change referred to by Harman seems a dim and distant one, with closures and unemployment the more immediate prospect then, hanging on to existing benefits becomes a real motivating force for many working class men.

How else can we explain the popularity of 'women out first' solutions? This reveals that, while working class men do not have a significant stake in defending the existing society, they are motivated, in real life, by the desire to cling to marginal and transient gains they have received courtesy of this society. Only if the prospect of the revolutionary alternative becomes real and immediate—and here the building of a mass revolutionary communist party is decisive—can the defence of sectional, or in this case sexual, advantages be really transcended and replaced by the fight for the historic, common interests of working class men and women.

## MEN OPPRESSING WOMEN

It was this particular aspect of Harman's article that drew fire from John Molyneux. He wrote:

*'The problem with the Harman/Cliff/German position is that in minimising or denying the material roots of the sexual division in the working class it underestimates the obstacle to achieving class unity and therefore underestimates the conscious intervention required by the revolutionary party to overcome that obstacle.'* [8]

Molyneux himself puts forward a position which recognises the benefits male workers gain from women's oppression. He points to this as the material root of the strength of sexism within the class. Hence it is necessary for the revolutionary party to take special measures to counter this pressure. But from saying this Molyneux slips into arguing that men oppress women within the family.

The fault with Molyneux's position (despite it being much more sophisticated than that of his opponents) is that he does embrace tenets of feminist theory. He bases his argument exclusively on the relationship between men and women in the family. He fails to take the relationship of social forces as his first premise. Materialists must start from an understanding of oppression within the context of the dominant determining features of society, namely class antagonisms. All oppression is subordinate to, though stemming from, this fundamental contradiction in class society. The family is an integral part of capitalist society, but it is impossible to understand its role and the relationship of individuals within it if you do not start from its function for capitalism. Molyneux starts, not from the role of the family, but from the unequal division of labour within it. He asks how this is maintained:

*'To a considerable extent of course it is maintained directly by the system through its socialisation of women into the housewife role, and, even more importantly, through its payment of higher wages to male workers...But it is also maintained by the system through male workers who refuse to do an equal share of the housework or, worse, insist that their wives do all of it.'* [9]

By simply looking at the family Molyneux cannot see that the key is not really who does what housework, but the actual existence of a privatised sphere of domestic labour. He concludes that men are actually the oppressors within the working class family. His paraphrase of Engels' analogy that *'within the working class family he (the male worker) is the bourgeois and the wife represents the proletariat'* does not save him from lapsing into feminism. The key question is what social conditions give rise to this oppressive relationship and how can they be overcome. For Engels, the systematic exclusion of women from social production was decisive in explaining why women were oppressed, not the division of labour within the family itself. This was in fact the result of capitalism's exculsion of women from the factories.

Women have to lose their chains to the household if they are to aquire the strength and solidarity to be fully liberated. Marx and Engels recognised this:

*'We can already see...that to emancipate woman and make her the equal of the man is and remains an impossibility so long as the woman is shut out from social productive labour. The emancipation of woman will only be possible when woman can take part in production on a large, social scale, and domestic work no longer claims anything but an insignificant amount of her time.'* [10]

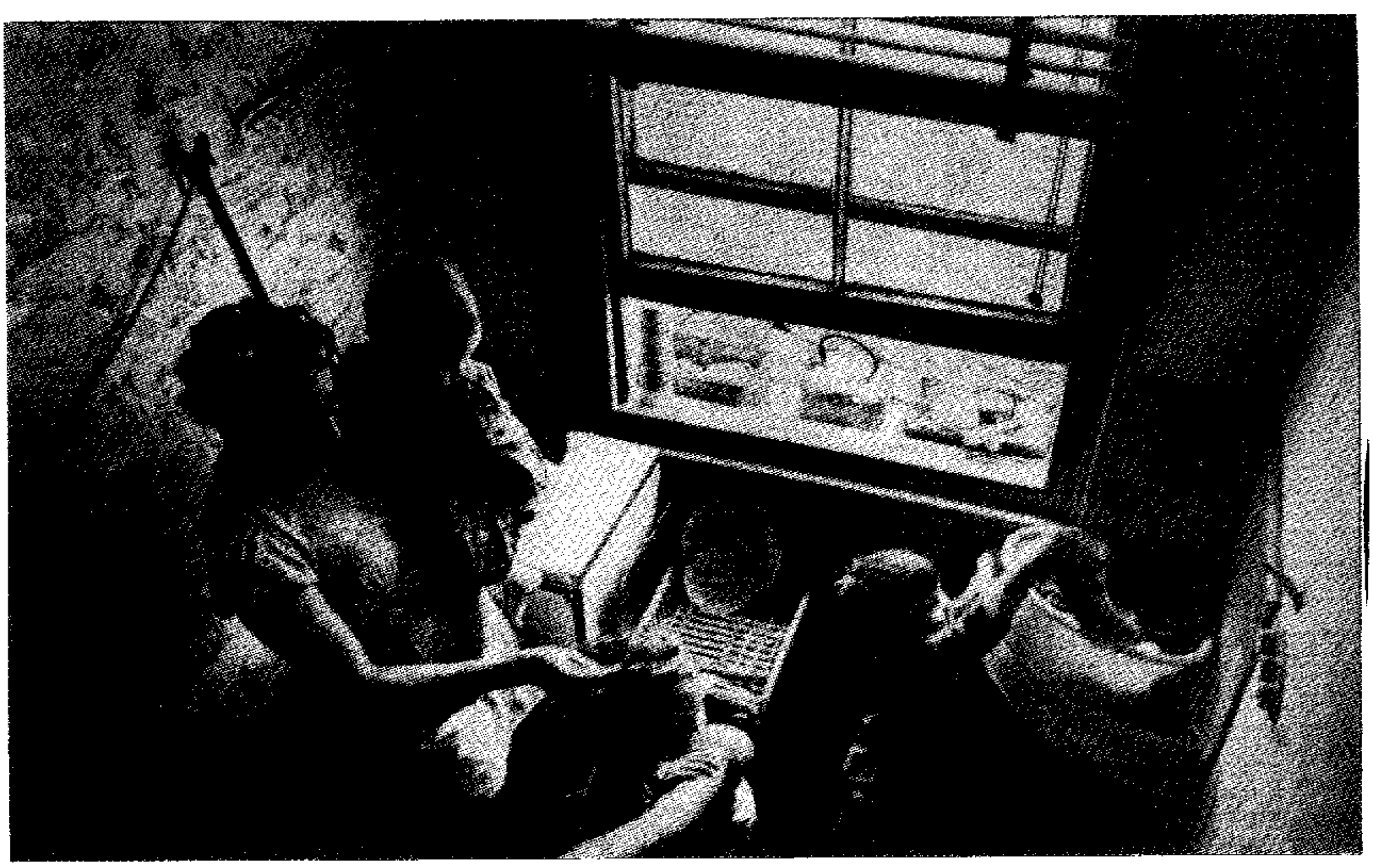
### THE THEORETICAL QUESTIONS ANSWERED

To understand the role working class men do play in the oppression of women it is necessary to look at the material roots of that oppression. It is wrong to look at the division of labour within the home, with women doing more than men, and simply conclude that therefore men oppress women. In this instance Sheila McGregor is actually partially correct in her reply to Molyneux when she says: *'Women's oppression does not consist in an unequal division of labour in the home but in a division of labour between the point of production and the home.'* [11] But McGregor herself then proceeds to make the equal and opposite error of denying the important role that the unequal divisions within the family have on determining consciousness.

The oppression of working class women is rooted in the existence of the family as the place where people live, are fed and clothed, and children are brought up to become the next generation of workers. The whole process, the reproduction of labour power, actually results in workers, both the existing generation and the next one, being presented to the bosses ready for work. That special commodity, labour power, without which capitalism would perish, is produced not by a factory or in a socialised sphere of production, but in the private household of each family.

The role of women in this process is very specific. Women are the prime domestic workers who labour, unpaid, to bring up children, keep the house and care for any other dependent relatives. This occurs whether or not women have jobs outside the home. The primary role of the vast majority of working class women remains that of mother/wife. The centrality of this to capitalism is clear. Without the labour of these women in the home workers could be reared, fed and kept alive, but only at the cost of massive investment in the socialised places that would take the place of the family. Capitalism is incapable of completely socialising housework in this fashion even when women are needed to work in the factories and offices.

The role women have in the family is the very basis of their oppression. It is not a matter of a technical 'division of labour' such as exists in the class generally between different trades, because it actually condemns women to a sphere of work which is isolated, where the work itself is tedious, the pressures of feeding and maintaining the family are enormous—in short as Lenin described it:



*Domestic drudgery; just an hour or two a day?*

*'..She continues to be a domestic slave because petty housework crushes, strangles, stultifies and degrades her, chains her to the kitchen and the nursery and she wastes her labour on barbarously unproductive, petty, nerve-wracking, stultifying and crushing drudgery.'* [12]

This work, not only tedious and unproductive in itself, also means that women are denied social contact with others of their class outside their immediate family. This is of central importance in preventing women from becoming organised, politically active and rebellious—they never have the solidarity and support of socialised production.

So McGregor is correct to say that the root of women's oppression lies in the distinct area of domestic labour in the family. Where she is wrong is that in concluding that since 'wives perform their duties on behalf of capital' she can reject the idea that working class men receive any benefit from that oppression. She argues that the division of labour is imposed on men and women, and that neither can escape their respective roles under capitalism. She notes that this division is reflected in wage bargaining, yet appears to be saying there is nothing that can be done about this under capitalism. The problem with her approach is that in trying to show that this is a class not a gender issue, McGregor ends up saying both sides suffer the same, thereby almost denying the fact that it is women, not men who are oppressed. This leads to a capitulation to the backward and conservative prejudices of men in the labour movement.

Working class men do benefit from the oppression of women, not because they are the cause of women's oppression, or that they are in some sort of unholy alliance with the bourgeoisie to keep women downtrodden, but by the very fact that they themselves are not specially oppressed as a result of their gender. The institution of the family is of greater material benefit to them than it is to women. This simple fact of life has enormous implications for the class and its consciousness both as individuals and collectively. Working class organisations are not automatically or spontaneously opposed to women's oppression, just as in fact they are not spontaneously socialist, contrary to the economist views of the SWP which see socialist consciousness stemming purely from struggle and not from the fight for communist leadership.

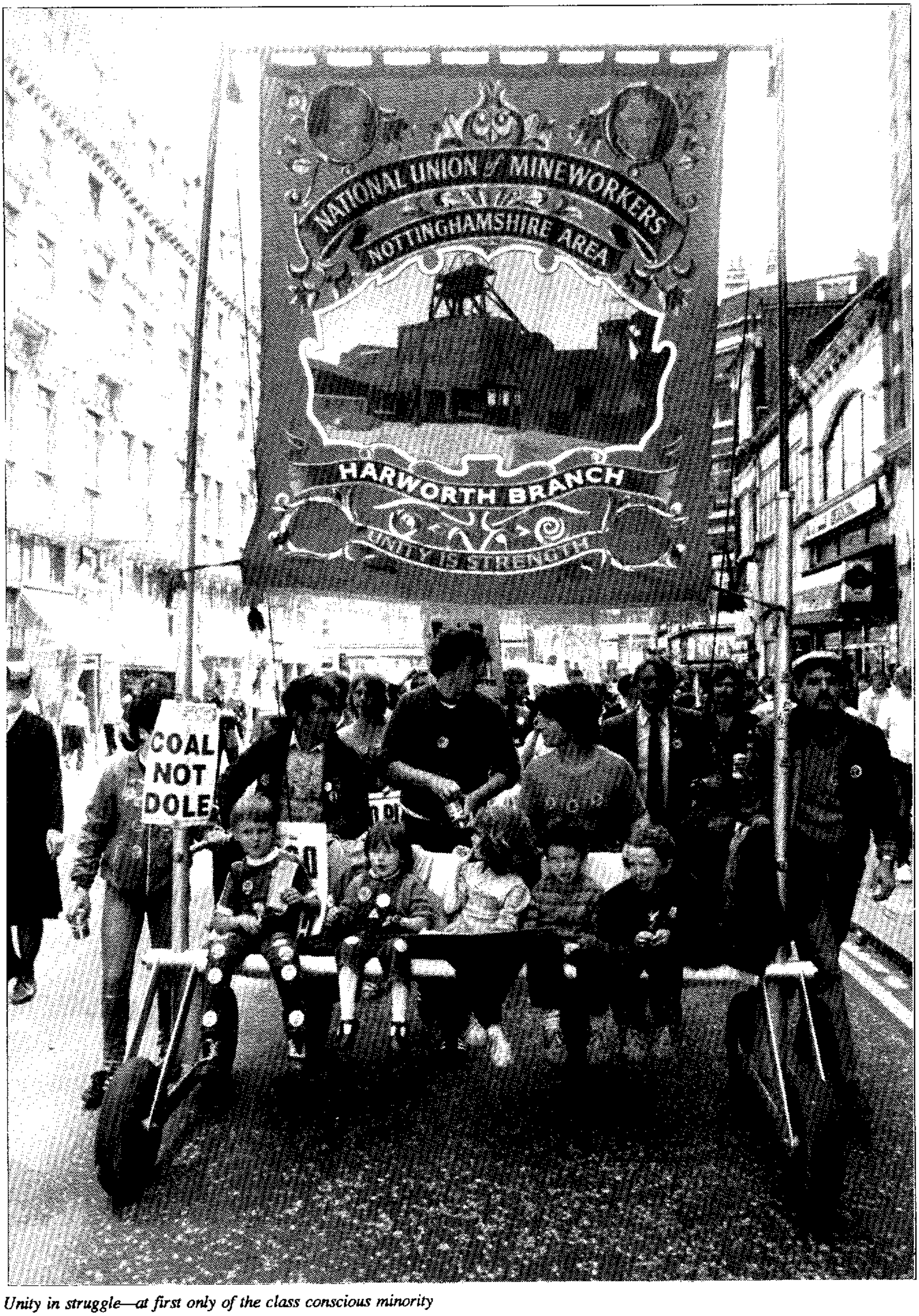
The struggle of revolutionaries to win the class to a conscious opposition to woman's oppression, which we know to be in the overall interests of the class, will be precisely that. A struggle. There are many examples of the problems women have had in attempting to get their own struggles taken seriously by the labour movement. Recent examples such as the Grunwick women and the Trico strikers only add to the list. The resistance men have is certainly partially based on their own position, whereby they fear loss of wages if women are brought into their jobs, and fear lack of a stable family or not having their tea on the table when they get in from work. When this happens—for example men opposing their wives' involvement in the miners' wives movement, something that was, unfortunately, common—then it must be fought.


## OPPRESSION AND SECTIONALISM

Understanding the roots of women's oppression in the family provides the clearest answer to the problem being debated. Do working class men benefit from women's oppression? The question must be answered dialectically, something neither side in the SWP debate manage. When looked at in terms of the relationship between social forces, classes, as historical materialism must, then clearly the answer is no. Oppression weakens and divides the class. It creates an obstacle to the unity of the workers against the common class enemy. Women's oppression and the existence of the family also deny the working class, men, women and particularly youth, many rights and freedoms. It imprisons them in relationships and commitments which are often unhappy and oppressive.

But this answer is not enough. Oppression serves to divide and weaken the class precisely because it does create different interests between groups. The clearest examples are perhaps of oppressed nations, where imperialist powers plunder the land, the natural resources and the labour power of the indigenous people. The super-exploitation of workers in imperialised countries undoubtedly weakens the world working class and drives up the overall level of exploitation. But more than that, the acceptance by sections of the working classes in the oppressor nations that 'their' country is doing the right thing, weakens the world proletariat even more, as Marx explained with regard to British workers over the question of Ireland. But the reason why British workers fail to challenge the imperialist banditry of their rulers is not just based on excellent bourgeois propaganda, powerful as that may be. Relative to the workers in the oppressed nations, the workers in the imperialist country are better off. Indeed the superprofits from imperialism are in part used to grant improved living conditions to the working class of the 'home' country in order to try and maintain social peace. This is the material basis of the labour aristocracy.

The SWP's economism means for them that any and every economic struggle can—from within itself—generate socialist consciousness. The sectional and sexual divisions in the working class are down played. Yet, this ignores the fact that many struggles are conducted on a sectional, not a class-wide basis. Divisions in the class, between men and women, skilled and unskilled, black and white, cannot be






*Unity in struggle—at first only of the class conscious minority* wished away or overcome by exhortation. The SWP have no scientific understanding of these divisions. This was clear in Cliff's analysis of the labour aristocracy quoted approvingly by John Molyneux to back up his case. Cliff basically attacks Lenin for suggesting that imperialist capitalism divided the working class, by bribery, into an aristocracy and a mass, and that the aristocracy was the social base of reformism and the bureaucracy. Not so, says Cliff.

Capitalist prosperity allows the whole working class to gain and is thus the root of reformism; capitalist crisis sounds its death knell. This jimcrack 'Marxism' led Cliff to declare that reformism was as good as dead in the early 1970's. Yet, like Lazarus, it rose from the dead and later ushered in the 'downturn'. Cliff's theory did not equip the SWP to understand reformism's 1974 triumph at the polls. For them, no labour aristocracy existed; therefore, in an economic crisis reformism would collapse, having no social base.

This theory in fact reflects the sectionalism that exists in the working class. It suggests that not only are workers' historical interests identical but so are their immediate interests; hence, ever more sectional struggles would eventually add up to revolution. This ignored the reality of differentials, demarcation disputes, racist strikes, opposition to women's strikes. All of these testified to the fact that as capitalism did go into crisis and as the leadership of the unions failed to defend the interests of their members on a class wide basis , the real existing divisions in the class did not always disappear.

Sometimes they sharpened. Certainly, the divisions in the class are more complex—and Lenin was well aware of this—than simply between an aristocracy and 'the masses', but that division does exist and does have a material basis.

Chris Harman, Sheila McGregor and Lindsey German deny that the working class can ever have contradictory interests. To accept that contradictions do actually exist within the working class leads to revolutionaries having to argue with certain sections of the class that they support others in struggle for the solidarity and strength it gives to the whole class. The SWP would find such political arguments hard. They prefer therefore to opt for an analysis which says all workers have identical immediate interests.

McGregor poses it most clearly when she takes up the analogy used by Molyneux about the relative privileges of protestant workers in Northern Ireland. Molyneux argues, correctly, that these material privileges, in terms of jobs, housing and pay, although nothing in comparison to the privileges of the ruling class, nevertheless have an important effect on the protestant workers. They form the material roots of Orangeism and of the powerful cross class alliance between these workers and their exploiters. Whilst it is certainly true that the oppression of the Catholics is not in the overall interests of the working class, to the Protestant workers it appears that the defence of their own jobs and privileges is of more immediate importance than the civil rights of other workers.

Against Molyneux, McGregor argues:

*'If, however, you separate off the immediate from the long term interests of Protestant workers, as John does in his article, then you end up arguing not only that it is in the immediate interests of Protestant workers to preserve their privileges over Catholics, but that unity is not in the immediate interests of the Protestant working class and therefore that Protestant workers realising their revolutionary potential is not in their immediate interests.'*[13]

This is a shoddy piece of polemic. McGregor hopes to show that Molyneux is ditching revolutionary Marxism. Having pointed out to us already that revolution is already on the agenda, McGregor, using chop logic, believes she has disproved Molyneux's argument. Molyneux clearly uses the example of the Protestants to show why revolutionaries must understand conflicting sectional interests in order to try and consciously overcome them, not pander to them, as McGregor suggests.

McGregor uses the example of the Nottinghamshire scabs to try and show how false it is to believe that one section of the class can have different interests. In an amazing feat of logic she points out:

*'The majority of miners in Nottinghamshire thought it was in their immediate interest not to join the national miners strike but scab instead. Do we therefore postulate that their deeply held backward views somehow coincided with their immediate interests? Is it true they got 52 wage packets striking miners did not receive, so did they immediately benefit from working? Does that mean it was in their immediate interests to scab?'*[14]

Yes! That in fact would be a good definition of a scab: someone who puts their own immediate, short term gain before that of the class or his or her workmates. But you cannot deny that they did get 52 wage packets and a better wage deal as a result of scabbing. Of course revolutionaries must point out that in fact the Notts scabs have severely damaged their own interests by their actions. Their 52 wage packets will seem little compensation when their pits are closed, when management impose stricter working conditions and pay restraint. They are left weakened by having lost their collective strength as trade unionists, committed as they are now to company unionism and class collaboration. It was on this basis that militants had to argue against the scabs, not just on money or immediate gain. In fact the whole basis of that Great Strike was the class conscious understanding of 'us now, you next'. Arguing these points with any section of workers can be difficult, especially in conditions where so few struggles are victorious. The SWP with its method of tailing the most advanced militants rather than offering revolutionary leadership, are left unable to argue for anything other than consolation to workers that little or nothing can be done, however, because of the 'downturn'. When that is over we can get back to good old basic (sectional) trade unionism.

The examples of the Nottinghamshire scabs and the Protestant workers in Ireland points to another important factor in the argument. The bourgeoisie are well aware of the sectional divisions within the class. They consciously exploit these. They like nothing more than to see workers in pitched battle with each other. They are prepared to fund and fuel these divisions, hence the payment of scabs during strikes even when they are unable to actually produce anything because no-one else is at work. By offering higher wages to certain sections, and by encouraging prejudices they hope to weaken the class.

## WOMEN'S OPPRESSION AND WORKING CLASS MEN

To return to the original debate, the position of working class men is similar to other sections of the class with particular benefits or advantages. Working class men do not cause the oppression of women, either generally or in their own families and relationships. However, they certainly do perpetuate that oppression, all too often in brutal ways. When men deny their wives rights to go out, to decide when to have kids, when to go to work, they are oppressing them. But similarly, when mothers deny their daughters rights to go out, wear what they want, do what they want, they too are perpetuating oppression.

But this is not way really the point. Relations between individuals are not of the same scale in determining roots and causes of oppression as class antagonisms. It would be false to conclude that since women often oppress their daughters that they are therefore the oppressors or that they have any real interest in maintaining that oppression. But what has to be understood is that the existence of the family, the ties that women, men and children have to it in terms of the necessary functions it performs (which capitalism fails to provide in any other way), affect behaviour and consciousness.

Perhaps the best way to explain the difference between working class women and men is to understand that they are not social equals. And if a man enjoys greater opportunities relative to a woman then clearly he has certain benefits over a woman and these benefits are sanctified by an edifice of sexist ideology. Far from this edifice crumbling as a result of common struggle alone, as Harman, McGregor and German assert, the Bolsheviks—in the shape of Trotsky—had a different view. After the conquest of state power Trotsky argued that social inequality still existed and found its reflection in the oppressive relations that prevailed in the family. His standpoint is a million miles from that of German et al:

*'But to achieve the actual equality of man and woman within the family is an infinitely more arduous problem. All our domestic habits must be revolutionised before that can happen. And yet it is quite obvious that unless there is actual equality of husband and wife in the family, in the normal sense as well as in the conditions of life, we cannot speak seriously of their equality in social work or even in politics. As long as the woman is chained to her housework, the care of the family, the cooking and sewing, all her chances of participation in social and political life are cut down in the extreme.'* [15]

A rather different perspective on the one or two hours Harman so complacently writes of. The real world of household drudgery that millions of working class women endure every day is seemingly a mere trifle to him. Real communists recognise the weight of these chains and fight to smash them.

Ideas do not fall from the sky. Peoples' consciousness is based on material conditions, which themselves are extremely complex. Bourgeois ideology is very important, but does not in itself explain why, for example men are sexist to the extent that they are. Such sexism is based at least in part on the fact that men would prefer to keep their dominant position which has led to certain apparent advantages. Of course women themselves are often the most vigorous defenders of the family and in many societies, the church. They defend those things which most reinforce their own oppression. It is clear that women are often backward in their ideas due to their isolation in the home and their lack of contact with other workers.

However, it is also true that it is women (a militant minority of women) who understand and struggle against their oppression. This is where the difference between the sexism of men and the 'sexism' of women lies. It is women workers, not male workers, who will lead the struggle against that oppression, and most rapidly ditch their prejudiced ideas. For men it will always be more of a struggle because it challenges so much and yet does not appear to immediately benefit them, not that is until they

*Clara Zetkin, German Socialist Women's Movement leader*

fully understand the liberatory potential of women's emancipation and its inseparable links with the achievement of proletarian power.

When it comes down to the question of how revolutionaries relate to women workers the purposes of the debate in the SWP becomes apparent. If male workers gain nothing but actually suffer as a result of women's oppression, then it should be no problem to convince them of the need to support women's liberation. This is the argument of Harman/McGregor/German who say that in periods of struggle, like the miners' strike, the Russian Revolution and other examples, it becomes apparent to all that women's oppression weakens them and it is thus in the interests of all workers to fight it. McGregor points out that: *'The role of miners' wives during the strike is, in fact, a powerful illustration of the fact that it is in the immediate interests of working class men for women to fight their oppression and for men to support them in doing so.'* [16]

This is in fact a gross oversimplification of what happened. In the first place, the women were struggling in support of the men, not against their own oppression. As the strike developed a small (but very militant and prominent!) minority of miners wives broke out of the confinement to soup kitchens and welfare, and began going out to pickets, to speak to other workers and build solidarity. These women necessarily came into conflict with their own and their husbands' ideas about 'women's roles'. And it was often not easy. Many women would tell of the problems they had getting the men to agree to stay at home and look after the children whilst the women went out to picket. Obviously as a result of these battles the consciousness of many miners and their wives changed. But it was by no means automatic. The fact that the wives' organisation was denied associate membership status of the NUM soon after the strike shows the remaining prejudice of many of the men, not just to women, but to the militancy they represented.

Attitudes do change in the course of struggles, and this is why revolutionaries can be confident of winning millions of workers away from their prejudices in such situations. But it requires the conscious intervention of revolutionaries and class fighters to achieve this. The Russian Revolution—the other example used to show how anti-sexist the class is—demonstrates the potential. But the battles which women, in the Bolshevik Party as well as outside, waged in order to get their interests taken seriously, deserve study. The Bolsheviks were not themselves perfect; it took Kollontai, Inessa Armand, Nikolaeva and others to pressure them into setting up Women's Departments.

A communist conclusion to this debate would understand that women themselves are central to the struggle against their own oppression. Not all women are, however, because this is not primarily a sex question; but working class women, who have most to gain in overcoming oppression and exploitation, and from liberation and working class power. Recognising the central part women will play in their own liberation is not a concession to feminism as the SWP old guard would say:

'We say that the emancipation of the workers must be effected by the workers themselves, and in exactly the same way the emancipation of working women is a matter for the working women themselves.'

And what rabid feminist said that? Lenin, in a speech to a conference of non-party women in September 1919. What Lenin also said which contradicts the SWP line of being opposed to special forms of work and organisation for women inside the party and outside, was:

*The Party must have organs—working groups, commissions, committees, sections or whatever else they may be called—with the specific purpose of rousing the broad masses of women, bringing them into contact with the Party and keeping them under its influence. This naturally requires that we carry on systematic work among women...We must have our own groups to work among them, special methods of agitation, and special forms of organisation. This is not bourgeois 'feminism', it is a practical revolutionary expediency.'* [17]

The members of the SWP who are confused by the debate over benefits would perhaps do better to spend their time studying the real history of revolutionary parties and their work on women. Cliff's distorted histories of Zetkin and Kollontai, followed by these shrouded excuses for a failure to take the woman question seriously, will teach them little of value. Study of the Bolsheviks, and of the German Socialist Women's Movement under Zetkin will be far more use.

Then perhaps the SWP would have more to offer the heroic miners' wives at the end of the strike than the patronising—'well join the SWP if you want to remain active'. Women from the mining communities, just like other working class women who are thrown into militant struggle need to organise themselves, build a mass working class women's movement, fight not for feminism but for class unity including their own demands as women.

Within such a movement communists will fight for their own programme and their own leadership. Such a mass movement is not counterposed to the party, but an arena within which it can fight and grow. The SWP refuse to sanction or build such a movement. They fear too much their own weakness They cannot stand the possibility of contamination with feminism again. So rather than fight such ideas in practice, they retreat into their journals to conduct their debates in private.

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1 *International Socialism (IS)* 2.32 p139

2 *IS* 2.12 p41

3 *IS* 2.25 p121

4 *IS* 2.23

5 Ibid p26

6 Ibid p27

7 Ibid p27

8 *IS* 2.25 p121

9 Ibid p120

10 Engels *Origins of the Family* L&W p221

11 *IS* 2.30 p94

12 Lenin *Collected Works* 29 p428 July 1919

13 *IS* 2.30 p92

14 Ibid p98

15 L Trotsky *Women and the Family* Pathfinder p21

16 *IS* 2.30 p93

17 Quoted in C Zetkin *Recollections of Lenin* p110

quest for higher productivity on the one hand, the determination of workers to resist death, degradation and mutilation on the other, has resulted in refinements and replacements of technology. Competition and class conflict have been the far from impartial handmaidens of scientific development. The nuclear power industry is not immune from this law of history!

**5.** What then are the responsibilities of the 'vanguard of the vanguard' in this area? We are the memory of the class, we seek to embody its historical generalised experience. We do not abandon our responsibility to lead. We must convince workers that the bourgeoisie is a reactionary class whose contempt for the future is proven by its carelessness in regard to the dangerous effects of the nuclear industry. We should not seek to minimise the dangers of nuclear power nor exaggerate the preparedness of the bourgeoisie to deal with a major accident in the industry. The record of minor accidents, of near 'melt-downs' over the last thirty years in Europe and America, the deaths and ecological destruction from Chernobyl and lack of concern about the long term future of high-level waste disposal are proof of this. A class which is conditioned by its frantic concern for next years' profit ledgers cannot be trusted with the future of humanity hundreds and thousands of years from now!

But against this record we must set down the equally terrible record of many other industries; of Bhopal with its 3,000 deaths and 200,000 serious injuries; of 'Chernobasle' in Switzerland which has killed off 200 miles of the Upper Rhine. The opponents of nuclear power do not call for the total closure of the chemical industries, but merely an enquiry or its 'restructuring'. This indicates an irrational extension of the genuine fear millions feel about the dangers of nuclear power, which in part stem from a grasp of the horrendous consequences of nuclear war.

The safety of workers in the industry and the safety of future generations of working people mesh and find a common focus in the struggle to impose safety standards within the nuclear power industry. Here we should remember that it is not the case that the party leads and the class follows; the dialectic of the relationship means that the class, or this section of it, must also teach the party how to concretise its demands out of the living experience of daily life. Thus our safety proposals in the struggle for workers control must have a provisional character; the final word on what is an 'acceptable level' of radiation contact, what structural improvements/containment vessels are adequate etc. cannot be settled now by our propaganda.

**6.** Those 'left critics' who want a shut-down now and an opening-up under a healthy workers state have effectively abandoned the method of transitional politics. The struggle now to improve and impose safety measures upon the bosses pushes forward new scientific and technological developments. Under capitalism if our masters wish to retain their cherished industry then under the hammer blows of this struggle they will be forced to refine and improve their industry; if they decide that the cost of concessions is such an intolerable pressure upon their profit margins that they stop building new plants or close down existing ones then we will fight to stop them closing these plants if such action would be at the expense of the workers in the industry or the mass of consumers. We are not blind and wilful optimists; we are revolutionary realists. We do not say that a safe industry is compatible with capitalism. Cheapening the technology of safety, bringing nearer the day of nuclear fusion, or closing down certain plants—all these are possible outcomes of struggle. But whatever the case, the fight for safety prepares the ground for a safer nuclear power industry under a workers' state just as the struggle for workers' control in that industry helps prepare the ground for a workers' state itself.

The struggle for transitional politics, for workers' control, builds a bridge to the consciousness of workers in the industry. These workers are not simply bosses agents; they combine a respect for the fears of the class as a whole with a determination to hold onto their jobs in an age of mass unemployment (and an age of scepticism about the ability of trade union leaders to find them 'alternative employment'). But this method also builds a bridge between the workers in the industry and the working class community at large. In short, it unites the working class against a common enemy.

Of course, our programme for the nuclear power industry is not guided by sectional interests. We cannot sacrifice the interests of the whole class to those of one section. Just as we will not tail the spontaneous opposition to nuclear power of many miners so we cannot allow nuclear power workers' complacency about safety prevent a vigourous campaign for workers' control over safety.

The 'left critics' are imbued with a two-fold pessimism. On the one hand they reject that there are remaining reserves within this mode of production for technological advance; on the other hand, they have not fully broken with the pessimism of the petit-bourgeois opponents of nuclear power who have long spurned the revolutionary capacity of the working class.

**7.** Our action programme for nuclear power must start from a recognition that the issues involved and the struggles that occur are international in character. We reject the national centred and myopic view of the SWP(GB) and Militant whose propaganda and programme starts and finishes with a concern for the British situation.

The struggle in the semi-colonial world has a contradictory aspect all of its own. On the one hand, the desire and need to satisfy their energy requirements in desert areas, far from the coast and with no fossil fuels underlines the progressive potential in nuclear power for these countries. On the other hand, an element of the anti-imperialist struggles in Pakistan, India, South East Asia or Latin America involves a fight against reactionary governments conspiring with multinationals who find no market in the imperialist countries (e.g. the USA) for their (often unsafe and out of date) technology. The fight for stringent safety measures and workers' control in the construction of the plant is doubly important in these countries.

**8.** The transitional programme for the nuclear power industry begins with the fight to change the defensive, economic struggle of the nuclear power workers into the struggle for workers control, not just of 'health and safety' but of production in the plant. This assumes immediate relevance where accidents occur inside the plants. In this context we fight for:

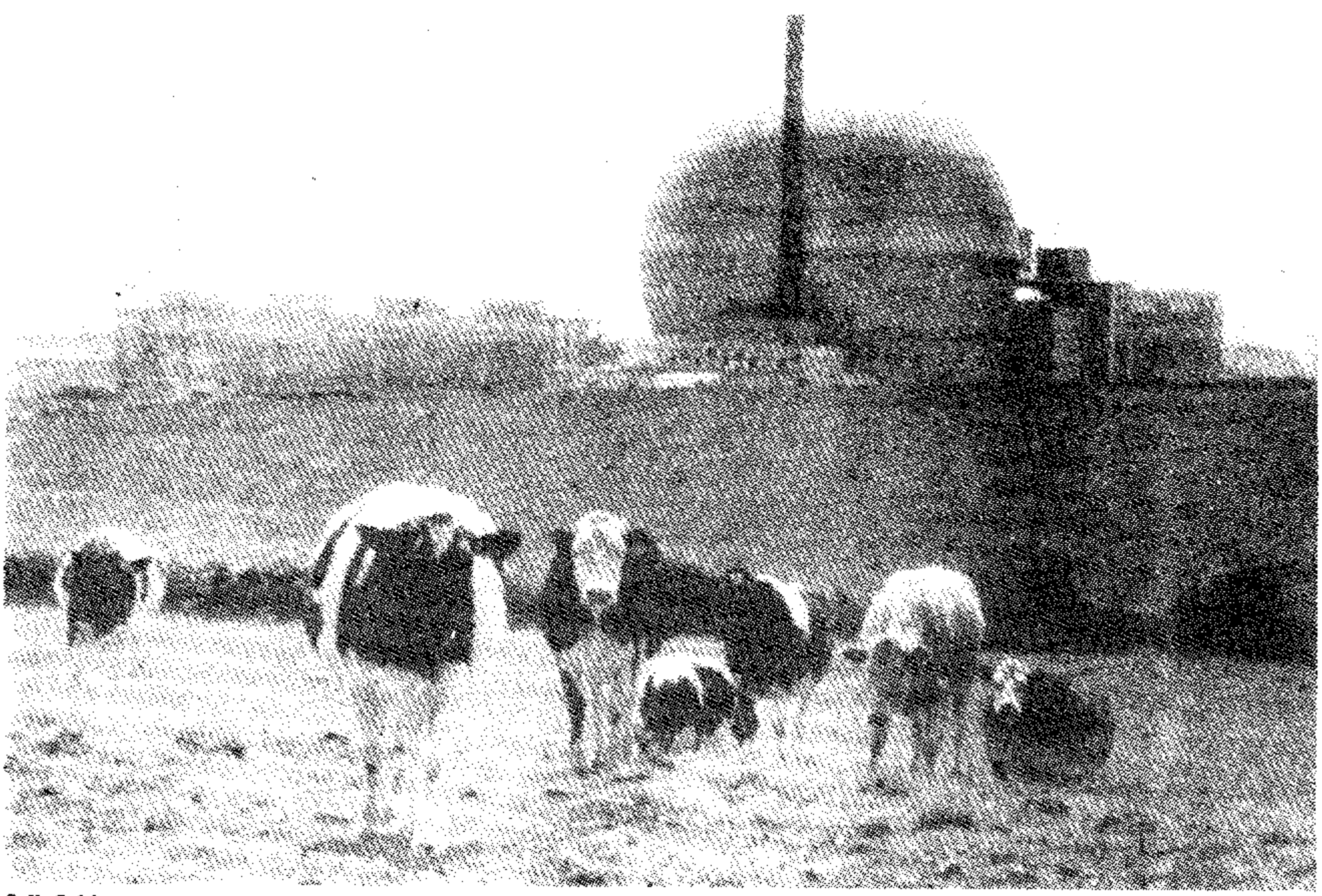
- **Workers control over safety, radiation levels, manning levels etc. The right to determine partial or full shutdowns and closures where**

**workers conclude that a plant or element of it is unsafe. Both in the struggle to *win* workers' control and the struggle to *implement* it day-to-day, the weapons of strike action, occupation, emergency cover only under workers control, leading to temporary 'shut downs' until demands are met, will be crucial. This does not coincide however with the shut-down strategy of the anti-nuclear movement.**

- **Workers' control over the construction of proposed plants. For power and building workers to fight for the imp[ementation of acceptable levels of safety provision, building specification at all stages of planning and in the supervision of construction.**
- **Structural improvements in the housing of the reactor.**
- **Lowering of safe radiation contact levels, and of emmission levels. For independent health advisors.**
- **An end to business/state secrecy in and outside the plant. Bosses secrecy and workers safety are incompatible!**
- **Workers involved in the specifically military aspects of the process to struggle for workers' control over the process.**
- **Full lay-off pay when temporary closures occur, for alternative jobs with no loss of pay if the workers decide on closure of a plant.**

The central element of our programme however is the demand for a workers' inquiry. The demand is applicable both *generally* into the nuclear power industry of a state or region, and *specifically* when new reactors, dumping sites, reprocessing plants etc. are proposed, or when an accident occurs. The main purpose of the workers' inquiry is to unite the nuclear power workers, the communities affected, the organised workers' movements, youth and progressive sections of the middle class around the struggle to render waste products safe, impose workers' control and veto in the proposed plants, on the process of construction. Should the workers inquiry find types of reactor or dumping inherently unsafe, or unsafe as planned by the capitalists then the struggle becomes one to shut down/prevent the building of them. In this struggle the battle needs to be generalised to the class as a whole. We fight for mass strike action as the key to this. Whilst we will take part in mass physical confrontations and occupations of sites we fight to win the best elements in this to the working class strike action.

The demand for a workers' inquiry, whilst placed on the capitalists and the state in the first instance, may also take the form of first winning the workers' movement to the inquiry, then fighting to implement the demands of the inquiry. In either case it should not be allowed to be simply an enquiry of pro-nuclear trade union bureaucrats or petit-bourgeois environmentalists but of the rank and file representatives of plant workers, building workers, working class womens' groups and representatives of the working class communities affected by local plants.



*Sellafield*

9. The Labour Party tries to look both ways on the question of nuclear power. It is forced to give expression to the genuine fears of its supporters and yet is intent on reassuring the nuclear power chiefs that a future Labour Government will not impose harsh conditions on it or impede its plans. We must fight for the following:

- **Full compliance with the demands of a workers' inquiry. Recognition of workers committees' right to veto management decisions in the industry.**
- **An end to state secrecy in the industry. Open up the records of the Department of Energy to union inspection.**
- **Repeal the Official Secrets Act. Disband the Atomic Energy Constabulary.**
- **Full trade union rights for nuclear power workers. Tear up all no-strike agreements.**
- **No permission for new plants until the trade union and community demands for safety are met.**
- **Full and immediate compensation for the victims of accidents whether in the plants or in the community, whatever the source of contamination.**
- **Nationalisation without compensation and under workers' control of all private sector contractors in the industry (e.g. Babcocks, Taylor Woodrow, GEC).**
- **A massive programme of research in medicine, nuclear fusion, alternative energy sources and safety.**

10. In the USSR the nuclear power industry, while not subject to the laws of profitability, has been expanded in the 1960's and 1970's under the direction of a bureaucracy that has cut back on safety standards. As the bureaucracy diverted its oil and gas resources into a means of earning hard foreign currency it built plant at break-neck speed, on the cheap. The consequences are to be seen in Chernobyl. Bureaucratic mismanagement has been aided and abetted by cracking down on dissent and even blocks the means of communication within the bureaucracy itself, making it particularly inept at taking effective preventative action. Chernobyl shows that the Stalinist usurpers must be overthrown by a political revolution if nuclear power is to be harnessed in the transition to socialism. As a consequence we fight in the USSR for:

- **An end to bureaucratic secrecy. For workers' inspection and management in the entire nuclear industry. Legitimate defence requirements to be decided by workers' committees.**
- **For new towns, amenities and compensation for all present and future victims of accidents such as Chernobyl.**
- **For a full discussion of the plan for energy provision at all levels of the trade unions and a fight for workers' control of the plan.**
- **Given the anti-Soviet Union propaganda of Thatcher and Reagan, who deflect thereby from the dangers of their own nuclear power industries we must fight to expose their hypocrisy.**

*December 1986*

# The anti-imperialist united front

## MRCI *theses*

1. The tactics of communists in relation to bourgeois and petit-bourgeois led movements coming into struggle with imperialism was outlined in essence at the Second Congress of the Communist International (CI). Lenin's theses put forward the possibility of forming an 'alliance' with these forces on two conditions. One, that they were in practice leading a struggle against imperialism and two, that such an alliance placed no restrictions on the communist's independent activity aimed at organising the workers and peasants against imperialism. The theses sowed no illusions in either the willingness or the ability of the 'national revolutionary' movement i.e. the bourgeoisie, to take the struggle through to the end, to break the stranglehold of imperialism. They emphasised that 'a determined fight' needed to be waged against painting these movements in communist colours. Independence of propaganda, organisation and action was necessary *because* the national bourgeoisie would vacillate and compromise in the struggle against imperialism.

2. The tactic of the united front in the colonial and semi-colonial world was developed more fully at the Fourth Congress of the CI. Its development was part of the discussion and elaboration of the united front tactic undertaken between the Third and Fourth Congresses, in particular in relation to the social democratic parties and their trade unions in Europe. In the period directly after the Russian Revolution and during the revolutionary crisis which gripped Europe after World War I there was little stimulus to develop the Bolsheviks' 1917 practise into generally applicable tactics for the CI, since the mass influence of the social democratic leaderships appeared to be on the point of collapse. As Trotsky said *'If we consider the party is on the eve of the conquest of power and working class will follow it, then the question of the united front does not arise.'* Within the CI the creation of communist parties, the building of soviets and the armed insurrection were the tasks central to a revolutionary situation. By 1921, however, it was clear that this revolutionary situation had passed. Capitalism, aided and assisted by the treacherous social democratic and labour leaders, had managed a temporary stabilisation. Recognising the changed situation and the strength of reformism in Western Europe, CI launched the united front tactic at the Third Congress under the slogan 'to the masses'. After this Congress the ECCI developed the tactics that became known as the united front.

3. the workers' united front was a tactic, or a series of related tactics, aimed at winning the mass of the working class to revolutionary communism, to the programme of the revolutionary party and for the dictatorship of the proletariat. Not through propaganda alone but through action, and in struggle:

*'Only by leading the concrete struggles of the proletariat and by taking them forward, will the communists really be able to win the broad proletarian masses to the struggle for dicatorship.'* (Theses on Tactics 3rd Congress).

As a *tactic* the united front was subordinate to this strategic goal. To turn the united front from a tactic to a *strategy*, where bringing it into being (or its maintenance once achieved) becomes the perpetual long term goal, can only lead to the liquidation of the revolutionary programme; a necessary consequence of the continuation of a long term alliance with the non-revolutionary parties or organisation.

4. Not withstanding the common method of the united front which underpins both the workers united front and the anti-imperialist united front (AIUF), there are important differences between them. The workers united front in the imperialist nation rests on the unity in action of the workers organisations and their parties. Communists fight within such united fronts, however limited, to develop the demands of the common struggle, through the use of transitional demands, to a struggle to overthrow capitalism. This necessitates the fight to develop the united front, in acute periods of class struggle, into soviets and the struggle for the workers government. The AIUF however develops on the terrain of minimum or democratic demands—the struggle against imperialist domination, for national independence and unity, for democracy and democratic rights. Into this struggle it seeks to draw, not only the workers' organisation, but those of the petit-

bourgeoisie—the organisations especially of the peasantry, the small urban property holders, the professionals, teachers etc—and even sections or elements of the national bourgeoisie itself, where ever the latter is compelled to resist imperialism by the pressure of the masses. The fight by communists to win the workers, poor peasants and the urban petit-bourgeoisie to the perspective of socialist revolution, to transform the struggle for democracy and against imperialism into a struggle against capitalism and for the dicatorship of the proletariat, to the extent that it is successful, must break up and replace the AIUF. The fight to win the masses from the bourgeois and petit-bourgeois leaders and their parties, the struggle to create workers soviets in the towns and soviets of poor peasants and agricultural proletarians in the countryside, is part of the struggle for a workers and peasants government; a government where the peasants have been broken from their bourgeois and petit-bourgeois leaders and won to the support of the dictatorship of the proletariat.

**5.** The united front by its very nature is a *temporary* agreement. Nine times out of ten, where there exists no specially favourable relation of forces or political situation, the reformist or nationalist leaders will refuse it and do their utmost to prevent their rank and file from participating. Where it is struck it will be around clear, precise and limited objects of real struggle. Its primary aim is not to produce joint propaganda (if it did it would be a propaganda bloc not a united front) but agitation around the action goals of the united front.

**6.** The CI made clear that the united front was not just an 'appeal to leaders', even less was it a proposal for a purely parliamentary combination or bloc:

*'The united front means the association of all workers, whether communist, anarchist, social democrat, independent or non-party, or even Christian workers, against the bourgeoisie. With the leaders if they want it so, without the leaders if they remain indifferently aside, and in defiance of the leaders and against the leaders if they sabotage the workers united front.'* (ECCI April 1922)

Thus the appeal for the united front was both from 'above and below'. But, *'the real success of the united front depends on a movement "from below", from the rank and file of the working masses'* (Theses on Tactics 4th Congress).

**7.** The striking of the united front does not for one moment mean agreeing to end criticism. For the CI there were to be no diplomatic silences or glossing over of past or present vaccilation and betrayals by the reformist leaders. Communists within the united front:

*'While accepting a basis for action must retain the unconditional right and possibility of expressing their opinion of the policy of all working class organisations without exception, not only before and after the action is taken but also if necessary **during its course**. In no circumstances can these rights be* surrendered.' (ECCI Dec 1921) Further more to maintain the united front in a bloc with reformist leaders during or after a betrayal in action, would be to become complicit in it. If it is important to know when to make a united front, it is equally important to know when to break it and thus issue an immediate warning to the rank and file workers that treachery is afoot.

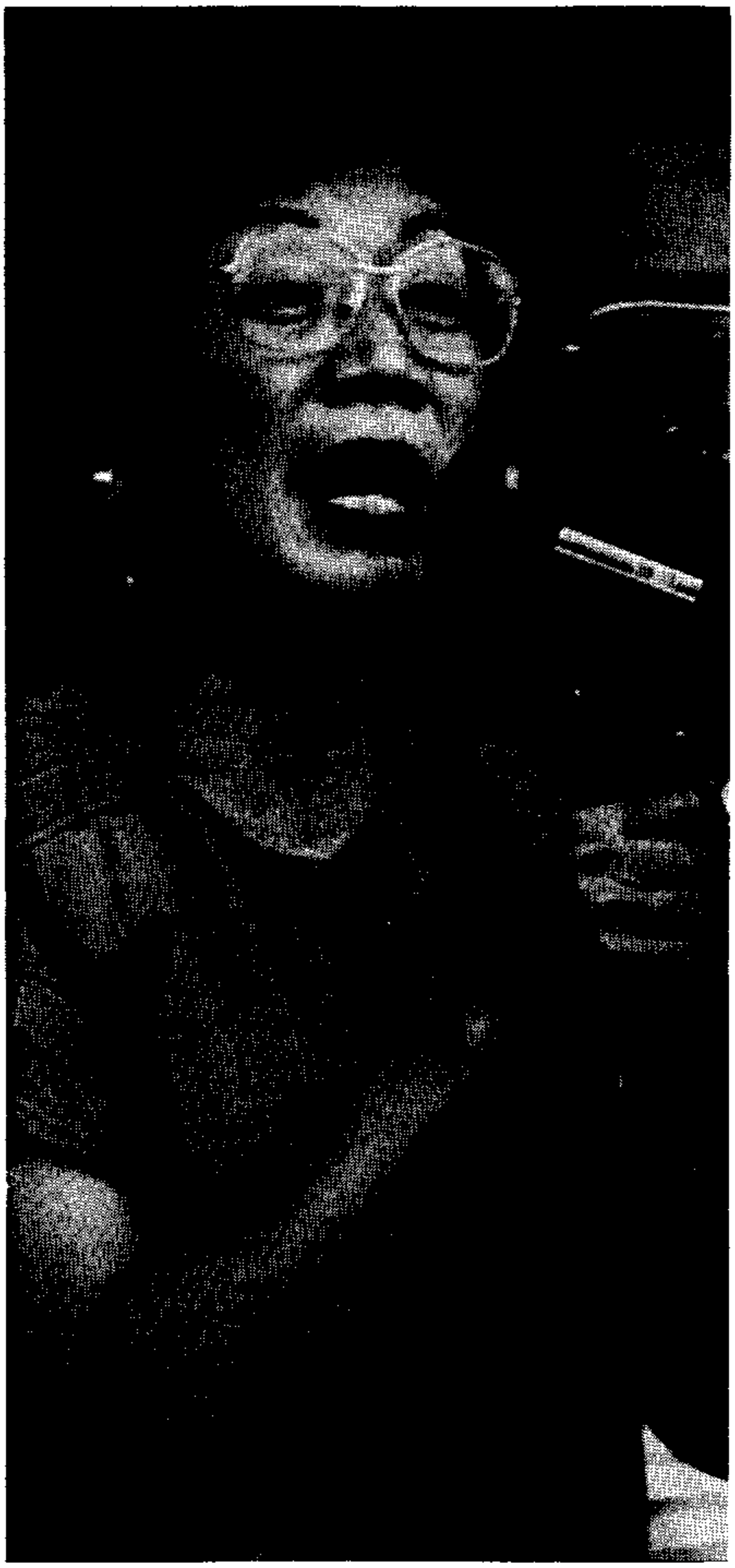
**8.** The type of organisation appropriate to the united front is an organ of struggle not of propaganda for a programme. As such, a trade union is in one sense a united front. More correctly a united front creates *ad hoc* fighting bodies commensurate to the task in hand. These may be strike committees, councils of action and at the highest level soviets. Such bodies, vital for the struggle, strengthen the pressure on the reformist leaders to 'break with the bourgeoisie'. A united front can therefore take many forms, it can be extremely episodic—for a single demonstration, rally, strike—or it can be of a 'higher' form, involving a series of actions and agreements—a miltary bloc, a rank and file opposition in the trade unions like the British 'Minority Movement' of the 1920's. Whatever form it takes, it is a block for action in defence of working class interests, in which the communists neither boycott nor submerge their own programme, they 'march separately, strike together'.

**9.** The united front is not limited to defensive trade union or extra-parliamentary struggles. It is taken on to the electoral arena where reformist parties dominate the working class. It also takes up the question of government and governmental demands. The resolution on tactics at the Fourth Congress makes clear that the slogan for a workers' government *'is an inevitable consequence of the united front tactic'.* The partial struggles of the working class inevitably run up against the structures of the capitalist state, against the government of the day and its policies. The communists have to provide society wide answers to the problems facing workers, they place demands on the workers' leaders, put forward a programme for a workers' government. But these are not just left as demands, they are fought for within the rank and file of the working class belonging to all workers' parties and none, in a united front struggle to implement them via workers' control in the factories, through the fight for soviets, via the general strike etc.

**10.** The basis of the anti-imperialist united front rests on the clash of interests between the peoples of the imperialised countries and the imperialist bourgeoisie. Imperialism promotes industrial development in the imperialised countries but in a stunted and lopsided form. The imperialist banks and monopolies dominate their economies, extracting super-profits in the form of repatriated profits and usurous interest payments on loans. They impose their constrictions on the eonomies through the imperialist agencies such as the IMF, World Bank, etc, and inevitably because of the impossibility of imposing such exactions democratically over any period, in alliance with the most reactionary elements tied to imperialism—the military heirarchy and landed oligarchy. The demand for 'independent economic development', for alleviation from debt, for state capitalist industrialisation, protectionism, land reform, and constitutional democracy, reflects the needs of those sections of the bourgeoisie and petit-bourgeoisie which suffer most from the straight jacket of imperialist domination. These demands can lead to episodic clashes between the bourgeoisie of the semi-colony and the imperialist bourgeoisie (or its agents within the country) as in the case of the struggle against Somoza in Nicaragua.

**11.** However, because of the weakness of the bourgeoisie in the semi-colonial world, the degree to which important sections of it are tied economically to imperialist capital itself, and most importantly, because of its fear of the revolutionary mobilisation of the masses, which threatens its own rule as well as that of the imperialists, the national bourgeoisie only exceptionally leads or throws its weight behind serious struggles against imperialism. As a result in many countries in the twentieth century the leadership of the anti-imperialist movements has fallen to the petit-bourgeoisie. But in the vast majority of cases its programme has remained faithful to that of the bourgeoisie despite the attempt to delude the workers by cloaking itself in socialist or communist colours—Nyrere's 'African Socialism', Mugabe and the Ethiopian Derg's 'Marxism-Leninism', the FSLN's Sandinism, etc.

12. Where the bourgeoisie or sections of it, or the petit-bourgeoisie, enters into a struggle with imperialism it is obliged to draw and lean on the mass of workers and peasants. In such cases it is the duty of communists to enter such a struggle alongside these forces. The anti-imperialist united front aims to break the hold of the bourgeois and petit-bourgeois nationalists over the masses, in struggle. The communists neither stand aside in a sectarian fashion nor do they hide their criticisms of these leaderships or the goals for which they struggle. Unlike the popular front which is a cross class coalition *subordinating* the interests of the working class to the programme of the bourgeoisie, the AIUF confines itself to concrete joint actions, specific agreements which take forward the struggle against the imperialists, within which the communists retain both freedom of criticism and propaganda. Such united fronts, given the compromising role of the bourgeois and petit-bourgeois nationalist, are likely to be extremely episodic and temporary. There is no question of tailoring the slogans of struggle to those considered acceptable to the bourgeoisie, let alone 'reserving a seat' in the united front.


*Corazon (Cory) Aquino—no political support*

13. The conclusions Trotsky drew for the International Left Oppostion from the Chinese revolution of 1923-7 were not that the tactic of the AIUF had to be abandoned but that its opportunist distortion led to disaster. Under the leadership of Bukharin and Stalin the tactic had been gutted of its revolutionary content. The Chinese Communist Party abandoned its independence and submerged itself inside the bourgeois Koumintang (KMT). It had, under the guidance of the Comintern painted up the KMT leadership in communist colours, lauding its anti-imperialist credentials and abandoning all criticism of it. It had boycotted the demands of the workers and peasants which threatened to rupture its alliance with the bourgeoisie.It had turned the AIUF into a popular front which delivered the Chinese proletariat into the hands of the counter-revolution.

14. Stalin and Bukharin were aided in this by the lack of clarity of the governmental slogans put forward by the CI in its discussions of the AIUF tactic. The Chinese revolution proved the slogan of the 'Revolutionary Dictatorship of the Proletariat and Peasantry' not only redundant but capable of being perverted into a call for a separate bourgeois stage of the revolution. In this sense, in Trotsky's words, the slogan became a 'noose' hung round the neck of the proletariat. It implied that a bourgeois solution to the struggle against imperialism was the goal which the proletariat fought for with the united front. The Chinese events reaffirmed the necessity of the perspective of the permanent revolution, the struggle for soviets and the workers and peasants government. Such a perspective does not mean that the AIUF can only be struck around such demands. In periods of defeat or where the masses are emerging from long periods of dictatorship, the united front may well be agreed around democratic demands, rights of free speech and demonstration, release of all political prisoners etc. The fight for a democratic constituent assembly can become an important goal of an AIUF where it is part of the struggle to overthrow an imperialist backed dictatorship. The fight for the expropriation of the landowners and for an agrarian revolution would figure centrally in the struggle for such an assembly in most parts of the imperialised world. The fight for these demands are above all conducted to strengthen the independence of the working class and its organisations alongside those of the peasants—via demonstrations, strikes, committees of struggle, soviet type organisations, etc.

15. The AIUF in no way implies giving support to so called 'anti-imperialist governments'. Communists give no support to bourgeois governments. We support any serious

*action* of such governments taken against imperialist interests, e.g. the nationalisations or expropriations of imperialist holdings. Communists would support and participate in military actions taken against imperialism i.e. in Nicaragua against the contras and US advisors, in Argentina against Britain in the Malvinas, fighting in such a struggle for the arming of the workers, for democratically controlled workers militias. Similarly where the political struggle reaches the stage of civil war against a dictatorship, communists might enter a military united front, whenever possible as an independent armed force accepting a common discipline in battle, making agreements under a common discipline. Aiming to strike a united front around common goals of struggle—immediate elections to a constituent assembly, legalisation of trade unions and strikes, etc. We recognise that military blocs are one form of the united front—a form not qualitatively different to united action for political goals, 'war is nothing more than the continuation of politics by other means'. When we call for the military victory of such movements as the FMLN, FSLN, etc, fighting against imperialism, its agents or a dictatorship, normally a slogan raised where the civil war or revolutionary crisis has reached a decisive stage, we are *not* endorsing the victory of their political programme. Within such a united front we struggle for our programme, to break the workers and peasants from the bourgeois and petit-bourgeois leaderships and enter onto the road of struggle for a workers and peasants' government.

**16.** It is therefore not permissible to give the AIUF a governmental form since the proletariat cannot share with bourgeois forces the goal of a common government. While we can join a common struggle for the convening of a constituent assembly along with petit-bourgeois and even bourgeois forces, our governmental slogan remains the workers and peasants' government. No bourgeoisie will tolerate a genuine working class government i.e. one that rests upon the armed workers and serves their immediate and historic interests, and the proletariat must under no circumstances support a government of its own exploiters. Any government which claims to be 'above classes' or to represent 'the people as a whole' is a deception. The proletariat can indeed defend or seek to bring about a democratic regime, utilising democratic slogans insofar as these mobilise for a struggle against dictatorship and for the rights of the workers, poor peasants and the oppressed petit-bourgeoisie. But such struggles and slogans should never be erected into a self-contained or self-limiting stage. Soviets must replace the freest parliament, and the workers' dictatorship the democratic republic. From the moment that democratic liberties have been won—*de facto* as well as *de jure*—they become an arena for the proletariat's struggle for power.

*Frankfurt, November 1986*

# Paint it black

**Bailing Out The System: Reformist Socialism in Western Europe 1944-85**
by Ian Birchall (Bookmarks 1986 pbk £5.95)

Reformism has proved very resiliant to the criticism of the "revolutionary" left. It has been denounced everywhere as a roadblock, as anti-working class, as irrelevant, and, more than once, as dead. Yet still it lives. Arising from the ashes of each electoral defeat it succumbs neither to the curses of the left nor to the far more substantial battering from the right. Quite clearly this demands an explanation from revolutionaries.

Ian Birchall's book is an attempt to show '*...both the resilience and the ultimately reactionary role of social democracy...*' (p14). Marshalling events and arguments from Greece to the Greens, from Atlee to Algeria, he records a catalogue of betrayals and sell-outs. He also records the recovery of the reformist parties after each subsequent fall. Although done in 'outline' form (as he says himself, a full account of social democracy's betrayals would require an *Encyclopedia Britannica*!) the chronological approach he adopts permits an overview of the fortunes of Western European social democracy which makes for a brisk read. In the absence of any more analytical work the book undoubtedly contains much useful information.

Yet the very briskness of the presentation has its own pitfalls. Phrases like *'Despite—perhaps even because of—this upsurge of militancy, the SPD saw its vote increased at the 1969 election...'* (p114) do nothing to suggest an analysis of the causes behind events. Was it *despite* or *because of*? Birchall shows every sign of neither knowing, nor caring. This vital connexion between the working class, its militancy and the fortunes of 'its' party is at the very root of the question.

Birchall's failure (and, as he says, the main ideas in the book are not his, but those of the Socialist Workers Party) is really to do nothing other than describe the social democratic parties and their fortunes. He fails completely to analyse the nature of reformist parties, their organic links to their own working classes and their consequent ability to repeatedly head off working class militancy in the interests of capitalism.

For the SWP reformism is quite straightforward. Its job is to hold back the working class by judicious doling out of reforms. Its basis is its ability to do this in times of prosperity. This has become increasingly difficult in the years since the end of the post-war boom in the early seventies. It is now all but impossible. Hence the inevitable demise of reformism, an 'idea whose time has gone'. The mystery of the continued existence and hold of reformism is bizarrely put down to the lack of confidence of workers:

*'the real problem is not one of consciousness, but of confidence; it is not that workers like the present system or believe its ideology - rather they lack the confidence in their power to change it.'*

For Birchall the 'revolutionary alternative' has two elements:

*'..on the one hand, a generalised account of an alternative society based on workers democracy; on the other, the building up of workers confidence in their self-activity through piecemeal struggles in the present.'* (p 220)

Shown, through militant industrial action, their own strength the working class can and will gain the confidence they now lack and reformism will be swept aside on the road to power. This is a mockery of the communist understanding of reformism's hold. As if it can be dislodged by the combination of the party egging on sectional struggles to link them up, thus 'generalising them', on the one hand and, on the other, a rousing portrait of the socialist future held before the working class to make it feel that it is all worth the effort.

Yet Birchall is himself obliged to chronicle the fact that industrial militancy has time and again over the last twenty years failed to dispose of reformism. Capitalism is in a deep period of crisis yet it fails to give up the ghost. Why?

Reformism cannot be understood simply as capitalism's social worker. To do so is to deny the very real struggles of the working class to create and maintain their own independent party. Historically social democratic parties have been the creation of the working class themselves - the products of the very 'self organisation' for which the SWP is always clamouring. Their creation represented an historic gain for the working class. But it was one that the bourgeoise turned against the workers. Although these days the politics of social democracy differ very little from the open parties of the bourgeoisie that is not the whole story. Their social base, in terms of direct or indirect affiliation as well as identification, is still largely the working class. They are bourgeois parties in that they ultimately defend the interests of the bourgeoisie against the working class. They are bourgeois *workers'* parties in that they rest on a mass working class base.

If Birchall does not understand the nature of reformism then neither does he know how to utilise tactics to exploit its contradictions. The tactics must have as their premise that organised revolutionaries seek actively to help reformist workers to free themselves from the illusions of reformism and to build a real party of vanguard fighters.

Birchall's notion of the united front is crude in the extreme. Nervously he talks about it as *' ...a platform which they* [revolutionaries - WP] *must dare to use...'* (p262). The cause of this nervousness is clear when he states that:

*The individual members of the SWP are no more immune to the blandishments of reformism than anyone else, but the party as a collective offers a chance of resisting and ultimately replacing reformism'*

Having thus reassured his own members Birchall goes on to outline the SWP view of the united front;

*'The reformists claim that they want to win certain, specific improvements.Good; we will join them in their struggle, and see how far they are prepared to go.'* (p264)

The defining feature of the SWP's attitude to both reformism and to the united front tactics needed to break it is essentially passive. The united front is used to *"...discover which of the members of reformist organisations share our vision..."* (p264). And it can only be a process of passive discovery of what is already there, because of the crippling self-limitation that the SWP bring to all their united front work: *"The united front is always for a limited aim, for something that can be won."* (p264).

This view of the united front merely oscillates between sectarianism (it is a device for finding 'good' reformists and recruiting them to the SWP) and opportunism (it is agreeing to fight for anything the reformist leaders are at present *expected* to do). This is a false way of putting it. Worse, it is a reformist way of putting it. What is possible? No! Revolutionaries, fighting for the interests of the working class start from the position of what is *necessary*! Birchall abdicates from the task of raising such demands as the working class needs; he effectively accepts the horizons of the reformist leaders. To do otherwise, he thinks, would be to sow illusions in them.

Of course, to ask Kinnock to overthrow capitalism would be to ask him to do not only what he does not want to do, but what as yet most workers do not want either. Yet to only ask him to do what he promises would not expose him at all since he promises little enough now, and less by the day.

Starting from workers' real objective needs it is necessary to formulate demands that Labour must carry through, and advance the measures necessary to force them through. Fighting in the unions and the Labour party for these demands allows you to engage in united action alongside refomist workers in a way that can expose the duplicity of Kinnock and the uselessness of the Labour party as a vehicle for lasting and far-reaching transformation.

In reality the SWP does not know how to use the united front tactic because it is afraid of engaging in combat with reformist leaders over the goals of the struggle; or even, in decisive moments of challenging miltant workers in struggle over the best tactics to employ (e.g. the Miners' strike, the print strike).

The SWP's practice in their united front work has either been to run the whole show (the "Rank and File" movements), or to tail the demands of the best militants (the miners' support groups) whilst calling on them to join the SWP. Both cases allow it to ignore existing leaderships in favour of "building the alternative"—on the sidelines. Thus the leap from opportunism into sectarianism is executed without impinging on, let alone challenging, those leaders.

As a bedtime read to frighten the children - a '101 crimes of reformism' - the book may have some merit; but in no sense is it a weapon which can arm revolutionary cadre to defeat the hold of reformism over the working class.

*Chris Ramsey*

# Labour must wait

**The Politics Of Irish Freedom**
by Gerry Adams (Brandon 1986 pbk £3.95)

In the preface to this text Gerry Adams writes that *'This book does not present itself as a definitive statement of present day republican politics. Rather, it is a personal statement...'* True, but a personal statement from the undisputed leader of Sinn Fein. Whilst the book's contents may not, therefore, be authoritative, they are without doubt very symptomatic.

Shortly after the book's release the Adams wing of Sinn Fein, commanding the overwhelming allegiance of the rank and file, scored a further success on the road to 'politicising' the armed struggle; the *Ard Fheis* in November 1986 overturned the old abstentionist policy in relation to taking seats in the Irish (26 counties) parliament. This policy had been in place for over 60 years and its abandonment saw the final parting of the ways between the Northern-based Adams leadership and the old guard Dublin-based conservative republicans around Ruari O'Bradaigh.

This latest bench mark in the Adams strategy comes as no surprise when one reads the book. from the very first encounters with republicanism it is clear that local grass roots politics were much more fundamental to Adams than the armed struggle. He joined Sinn Fein in 1964. Although he came from a republican family he admits that in 1961 he mused with a friend on what the initials 'IRA' stood for. In 1963 he states he 'didn't even know what the border was'. The IRA in Belfast at that time was down to 24 volunteers and two hand revolvers.

RUC-provoked riots prompted his activism in the mid-sixties but it was into the *'low-level social justice campaigning by individuals and small groups'* that he went.

This apprenticeship was not surprising. The dismal defeat of the IRA's 'border campaign' of the late 1950's produced amnesia in more than Adams. It was part of the ritual impasse of the military struggle which led to the usual turn to 'political answers'. It was this same impasse in the late 1970's that was to present Adams with his chance to turn the republican movement back onto the political track. After a brief renaissance from 1971 until 1975 when the IRA star was high in the sky again, the intiative was seized by the British; SAS, 'Ulsterisation', Diplock Courts, H-Blocks, etc all demonstrated painfully that a guerrilla military campaign necessarily directly involving only a tiny minority could not oust the British.

Adams worked to give the movement mass roots in the northern Catholic ghettoes through local work on the estates over issues such as housing and harassment. But he also knew that so long as the residual nationalist consciousness of the southern population was allowed to be exploited by Fine Gael and Fianna Fail, the bourgeois parties, then the anti-unionist struggle in the north would be contained.

The turn to developing a rounded political strategy in the 1980's has led many on the British left to detect a 'left turn', applauding any move away from dependence soley on the Armalite as a sign of progress and political sophistication which augurs well for Sinn Fein's socialist evolution. Some even claim that Sinn Fein is socialist. Bowled over by the increased influence of feminism in the ranks and the sloughing off of the worst backward looking elements of Catholic communalism, centrists of the Socialist Action ilk are prepared to forgive Adams anything.

But what is Adams' strategy for achieving Irish freedom? The book tells us that he does not have a new story to tell, merely an old one updated for the 1980's. It can be summed up in the old adage 'Labour must wait'. The key question of political strategy of those seeking Irish freedom is the relationship between the struggle for national independence, throughout the 32 counties, from imperialist domination and the fight for socialism. Here Adams is firmly entrenched within the perspectives and nostrums of petit-bourgeois nationalism and an equally petit-bourgeois vision of socialism.

He writes that *'In order to bring about a socialist society you must have real national independence... real national independence is the pre-requisite of socialism'.* Indeed, for Adams *'Socialism includes and is a stage in advance of republicanism'.* In case this is not clear enough he later contrasts his view *'with the ultra-left view, which counterposes republicanism and socialism and which breaks up the unity of the national independence movement by putting forward 'socialist' demands that have no possibility* of being achieved until real independence is won.' Moreover, an anti-imperialist movement 'cannot be built around the slogan of socialism until socialism comes on the historical agenda, until a distinctly Irish form of socialism is developed to meet our needs...'(p135). These passages are enough to evidence the gulf that separates Trotskyism from the new 'socialism' of Adams' Sinn Fein.

Adams is right to see the stunted development of the 26 counties as lying in its domination by imperialism. By the act of partition over sixty years ago, the south was cut off from its industrial lifeblood; decades of failed protectionism gave way to the massive influx of foreign capital in the 1960's and 70's which strapped the country in a steel ring of debt as its governments' raised money to finance huge profit repatriation for the multi-nationals and provide an infrastructure. Today, the south has debt repayments that count for some half of its GNP.

However, this inflow of capital led to an even more dependent and servile national bourgeoisie, tied to the apron strings of imperialism; the Irish contruction giants, and even the big retailers and food bosses prospered on the basis of the growing urbanised working class of the 1960's and 70's which was a product of the influx of imperialist capital. Even the bourgeois bureaucrats that top the huge state capitalist sectors of the Irish economy (e.g. electricity) are bound by golden chains to German, Japanese, US and indeed British imperialism.

It is the working class which feels the oppression and suffers the exploitation of imperialism, not the backers of Fine Gael, the Progressive Democrats or the Fianna Fail. So it is sheer evasiveness of Adams to argue that Sinn Fein's progamme 'would aim to appeal to all those capable of taking a national stand...' Obviously he is casting longing eyes around for a patriotic Irish bourgeoisie. He will search in vain if it is deeds he seeks rather than words. On the other hand the burden of taxation to finance profits; the £IR3 million a day it costs to enforce partition; the armed garrison over the border ever ready to threaten the movement of the Irish workers to throw off their burden; the repressive legislation in the south that flows from partiton; all this weighs down the working class of the 26 counties.

Thus the working class, both in the south and, of course, the anti-unionist workers in the north, are the only force capable of leading the struggle for 'national independence'. They must take political power to smash partition, not through the talking shop of the Leinster House kind, but in action councils which link the factories, offices and estates. Yet if they do that they must use that power to end their own exploitation by their Irish bosses too, or face a disastrous sell out of 1922 proportions.

Adams glosses over these facts of political life in Ireland, and by his insistence that we must not raise 'socialist', that is, class demands now, he is delivering the working class into the hands of the Haughy's of this world. As such he has no hope of achieving his utopia of neutrality and independence for Ireland. Held to a strategic alliance with non-proletarian classes in Ireland, the working class will never be free of imperialism. For this reason there is no chance of a 'socialist' Ireland automatically following on once independence has been achieved under the leadership of Sinn Fein. A revolutionary communist party must be forged throughout the 32 counties of Ireland in a common struggle alongside many thousands who presently agree with the views set out in 'The Politics of Irish Freedom', but also in a determined struggle with the ideas contained between its covers. *Keith Hassell*

# A centrist on war

**The Meaning Of The Second World War**
by Ernest Mandel (Verso 1986 pbk £6.95)

Except for the Russian Revolution no event has shaped the modern class struggle more than the Second World War. The basic outlines of every contemporary war and revolutionary struggle were drawn during World War II. Yet despite its importance, the war remains a virtual closed book for the British labour movement.

No Labour politician dares to 'politicise' the war. No section of the Communist Party wants to remember the *Daily Worker's* triumphal headlines on the morning of Hiroshima. The view that this was an 'anti-fascist' war, fought by 'the people' remains the only acceptable one. It is reinforced time and again by the media: not just through endlessly repeated war films, but through documentary series like *The People's War* and the currently showing *World at War*.

Against this background Ernest Mandel's *The Meaning of the Second World War* is a welcome attempt to summarise the Marxist analysis of WWII. Brief but thought-provoking, the book is a work of Marxist historiography. It challenges bourgeois, reformist and Stalinist war historians, not with a wealth of evidence, but with a theoretical framework. From the standpoint of Lenin and Trotsky's view of war in the modern epoch as the product of inter-imperialist rivalry Mandel attempts to throw light onto events shrouded by ruling-class and Stalinist myth and legend.

But the book contains errors symptomatic of Mandel's centrist politics which as the leading thinker of the USFI are not his alone. Its mistakes are a product of the general theoretical disorientation of Trotskyism after 1945. Whilst this is not an attempt to outline the Trotskyist programme against inter-imperialist war the fruits of the USFI's opportunism are present at key points in Mandel's analysis.

Mandel has been described as the 'orthodox revisionist'. Both the book's achievements and errors confirm the accuracy of this description. The most important task of any Marxist explanation of WWII is to demonstrate its fundamentally inter-imperialist character. That is, to explain that the Second World War was fought between the imperialist powers for the same class interests as the, retrospectively accepted, 'bad' war of 1914-18. The exceptions to this; the war of the USSR against Germany and the various wars of liberation by the oppressed colonial countries, must be seen in the context of a war whose essential driving force was the struggle over the world market between rival imperialist powers. Thus despite Britain's alliance with the USSR so this was not an anti-fascist war. Just as much as British Marxists should have defended the USSR so they should have used the tactics of revolutionary defeatism in relation to their 'own' country.

Mandel sets about the task of explaining this in a way reminiscent of his work on capitalist economic crisis. He begins with an explanation of imperialism's inherent flaw: the contradiction between a world economy and its political form, competition between nation states. He then defines the role of war as an expression of that contradiction: *'Wars are precisely a mechanism for adjusting or adapting the military and political balance of forces to the new industrial and financial one.'*

As in his economic writing Mandel's strength lies in his desire to concretise general laws and tendencies such as the above; explaining the mediation of fundamental economic conflicts through political, and in this case, military conflict.

The first half of Mandel's book is a largely successful attempt to root the war aims and unfolding alliances of the protagonists in their chosen route to hegemony over the world market. In particular he shows how the central dynamic of WWII was the conflicting desires of Germany, Japan and the USA to replace Britain, France and Holland with a single dominant imperialist power. Along the way Mandel deals with several of the accepted nostrums of bourgeois war historians.

Against the argument that WWII was the inevitable outcome of the 'injustices' of the post 1918 settlement, Mandel focuses on the Pacific conflict. He charts the co-existence of US and Japanese interests in the Far East between the Boxer Rebellion and the Washington Naval Agreement (1922). He explains how it was Japanese imperialism's decision to break from its economic isolationism after 1930 which led to conflict with the USA for 'strategic insertion' into China and the Pacific. It was this rather than any 'aggrieved national pride' which led to Japan's war of conquest in the Far East, and made the war of 1942-45 inevitable.

Against A J P Taylor's theory that Hitler blundered into WWII, Mandel gives a convincing account of the pre-war years which confirms Trotsky's 1932 prediction; that by entrusting its fate to fascist desperadoes, German imperialism had made another European war inevitable.

Mandel even puts forward evidence that both severe economic crisis (1938-9) and the short term limits of German raw materials determined both Hitler's offensives into East Europe, France and Russia and their form—the *blitzkrieg* or surprise war of territorial conquest.

Such arguments would of course be dismissed by bourgeois war historians a 'crude economic determinism'. But for Taylor and Trevor-Roper it is concepts like Hitler's 'megalomania', Chamberlain's 'weakness' which govern the outcome of great events. That is why the authenticity of Hitler's diaries is of greater interest to these great thinkers than scientific analysis of the German economy.

The charge of economic determinism should least of all be levelled at Mandel however. At the same time as showing the influence of inter-imperialist economic rivalry he constantly stresses the 'relative autonomy' of the political and military spheres. For example he writes of the final outcome: *'Was this outcome decided at Teheran, Yalta and Potsdam? Was it in other words the product of diplomatic horsetrading, 'mistakes' or even 'betrayals'? To a large extent it was determined on the battlefield.'* (p50)

Here Mandel only confirms Trotsky's understanding of the relation of military to economic factors during a war, as when he wrote in 1940: *'All the great questions will be decided in the next epoch arms in hand.'* (Trotsky *Writings* 1939-40 p221)

On the basis of this understanding Mandel constructs, in the second part of his book, an outline of the war's military history. This is particularly useful for British Marxists. It shows how Britain and the USA let the Soviet Union suffer the brunt of German imperialism's onslaught, remaining content until 1943 to reconquer their colonies in North Africa and the Far East. It describes, too, how from France to Northern Italy to Greece the pace of the Anglo-US advance was entirely determined by the aim of maintaining capitalism. It confirms the historical truth of the FI's 1944 slogan: 'Capitalist Second Front means Counterrevolution in Europe!', and provides useful facts for any argument against the 'anti-fascist war' myths propagated by the ruling class.

However, having defended and concretised Marxist orthodoxy in theory, Mandel characteristically abandons it when he comes to look at its programmatic implications.

Following the categories laid down by Lenin and Zinoviev in 1915-16, Mandel divides up the military conflicts of 1939-45 into several types. He characterises the major conflicts as inter-imperialist, with the exception of the USSR vs Germany, and the various colonial liberation wars against both allied and axis powers. These he describes as 'just wars': *'By "just wars" are meant wars which should have been fought and and which revolutionaries supported then as they do now'* (p45).

Apart from arbitarily seperating China from the rest because it 'would develop into a socialist revolution', he is correct up to this point.The errors begin where Mandel tries to deal with the resistance movements in imperialist countries occupied by other imperialist countries. He adds to the category of just wars: 'A just war of national liberation fought by the populations of the occupied countries of Europe, which would grow into socialist revolution (Yugoslavia and Albania) or open civil war (Greece, North Italy)'.

This passage contains a welter of errors, confusions and deliberate ommisions. Every one of these can be traced to Mandel's centrist view of the resistance movements and the post war social overturns in East Europe. The most decisive error is in the use of the term 'occupied country'. As Zinoviev pointed out during World War I, it is not who attacks first, who is occupied, who is guilty of lying, etc which determines the Marxist attitude to war. It is the class interest behind the conflict.

The civil war in Northern Italy was just, not because Germany had occupied Italy, but because it was the war of the working class against its oppressor. The insurrectionary movement of the Italian workers would have been just even if it had been aimed at US and British forces, just as the Greek insurrection was. The logic of ascribing occupied Italy the label 'oppressed nation' is to extend this also to the other imperialist countries which were at some time occupied by their enemy. As for 'occupied' France, however, there is a studied silence in Mandel's typology.

This is no accident. Mandel has been a key protagonist of the argument that Trotskyists who refused to take part in the bourgeois/Stalinist led French resistance were 'sectarian'. Yet the resistance fought under the flag of French imperialism. Instead of the fraternisation between troops so nostalgically remembered of World War I, the French Stalinists slogan in 1944 was 'each man kill his Boche'. The Trotskyist tactic towards armed resistance movements in Nazi-occupied France and Belgium are not dealt with here. What is laid down however is a theoretical framework for justifying opportunism towards blatantly nationalist armed alliances which included everything from the CP to De Gaulle and French fascism.

It is revealing to note that Mandel doesn't extend the priveleged status of 'occupied country' to Germany and Japan in 1945, despite the fact that Anglo-US imperialism imposed the strictest curbs on the freedom of workers in these countries until after 1947.

Mandel's earlier capitulation to Tito and Hoxha equally mar his ability to scientifically characterise the conflicts in Eastern Europe. From the beginning, Mandel has regarded the social overturns in Yugoslavia and Albania as different in type from the social overturns in the rest of the area after 1945, hence their inclusion by name in the list of just wars. What of Poland, Czechoslovakia, etc? Again Mandel says nothing. But any scientific study, which can afford room to a detailed account of the Red Army's advance from Stalingrad, should also give at least a cursory characterisation of the conflicts in Eastern Europe.

In his conclusion Mandel shows how the fundamental contradictions of imperialism were not solved by the war, merely reshaped on a massive scale. In World War II capitalism made the transition from regional ecomonic blocs to a real world economy; from protected markets to US protected free trade; from inter-imperialist rivalry to the cold war; from direct colonial exploitation to the 'free' exploitation of the multi-nationals. In the course of the war a technological revolution was set in motion. Nuclear power and nuclear warfare, rocket and jet propulsion, the computer, the antibiotic drug, all were fruits of the war years. All this laid the basis for a massive surge of economic growth which confused and disoriented Trotskyists who took literally, i.e. one-sidedly, the *Transitional Programme's* dictum 'Mankind's productive forces decay'. But 40 years later the fundamental contradicitons between imperialisms, the workers' states and the semi-colonial countries increase in depth and scope recreating many of the conditions of the decade before World War II.

Anyone who has searched in vain in the left press for the facts and arguments about World War II; anyone watching *The World at War* for the first time; anyone looking for a historical background to the Fourth International's debates on tactics during World War II should read this book. But anyone who is a Trotskyist should read it critically.

*Paul Mason*

# Divisive 'anti-racism'

**Shattering Illusions: West Indians in British Politics**
by Trevor Carter (Lawrence & Wishart 1986 pbk £3.95)

Detachments of right-wing historians are currently laying seige to the history of black people in Britain. In the latest round of rearmament even supposed 'non-political' historians such as G R Elton have lined up their guns in racist formation; this doyen of the academic establishment proclaimed recently that black British history was 'non-existent'. The implications are clear: if blacks have no history here, they are not part of the British *volk*, and so have no legitimate right to be in this country.

Against such a background it is tempting to seize on every left-wing study of blacks in Britain as ammunition for an anti-racist counter-attack. Any such illusions are shattered by Carter's book. Quite simply this is a book which backfires.

Carter is a longtime member of the Communist Party and a black activist who arrived in Britain in the 1950's. The more useful parts of his book are indeed the oral reminiscences of his West Indian co-arrivees. Many black workers landed expecting 'solidarity from our natural allies' in the labour movement. But most of them found only racist hostility from the white working class. Unions like the TGWU and NUS organised strikes against the employment of black workers; guest-houses displayed signs such as 'No blacks, no dogs'; in pubs and clubs blacks were often barred, or—in one case at least—told to 'bring their own glass'.

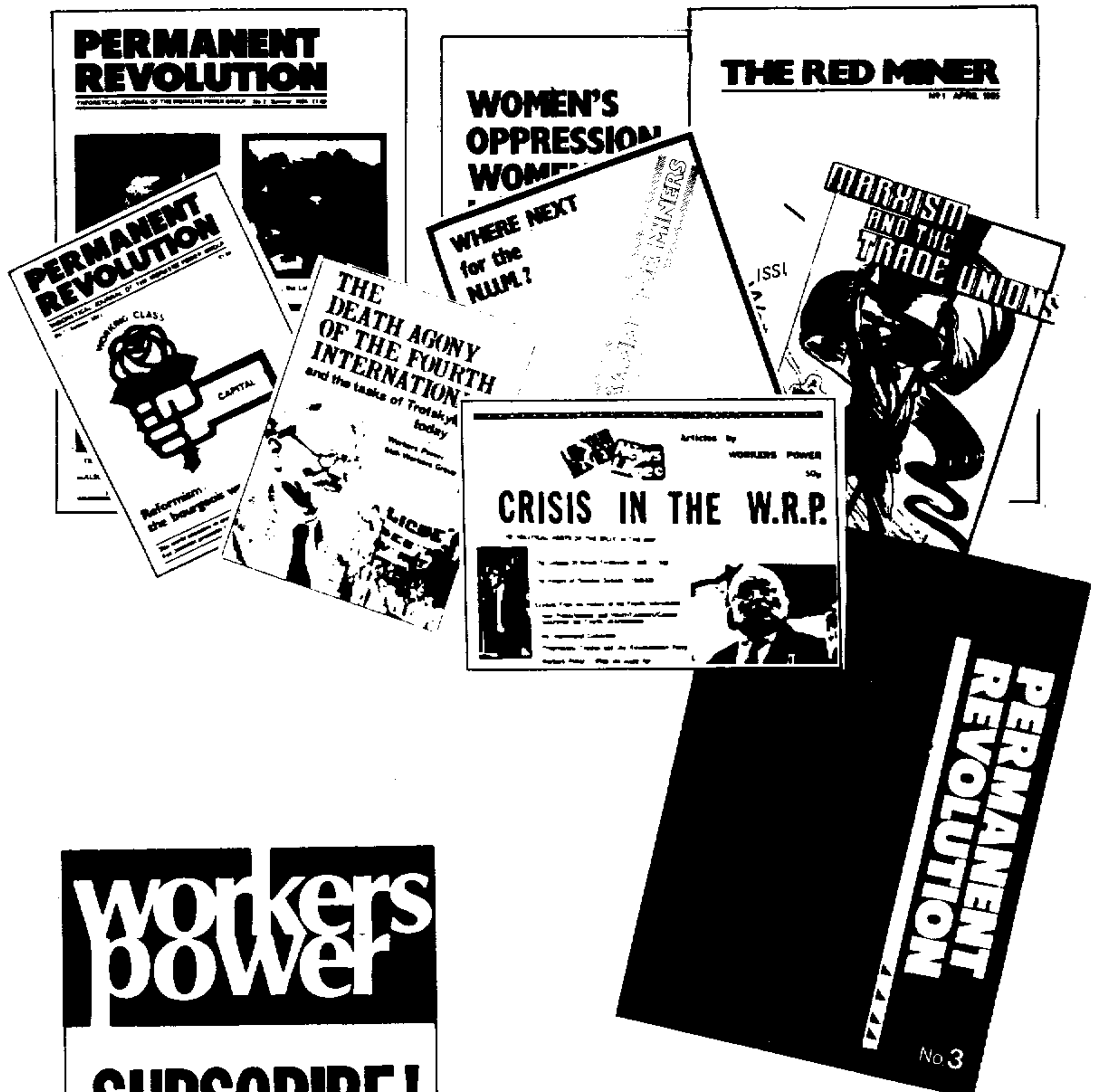
This empirical assemblage of the experience of racism is a salutary reminder of what black workers had to face daily then (as now), and a bitter indictment of the failure of the labour movement to purge itself of racist ideology. Yet, Carter's *theoretical-scientific* understanding of racism, its origins and nature, is shot through with deficiencies: which is hardly surprising, since he employs the pseudo-Marxism of his Stalinist party.

Carter's world view is the familiar Euro-communist schema: 'Racism cannot be dealt with solely within the framework of class politics'. Why not? Because 'racism predates capitalism'. If this latter claim is true (and it's not: anyone in doubt should read Peter Fryer's *Staying Power*) then, of course, the overthrow of capitalism is not a precondition for the eradication of racism, since its existence is separate from bourgeois class rule. It follows, of course, that the struggle for socialism and the fight against racial oppression are also seperate, and the 'black movement' and the 'working class movement' only partners under the umbrella of the 'broad democratic alliance'. The reactionary conclusions which flow from this are well illustrated by the following remark: *'For black people to be treated fairly and democratically and not to be discriminated against because of our colour, some of the power and material assets which need to be transferred must come from the white working class'.*

This incitement to fight it out over the crumbs whilst bosses keep the whole cake will lead to disaster for black people and the labour movement. We must make the bosses pay the whole cost of peoples' conditions to complete equality.

Let us restate an important Marxist fundamental: the struggle against racism is not a struggle between races but the fight for a *united* black and white struggle against the capitalist system which created and sustains it. This does not mean, as many think (*a lá* Militant) that nothing can be done about racism 'until after the revolution'. That is economism not Marxism. The Marxist view of racism is, as the American Trotskyist Jim Cannon put it: *'a special question of doubly-exploited second-class citizens, requiring a program of special demands as part of the overall program'* for socialism by proletarian revolution. But nothing of the sort is to be found within the pages of this book.

*Jon Lewis*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