

Workers power

THE MONTHLY PAPER OF THE WORKERS POWER GROUP

number 13

MARCH 1980

15p

Steel: Danger of Isolation

In the aftermath of the successful mass picket at Hadfield's in Sheffield, which forced the shutdown of the plant on 14th February, there have been howls of indignation from the bosses and their press. Fleet Street's rags have vied with each other to see who could come up with the headlines that insulted the steelworkers the most. James Prior quickly beefed up his anti-union Employment Bill, attacking picketing rights and the right of workers to take solidarity strike action with other workers.

Tory Attorney-General, Michael Havers, stepped in, assuring the police that they had the right to attack picket lines, intercept coaches carrying pickets and limit the numbers of workers on picket lines. All this could be done, he said, within the framework of existing law.

The police did not really need the encouragement. Their violence against steel pickets outside Castle Bromwich in Birmingham resulted in the near death of one worker. They have raided homes without search warrants,

and have raided the Labour Club in Birmingham. They hope that their tactics of intimidation and violence will break the will of the steel strikers. That the will is still strong, however, was demonstrated by the 1,500-strong picket outside the private steel firm at Sheerness.

The attacks of the police, the massive press campaign and the playing of the law and order card will all take their toll on large sections of the steel strikers. To repel this combined offensive, all the energy and strength of the labour movement is needed. The steel pickets must not become isolated from the rest of the working class. Strike Support Committees involving workers from all industries must be built in every locality. Such bodies must support the strike, the pickets, and organise workers affected by the strike who are facing lay-offs, to take direct action - occupations - against their own bosses. Such committees can provide a real basis for class-wide action against the bosses and Tories and in support for the steel strikers.

CONTINUED ON BACK PAGE

Break Bill before it's law

General Strike now!

The scale and tempo of the Tory attacks on trade unionism is increasing daily. They have moved in the last weeks to strengthen their proposed laws against effective trade unionism. They are out to deal a body blow to the unions most importantly to militant picketing, used to great effect, by the steel strikers.

The Tories are attacking against a backcloth of widespread victimisations of shop floor leaders. Edwards has finally got the scalp of Derek Robinson. He is hoping to build on his triumph and has already refused to recognise the credentials of Alan Thornett, a democratically elected senior steward at the Cowley plant.

These moves are part of his campaign to break union resistance to his new work practices scheme which include such measures as the introduction of TV cameras to spy on workers on the production line. At Ford Langley the bosses have victimised two shop stewards in a bid to undermine the shop floor organisation in the plant. The bosses are keen to have anti-union laws passed but they are prepared to act against workers in advance of them.

The meeting between the Home Secretary and senior police officers, shows that the Government is ready to move against strikers now. The police thugs,

who have already arrested hundreds of steel strikers, have now been given a green light to use a range of criminal laws, including obstruction, the conspiracy laws and the public Order act to smash-up picket lines under the existing 'Law'.

Workers must be prepared to defend themselves against the class 'justice' of the bosses, not by relying on lawyers in the courts, but through defence units on the picket lines.

The Tories recognise that the existing strength of mass picketing and solidarity strikes has to be dealt with. Central to their plans is the implementation of the Employment Bill, that will weaken the ability of the workers movement to resist the bosses wage and job cutting plans.

Prior has introduced new clauses to toughen up his bill. They will remove unions' rights to protection from actions for damages unless the courts are happy:

"whether or not the action taken was reasonably capable of furthering the dispute in question" and "whether or not it was taken predominantly in pursuit of the dispute and not principally for some extraneous motive".

As Prior has admitted, these provisions would make solidarity strikers and workers involved in political strikes liable to court action, forcing them to pay damages to their em-



"Police thugs have now been given a green light ... to smash up picket lines."

ployers...or face jail.

Prior's bill must be beaten now!

The official leaders of the labour movement are doing everything in their power to ensure that the opposition to the Tory legal onslaught is minimal. Where workers have been prepared to move into action alongside the steel workers, the TUC have actively worked to sabotage the struggles. The sabotage of the South Wales General Strike is a clear example of this. One major reason the miners voted against taking action was because they had been deliberately left out on a limb by the British and Welsh TUCs.

The TUC itself has responded to the Tories threat with a campaign that doesn't even attain the status of shadow boxing. The march in London on March 9th is an important demonstration, and must be made massive, as a show against the Tories and against the immobility of the TUC windbags. Indeed, nothing would frighten the Tories more. But to take it beyond the passive protest gesture that the TUC are hell-bent on making it, we must use building for it as a focus for direct action against the laws, building labour movement committees to mobilise for it. The

TUC hope that a Sunday stroll in the capital will cool the tempers of the workers' mobilised. They claim they are doing their part in the struggle against the Tories. Indeed they are - channelling the energy and potential that exists inside the workers movement into the dry dock of protest politics. As Len Murray unashamedly put it:

"We are not talking about a revolution or a general strike in the sense of bringing the government down... We are talking about protest - loud protest"

But the Tories know exactly what they are after, and no amount of protestation will change their minds. The May 14th day of action is planned in the same vein as the March 9th protest. The TUC are proposing token actions, meetings in lunchtime and after work. Against this we must demand that the action be brought forward, taken alongside the steel strikers, and must be organised as all-out strike action.

While we argue that maximum support must be built for the actions called, we know that they will not be sufficient on their own to beat the Tory laws.

The all-out attack on the unions

must be met with a general political offensive by the trade unions. The cap-in-hand visits of the functionaries of Congress House to discussions with the Tory Government must be stopped now.

The Bill must be beaten now - before it becomes law - not merely opposed once it reaches the statute book. We must mount massive pressure on the TUC to call a general strike to defeat the Bill. And with many other sections of workers already in conflict with the Tories, or preparing to do battle with them, that General Strike cannot restrict itself to simply revoking the Employment Bill. All the bosses' plans - the closures, the cuts and the Bill - can be hurled back by a General Strike.

The TUC has no intention of organising such action. Even if it is forced into it by rank and file pressure or the Tory government, it will set out to betray and demobilise the movement. While we must demand that they organise and lead, we must build Councils of Action in every locality that can mobilise real support, force the TUC to act, and give a decisive lead the moment the official leaders draw back from the fight with the Tories.

PHOTO: JOHN STURROCK (Report)

Inside: 1926 General Strike, SWP & Women, El Salvador

editorial

Make Militancy Political Or Else

The last weeks of February saw a series of set-backs in the struggle against the Tories. Edwardes' triumph in victimising the convenor of the largest Leyland plant; the overwhelming rejection of the South Wales NUM Executive's strike call; the lack of strike action in the South Yorkshire Cuts day are all grim examples. Rank and file "revolts", encouraged by the Tory yellow press, and connived at by the right-wing union and TUC leaderships, have called a halt to what seemed to be an unstoppable snowballing of anger and fighting spirit.

Militants angry and confused by these set-backs are looking for explanations and for ways of recovering the lost ground. The left-wing union leaders like Emlyn Williams blame the propaganda barrage of the bosses' press, and the 'interference' of management in the workplaces. We have had the curious spectacle of the NCB and Michael Edwardes facilitating mass meetings and putting out leaflets by the score, and Thatcher posing as the voice of rank and file trade unionists, denied their democratic voice by bully-boy militants!

Whilst of course this wave of propaganda has had an effect, to complain about "outside interference" is no answer. The Tories and the bosses won't oblige us by playing by the rules. The answer to this avalanche of lies is threefold:

1. Rank and file militants, whatever the temptation, must be the best defenders of shop-floor democracy, even when this works against them in the short term. Regular section meetings, mass meetings and the democratic right for the opponents of strike action to put their case are in the long run the only way to educate the rank and file, and immunise them against the bosses' smear tactics.

2. The bosses' lie machine can be halted. Trade unions write, produce, print and distribute the papers of the tiny clique of Fleet Street barons. It is time these trade unionists fought for the right to reply - equal space for the slandered victims. If the Thompsons and Murdochs refuse then stop their lying mouths! They should halt the newsrooms, the presses, the vans until the elementary democratic right of reply is won. The dictatorship of big business over the media - misnamed the "freedom of the press" - must be exposed and challenged.

3. We need our own press - at every level. The union funds lie mouldering unused. Let them be mobilised to provide workers at all levels with regular shop stewards bulletins, factory and combine newspapers, with a daily paper for the labour movement (sold by each and every steward, open to rank and file correspondents, and mobilising support for each and every section in struggle). When the union leaders complain - as the TUC did last year, or as Benn has done recently, of the bias of the press, we should demand that they put their money and resources where their mouth is. In the meantime the rank and file should take the lead at factory level - a bulletin in every shop - in every plant.

But the bosses' propaganda is by no means the only reason for the problems we face. The Union leaders - Sirs, Duffy, George Wright and Len Murray are tirelessly working to stop action on unemployment, the cuts and the anti-union laws coinciding or linking up with the steelworkers strike. Above all they wish to obstruct any action that oversteps the bounds of harmless protest.

Left leaders, Scargill, McGahey and Co are loud in their declarations of willingness to come to the aid of the steel workers, or Derek Robinson "when we are called". They then sleep soundly in their beds, secure in the knowledge that Sirs or Duffy will not call them from their slumbers. Emlyn Williams, despite his support for strike action alongside the steelworkers, has so far failed to expose and disassociate himself from the betrayals and sell-outs he knows full well are being hatched by Gormley, Wright and Murray.

Only by sharply exposing and calling to account these traitors in the union ranks can an alternative leadership gain the confidence of the rank and file.

Faced with these betrayals, many militants - often influenced by the Socialist Workers Party - think the answer lies in settling back to the "basics" of militant trade unionism summed up in the 'Rank and File Code of Practice'. Whilst of course all its points should be built into the norms of rank and file action, this 'back to the drawing board' approach is totally insufficient.

On the SWP's part it is based on a chronic pessimism, rooted in the weakened state of rank and file organisation - the decrepit state of the "militant networks" in the various unions. They fail to see the potential in the massive class battles ahead for rapidly rebuilding under fire. Not only the potential, but the critical necessity for such rebuilding. For if the Tories win - if the steelworkers are beaten, the Leyland carve-up goes through, if we do have 2 - 3 million unemployed within a year, then the tasks will be that much more difficult.

Dogged by this pessimism, and by an inability to reply to the Tories' class-wide attack with class-wide politics, strategy and tactics, the SWP fall back on calling for unity with the CP on the basis of the CP's "left" policy of one-day token stoppages and action "when the Bill becomes law". Thus the SWP - despite the undoubted honest and militant intentions of their members - cannot distinguish themselves fundamentally from Murray's "protest" strategy. The SWP's dithering when faced with the CP-dominated Liaison Committee for the Defence of Trade Unions' failure to initiate rank and file action against the Anti-Union Bill proves this.

We do not deny that there is a crisis of leadership at rank and file and shop floor level. For us this means that - outside of national strike situations - the militants are thirsting for action but all too often cannot get their members to follow them. But we believe that at root this is a political crisis - not just one of organisation or propaganda. Yes, we need shop floor organisations and democracy, we need militant tactics, effective picketing etc. We need bulletins, newspapers. But what are we to say, what policies, demands are we to fight for?

We believe that a new rank and file movement, grouping the best militants together is essential. We believe that revolutionary communists alone can provide the consistent politics and leadership for such a movement. The struggles of the coming years must be political struggles which utilise direct action strength to take on the government, its law courts, its police thugs and its propaganda. They must also be struggles that settle accounts with the traitors in our own ranks. It is not, as the SWP believe, simply a question of militants making propaganda for the socialist future, while carrying on with militant 'back to the 60s' trade unionism. They must fight for demands which answer the crying needs felt by workers today - how to beat unemployment, inflation, cuts, state attacks on the unions. They must show that those needs can only be met by breaking the power of the bosses in industry, and the state that guarantees it.

International

El Salvador: breaking

The overthrow of the U.S. backed butcher Somoza by the Sandinista National Liberation Front (FSLN) continues to send shock waves throughout central America. In El Salvador there is mounting opposition to the barbaric repression meted out by the ruling military junta.

On January 22nd, 200,000 workers and peasants took to the streets of the capital, San Salvador, demanding democratic rights and an end to the grinding poverty which affects the Salvadorean masses. The demonstration, called by the National Revolutionary Coordinating Committee (CNR) was savagely attacked by the National Guard. As the march passed the National Palace, in the centre of the capital, the National Guard opened fire killing many demonstrators and wounding others. In the

aftermath of the attack 40,000 demonstrators took refuge in the campus of San Salvador University. The National Guard surrounded the University and once more opened fire on the demonstrators. Military aircraft flew overhead spraying people with insecticide. The Salvadorean Red Cross estimates that 100 people died and more than 300 were injured.

In response to the massacre the CNR called a three day general strike which got the support of 150,000 workers in the cities and countryside. Thousands more attended the funerals of those murdered by the military junta.

The present military junta, headed by Colonels Jaime Abdul Gutierrez and Adolfo Arnoldo Majano, came to power in the US-backed coup of October 15th 1979.

The coup overthrew the hated regime of General Carlos Humberto Romero. The US clearly hoped that

the mounting unrest in El Salvador could be headed off by installing a more "progressive" section of the military in power. And, indeed, the present rulers promised a "redistribution of wealth" and a "democratic opening" for the Salvadorean masses.

But the promises were not honoured. On coming to power the junta banned street demonstrations, imposed a curfew, tightened press censorship and deployed troops and tanks on the streets of the major urban areas. During the last 3 months of the new junta 600 people were massacred.

The only concession made was to allow the return of a number of bourgeois exiles - in particular leading figures of the Christian Democratic Party (PDC). The junta attempted to give itself a democratic gloss by adding 3 civilian members to its ranks. Along with the leader of the Chamber of Commerce and the rector of the Central America University these included Guillermo Manuel Ungo, leader of the Social Democratic National Revolutionary Movement (MNR). In addition the junta has set up a civilian cabinet composed of PDC members.

But any hope U.S. imperialism may have had of establishing a stable, "democratic", modernising regime in El Salvador have foundered on the realities of the Salvadorean economy. Whilst El Salvador is the most highly industrialised economy in central America, agriculture forms the economic backbone. 14 Salvadorean ruling families own the vast majority of arable land (estimates go as high as 86%).

Agricultural production is based on large scale plantation farming



TURKEY

In the face of the worst economic crisis ever in Turkey's history, the class struggle is sharply intensifying. The Aegean town of Izmir, now added to Turkey's list of provinces under martial law (21 provinces covering half the population), has been the centre of much of the action. Over the past few months a devaluation of the Turkish Lira by 33% has sent prices of all basic goods soaring. Inflation is now at the astronomical annual rate of 90%, while unemployment has reached the 20% mark.

Unwilling to sit back and be crushed Turkish workers have responded by turning to the unions, primarily DISK a left-wing union in which the illegal Communist Party hold sway, as their means of defence. Unionisation amongst Turkey's industrial sector, for example, has risen to an all time high of 40%. But, joining the unions is far from being a passive, form-signing act in Turkey. It can amount to a serious challenge to the bosses and the state.

This was demonstrated when the bosses at a state owned agricultural products factory, TARIS, in Izmir sacked 11,000 of its workers when they refused to join MISK, a fascist trade union, and opted for DISK. The police were called in to intimidate the workers and scuffles broke out as police tried to search workers on their way to work. Workers responded to the sackings with an occupation of the plant, which, after 12 hours was smashed by 10,000 troops, backed by armoured cars. They herded over 500 of the 1,500 workers in the occupation, into a sports stadium.

An Izmir-wide general strike was called, but was then called off after only 12 hours because the leaders felt a strike confined to Izmir would not have any effect. Fighting in the city continued, however, and in the Bidonville working class districts barricades and red flags were put up. A 2,500 strong task force attacked the district, carrying out house-to-house searches and arresting numerous workers. For good measure 300 left wingers were rounded up in Istanbul, to prevent them from urging solidarity with Izmir.

These are glimpses of the virtual state of civil war that exists inside Turkey. It is a war between the government and their fascist Nationalist Action Party supporters, the 'Grey Wolves', on the one hand, and the working class, poor peasants and Kurdish nationalists on the other. Since Demirel took over, late last year, 497 political killings have taken place - mainly

fascist attacks on left wingers.

Disatisfied with Demirel's repression of the working class the army generals have twice, in as many months, warned that they will take over unless repression is stepped up against 'anarchists and separatists'. This is no idle threat - these butchers have taken over twice before. Their threat poses an enormous danger to the Turkish masses, as the army brutality in Izmir indicates. Demirel has said that the army is a friend of democracy. He declared:

"Our army is a very civilised army. I have it under control all the time".

This is pure whitewash. The generals are calling the tune and if Demirel doesn't play it he will be out. That is why he has granted the army's request that martial law be extended, and why he has to be in daily consultation with it.

Kurdistan

In solidarity with the struggle for Kurdish self-determination being waged in Iraq, Iran and Turkey, we print the following:

"Press Release concerning the battle of Simaqli from the Kurdistan Solidarity Committee.

The Kurdistan United Socialist Party (KUSP) of Iraqi Kurdistan has contacted the Kurdistan Solidarity Committee to pass on a message to the media of the world about the lonely war they are waging against the Iraqi regime. The content of the message is as follows:

In the early hours of the morning of 24/12/79, two brigades of the Iraqi Army's special units, supported by mercenary forces and squads of armoured helicopters and tanks, with the intention of cleaning the area of three hundred peshmergas belonging to KUSP, attacked the mountainous region surrounding the village of Simaqli, which lies between Erbil and Kuysanjag. Within hours the peshmergas had prepared themselves, and the battle began at 9.00 am and continued until 7.00 pm. Then the army withdrew, leaving behind seventy-one bodies of their two hundred dead. Among those killed were six officers, two of them identified as Captain Husham and Lieutenant Fatthi. Other losses included an armoured helicopter, three mortars, four Greenof machine guns and sixty Kalashnikov sub-machine guns.

Casualties suffered by the KUSP forces were three dead and five wounded. Two of the dead were group leaders."

Imperialism is now openly alarmed about the fate of Turkey. The West German Finance Minister, Hans Matthofer, has promised to push for 1.5 billion dollars aid from the OECD, while the IMF are granting Turkey a loan of 228 million dollars. The US has now negotiated the reopening of three of its military bases/listening posts on the Soviet/Turkish border and, for the first time since 1960, a top-level meeting of NATO ministers will be taking place in Ankara this spring.

The 'fall' of Afghanistan and Iran has made imperialism frantic about their hold over one of the key areas of the world - they are desperate to 'save' Turkey. The 'Economist' summed up imperialism's fears, declaring that the collapse of Turkey "Could make the fall of Afghanistan sound, by comparison, a distant rattle of stones in the hills". Hence the massive financial and probably, military aid to Turkey.

Clearly the crisis in Turkey is hitting the working class and peasant masses of Turkey hardest. They are hitting back but dangers block their efforts at every stage. The CP remains wedded to a stageist programme of 'national democratic revolution' and Trotskyist forces remain a tiny minority inside the working class.

The Republican People's Party is now facing 'left', with Ecevit, who as Prime Minister last year began the process of repression by implementing martial law, criticising Demirel's extension of it as the worst repression seen since 'Idi Amin'.

This shameful demagoguery should be rejected and Turkish revolutionaries should fight for a break with Ecevit by the workers' organisations. The RPP is a bourgeois party, a proven enemy of the working class. The workers must develop their own independent organisations of struggle. But this does not mean reducing the struggle to isolated military activities. The guerilla groups in Turkey, mainly of a Maoist orientation, have gained considerable support among many of Turkey's young workers. In the face of daily fascist attacks this is an understandable but inadequate response. It will be the mass mobilisations of the working class in organised and united struggle that will beat Demirel, Ecevit the fascists and imperialism - not individual heroes.

Outside of Turkey it is crucial that solidarity is built up with the Turkish and Kurdish workers and peasants in their fight against reaction. To this end WORKERS POWER in Britain will be supporting the recently formed Turkish Solidarity Campaign, to fight inside our own labour movement for support for our Turkish and Kurdish brothers and sisters.

US stranglehold?

of the major export crops: coffee, cotton and sugar cane. The modernisation of the plantations left the majority of the peasants without land or work. Agricultural workers are employed only seasonally and unemployment in the countryside has risen to 60%.

The 14 family ruling oligarchy has consistently opposed the most trivial attempts to introduce land reform. In 1975 the government of Colonel Molina attempted to redistribute 59,000 hectares of land to 12,000 peasants. Despite the offer of generous compensation to the landowners this measure was firmly blocked.

An alliance of the landowners and the big bourgeois have dominated the government from 1961 onwards through the National Conciliation Party (PCN). The PCN also enjoys the support of the upper strata of the military hierarchy. In 1970's there was a shift toward token democratisation with the PDC being allowed to run against the PCN in presidential elections in 1972 and 1977. But any chance of the PDC winning the election (and the indications are that it would have done) was sabotaged by ballot rigging and intimidation of voters by military or para-military organisations.

The present trend of the junta towards increased repression illustrates the total inability of the PDC, despite forming a cabinet, to affect events in El Salvador. The PDC, based mainly on middle class professionals and the rural petty bourgeoisie has no support within the landowner/big bourgeoisie alliance. As a professor of political science at the University of Central America put it,

"The Christian Democrats no longer mean anything in this country. They are irrelevant. Their time has come and gone." (Newsweek 4.2.80)

The Salvadorean left which leads the opposition to the junta is dominated by the National Revolutionary Coordinating Committee (CNR). The CNR is a front organisation formed on Jan 11th this year by the People's Revolutionary Bloc (BPR), United Front for People's Action (FAPU), Feb 28th Peoples League (LP-28) and the Communist Party's legal electoral front the Nationalist Democratic Union (UDN). Despite the socialist rhetoric employed by the CNR all the information suggests that it is based on the politics of anti-imperialist nationalism - like its counterpart in Nicaragua, the FSLN.

In the aftermath of the October coup each of the left organisations attempted, unsuccessfully to call a military truce with the junta. The most influential, the BPR, opposed the junta but stated that the time was not right for armed insurrection. The CP, which for years has been part of a popular frontist electoral bloc with the PDC, openly supported the new junta. CP leader Roberto Castellanos said: "We support the junta because we believe it is going to comply with its promises and open the possibility of democratising the country." (IP 5.11.79)

The LP-28, which is a member of the MNR dominated "Peoples Forum", at first hesitated to endorse MNR participation in the junta. But then LP-28 declared their willingness to work with

"progressive sectors" of the junta. LP-28 were quoted in Newsweek as saying: "The junta has shown good will and we are going to stop fighting against it." (Newsweek 29.10.79)

FAPU, in the Nicaraguan daily La Prensa, declared their commitment to "non violent" struggle: "As the first step we have decided upon, we are going to press forward a series of struggles that involve mobilising the entire people and increasing their combativity in the framework of peaceful, non-violent struggle."

But the left's illusion in the army's willingness for 'peaceful co-existence' were soon shattered by events and they were plunged back into armed conflict.

The programme of the CNR recognises that the hold of the bourgeoisie can only be broken by armed insurrection. The founding platform declares:

"The attempts to establish a third historical alternative - reformism - have been frustrated....the crisis cannot be resolved in this way as some sectors of the imperialists, the bourgeoisie and the middle layers claim."

But the tasks of the popular insurrection for the CNR are purely democratic and not socialist:

"[The situation]....will guarantee democratic freedoms and rights to the entire people. In this way real democracy will be established. The land will be turned over to the vast majority in the countryside.... Real national independence will be won....These big tasks can only be carried out if the revolution first triumphs, that is, if it takes power, destroys the oppressive, corrupt and bloodthirsty military tyranny



and establishes a revolutionary, democratic, anti-imperialist government based on peoples power.

The programme advanced by the CNR is the same as that advanced by the FSLN in Nicaragua. What is this programme in essence? Beneath the rhetoric of 'peoples' power - a slogan with a disastrous recent history in Chile and Portugal - it is the Popular Frontist policy transposed to the semi-colonial world. Its essence as popular frontism is to be found in its resolute maintenance of a bourgeois democratic programme and the maintenance of the bedrock of the capitalist state machine.

This anti-socialist programme (socialism is to be put off until a later 'stage') is disguised by anti-imperialist rhetoric and demagogy. The alliance with the 'progressive' sections of the 'national' bourgeoisie may be little more than an unspoken aspiration at first. The 'left' or 'from below' version of the popular front, is a promissory note to the bourgeoisie. It blunts and obscures the class consciousness, the demands and goals of the proletariat dissolving it, along with the peasants and soldiers, into a common 'popular' marsh. It holds out the

promise of a place among the people for the repentant bourgeoisie.

The FSLN was able to unite with the anti-Somoza sections of the bourgeoisie and is now busy constructing a capitalist state in Nicaragua. Conditions are by no means identical in El Salvador. The ruling classes still preserve a relative unanimity - nothing like the anti-Somoza bourgeoisie exists as yet. This makes an FSLN type popular front alliance impossible in the short term.

The Salvadorean working class is the best organised in Central America. It is of vital importance that the working class takes the lead in the heroic struggle against the barbaric Salvadorean ruling class. With the smashing of Somoza in Nicaragua, the upheavals in Guatemala, a decisive lead from the Salvadorean working class, basing itself on independent class organisations and programme, could deal a decisive blow in breaking the US stranglehold in Central America.

Charlie Shell

The Sliding Scale of Wages

Part 2

IN THE TWELVE months to January 1980, wholesale prices rose by 27% according to figures released by the Department of Industry on February 11th. The government-prepared Retail Price Index (RPI) showed an increase on December of 2.5%. Inflation, on the scale of 1975, is with us again.

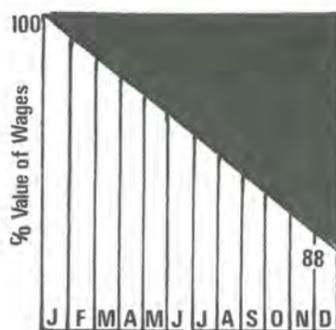
In the first part of this article we looked at the fundamental roots of inflation in the massive expansion of credit needed to finance investment at a time of falling profit rates. In this article we concentrate on how the working class should resist the erosion of wages by inflation and make the fight against inflation part of the class struggle against capitalism itself.

What is the sliding scale?

The basic idea of the sliding scale is simply that wages should regularly increase in order to keep pace with the falling value of money that inflation causes.

Despite the arguments of those, like the SWP who oppose the demand, this basic idea is accepted by all socialists and working class militants. For example, most current wage claims have been worked out on the basis of 18% inflation in the last year. The central idea behind the 'catch-up' claim is simply that inflation should be compensated for on an annual basis.

WORKERS POWER is certainly



Graph One - Annual catch-up

not against regaining the real value of last year's wage deals, however, the annual catch-up cannot do anything about the wages lost during the year.

This is illustrated by graph number one. If inflation averages 1% per month then in twelve months wages are only worth 88% of their original buying power. If won, the catch-up claim regains the original position, but it leaves out the losses that have been steadily accumulating over the months. The shaded area above the graph represents this lost money. The catch-up claim, therefore, is a particularly ineffective way of trying to counter the impact of inflation on wages.

The advantage of the sliding scale when operating in the same circumstances is shown by graph 2. Because the catch-up is more frequent the losses are not able to accumulate during the year. Yes, there is still some loss, again represented by the shaded area above the graph. This is unavoidable as long as workers have to work a week in hand. The advantage of the sliding scale arrangement

A strategy against inflation

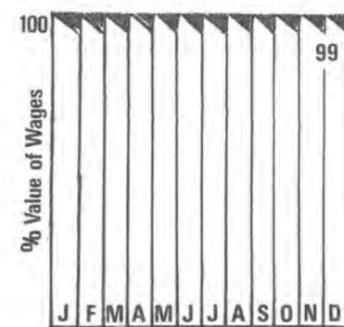
over the annual claim is nonetheless obvious.

Whilst this point is important in explaining the general operation of the sliding scale it is clearly inadequate for assessing the demand as a political demand. The struggle over wages is a central part of the class struggle and a strategy for waging it cannot be worked out by simple arithmetic.

The full demand, as revolutionaries should argue for it is, 'for a sliding scale of wages, 1% rise in take home pay for every 1% rise in the cost of living, as calculated by the workers themselves in the form of price-watch committees of trade unionists and housewives.' Let us examine each part of the slogan and see why it is important in making the slogan the correct one for revolutionaries to raise.

A sliding scale of wages, one per cent rise in take home pay

We have already discussed what the sliding scale part means, the importance of the 'take home pay' part is that it should be a basic axiom of revolutionaries that the working class should not pay a penny towards the upkeep of the bourgeois state. We are against paying taxes to pay for an army, police force, judiciary and bureaucracy that has, as its ultimate purpose, to defend the class that exploits and oppresses the working class. We do not, therefore, take taxes into



Graph Two - Sliding Scale

account when considering wages. Pay means take home pay, and that is what we are trying to protect.

for every one per cent rise in the cost of living, as calculated by committees of trade unionists

As a guide to the impact of inflation on working class incomes the RPI is phoney. Not only can it be rearranged, as the Tories are considering at present, to leave out certain price rises, such as those caused by oil price increases, but it is not based on a working class pattern of expend-

iture anyway.

Instead it is based on the spending of a supposed 'average' family. For example, the RPI assumes that food counts for 23.8% of the average family's spending, yet figures collected by the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development, OECD, show that, in Britain, food actually takes some 31.2% of income. Even this is still an average for the whole country. The Child Poverty Action Group (CPAG) calculates that for the lower paid working class family food takes 45% of income. Since food prices have been rising faster than the general level of inflation (food rose 16.8% faster in the period 1970-77 - OECD) this means that inflation, for workers' families, has been considerably higher than the RPI claims.

By itself this only says, 'Don't trust the government's figures' but the slogan goes further than that. It argues that workers themselves should calculate what they need to compensate for price rises. In this way it is aimed equally at the class collaborationist leaders as well. Put bluntly, it says, 'Don't trust them, or their experts, in the end they will try to sell you out through a deal which will capitalism intact.' The sliding scale of

Continued on page 6

BOSSSES' SHOWDOWN TUC'S BACKDOWN

The period after the First World War was one of growing crisis for British capitalism. Her waning supremacy in world markets in the face of international competition from America, Japan and most importantly Germany had already led to the first full scale imperialist war. Despite the harsh terms imposed on Germany by the victorious imperialist powers Britain's ageing industries remained chronically uncompetitive on a world scale. The ruling class's room for manoeuvre had been dramatically curtailed by the impact of the Russian Revolution on the working class of Britain and Europe. In 1920, the threat of a General Strike called by a national trade union council of action foiled the Government's plans to intervene against the Soviet Republic by backing a Polish invasion of Russia.

However, despite the strengths of the British trade union movement—its growing membership, 2½ million in 1913 to 4½ million in 1918, a powerful process of amalgamation which in 1920/21 led to the creation of the AEU, the T&GWU and the GMWU—it also had chronic weaknesses. The bosses first attempts to deal with the crisis by driving down workers living standards was taken barely nine months after the victory over the Polish arms issue. Demands for drastic wage reductions in the mines marked the opening of the employers offensive and threw down the gauntlet to the most powerful sections of the working class—the Triple Alliance of the Railwaymen, Miners and Transport workers. Despite the strength of the working class and its obvious willingness to take on the employers in this battle the principle trade union leaders, Frank Hodges of the miners, J.H. Thomas of the Railwaymen and Robert Williams and Ernest Bevin of the Transport workers betrayed the miners and the whole working class. Using the excuse of the miners executive refusal of a "reasonable compromise" they called off the solidarity action leaving the miners to go down to defeat. "Black Friday" as it was known henceforth in the Trade Union movement demonstrated the importance of fighting for a new leadership in the trade unions, a task that the young Communist Party was soon to set itself.



As a direct result of Black Friday the employers had reduced real wages dramatically by 1924—the miners by 26%, by 20% for iron and steel workers, by 11% for textile workers. Furthermore in the wake of this retreat between two million workers left the trade unions between 1921 and 1923. Yet 1923 saw the beginnings of a recovery in the working class movement, an upturn in the number of strikes and an increasing political confidence reflected in the growing strength of the Labour Party and the first minority Labour Government in 1923. But the crisis of British capitalism was growing worse not better and it was becoming clear in ruling class circles that more drastic measures were needed to "restore profitability". The "stabilisation" of Germany after the defeat of the German working class in 1923 via the British/American Dawes Plan resulted not only in cuts in German workers living standards but in increased competition with British industry. Coal again became the centre of the crisis. Falling on and defeating the miners, as a preliminary to breaking the power of the trade unions generally, became a central task for the ruling class just as defeating the steel workers as a prelude to breaking the power of the unions is central to the strategy of the employers today. **This was the task that Baldwin's Tory Government set itself when it came into office in December 1924.**

DEPARTURE

Facing the Government and employers challenge was an apparently 'left' dominated trade union leadership. The departure of five right wingers including J.H. Thomas into the Labour Government had strengthened the 'lefts' hold on the General Council of the TUC which had been established in 1920 and charged with "centrally coordinating" the whole movement. A.J. Cook like the present day Arthur Scargill fond of describing himself as a "humble follower of Lenin", had been elected to the secretaryship of the Miners Federation in 1924 with the assistance of the CP and Miners Minority Movement which had been formed in January of that year. Other left wingers on the General Council included A.B. Swales of the engineers, A.A. Purcell, president of the TUC and George Hicks of the Building Trade Workers. Hicks and Purcell took a prominent role in campaign for a united international trade union federation, one including the Russian trade unions and the Red International of Labour Unions (RILU). As Purcell put it at the Hull Congress in 1924 he was fighting for "a genuinely united and avowedly anti-capitalist international federation of Trade Unions."

Left: Earl of Birkenhead.
Below: The TUC General Council:
J.H. Thomas, A. Swales, B. Turner,
A. Pugh (Chairman) and W. Citrine
(Acting General Secretary)

The CP although small had a significant and growing industrial implantation with its paper Workers Weekly averaging a healthy circulation of 50,000. The Communist Party was clear at this time that neither the present leadership of the unions nor the old methods of struggle were capable of combatting the employers offensive, a movement had to be built under communist leadership, which would transform the unions and prepare them for battle. To this end in August 1924 the first conference of the National Minority Movement was held. "The Worker" (the paper of the British RILU) spelled out the tasks of such a movement:

"In every union the Rank and File forces must be gathered (1) around a fighting programme (2) around concrete demands for union consolidation and reorganisation (3) around the necessity for creating a new ideology amongst the trade union membership (4) around the necessity of training and developing a new leadership to replace the old."

Their first conference had over 270 delegates representing some 270,000 workers and, by the eve of the General Strike the special conference of the Minority Movement brought together delegates from 547 organisations representing 957,000 trade unionists.

The weakest link of the British economy, the coal industry was to provide the starting point for the ruling class offensive. On June 30th 1925, faced with the German coal mines in the Ruhr going back into full production, the coal owners gave notice of the termination of existing agreements involving drastic wage reductions and abolition of the principle of a minimum wage. Baldwin stated the position bluntly to a deputation of miners the day before the employers notices expired:

"All the workers of this country have got to take reductions in wages to help put industry on its feet".

However the plans of the employers and Government were temporarily halted by the General Council declaring its support for the miners and instructing all trade unionists involved in the transport of coal—railwaymen, dockers, transport workers, to cease work. Unready for a massive industrial strike wave the Government retreated.

An emergency cabinet meeting came up with a 9 month wage subsidy while the favourite ruling class delaying tactic, a "Royal Commission" under Sir Herbert Samuel made recommendations on the mining industry.

While "Red Friday", the day the Government backed down in the face of united industrial action, became a symbol for the working class of their industrial strength for the ruling class it meant something different. Winston Churchill, then Chancellor of the Exchequer and one of the most militant advocates of breaking the power of the unions, summed up the reasons for postponing confrontation in a speech a few months later. "We therefore decided to postpone the crisis in the hope of averting it, or, if not of averting it, of coping effectively with it when the time comes."

This was no idle threat. Between "Red Friday" and Churchill's speech the Government had set about with a will the preparation necessary to defeat a General Strike. Churchill could well be pleased, the Government had perfected its administrative machinery—the country was divided in ten divisions, each under a Minister as special commissioner in charge of a staff of civil servants to handle direction of transport, food, postal services, coal etc. Just as the present Government has refined and perfected its anti union police squads so Churchill and Baldwin made sure

General S

Socialists must learn the lessons of the 1926 General Strike as vicious as the one launched in the 1920s. Trotsky pointed out of the capitalists, because of the weakness of the independent within the rank and file. He pointed out that the bureaucracy, precisely in order to put them in a position from which they could strong today. The 'lefts' such as Scargill in the unions and Ben

The dangers are all present. To counter them it is crucial that leaders. We must develop a rank and file movement of the street revolutionary path, fighting against the various 'left wingers' and file bodies that can lead and organise a general strike that power in the unions. This means building action councils, defence that can bring workers into action, into the best possible position struggle for power. Our aims are similar to those that Trotsky only under the influence of the independent slogans of the Party appreciate its tasks precisely, change its leaders, fortify itself in (Writings on Britain Vol. 2 New Park).

Building a new revolutionary communist party and a new period of ruling class attacks and intensifying class struggle.

that the trade union movement would face the full might of the state forces when they prepared to defend themselves. The official machinery was linked into the "volunteer service committees". The "Organisation for Maintenance of Supplies" (OMS) a semi-official body for organising scab "volunteers" was set up in September. It undertook the training of strikebreakers who learn their skills on the private works railways and lorries lent by industrialists at weekends. The commissioners organised special divisional conferences which planned the measures to be taken in the event of a general strike—dealing with the "safe conduct" of transport, setting up mobile police squads, and organising the special constabulary and the armed thugs of the "Civil Constabulary Reserve" (recruited from ex-soldiers "who could be vouched for") for their strike breaking activities.

While the ruling class was preparing itself for the coming confrontation—the trade union leaders like Len Murray and the TUC leaders today carried on business as usual. The General Council, despite its 'left' majority took no steps to organise the working class for battle.

CRITICISM

The Communist Party, hog tied by the alliance between the British General Council and the Russian Trade Unions in the Anglo-Russian Trade Union Committee mounted only muted criticism of the inactivity of the Trade Union leaders. The perspective of fighting for a "general staff" of an ideologically and organisationally transformed trade union movement, which could take on and defeat the class enemy, developed at the first Minority Movement conference, had become a passive, disarming slogan "All power to the General Council" by 1926. That this demand posed no threat to the authority of the Trade Union leaders was made quite clear by Walter Citrine in his memoirs:

"People who thought like myself had for years been talking about a general staff of labour. 'All Power to the General Council' they declared. Such slogans seemed not only eminently desirable but just plain common sense. We didn't realise how conservative a force the trade union movement could be in relation to its own affairs."

By March 1926 when the Samuel Commission reported, the Government and employers were confident enough to go straight on to the offensive. The miners were not the only target, the engineering employers were demanding longer hours, the railway companies were threatening wage cuts and the building employers were beginning an assault on working conditions. The Commission report itself, starting from the basis that the coal industry was "uneconomic" and losing money, proposed an ending of the subsidy and wage cuts. Coupling this with

recommendation of a degree of state intervention to rationalise the unmoded industry.

While the miners leaders rejected the Commission's report they foiled the General Council increasingly active in declaring its support. J.H. Thomas, now back on the General Council and a leading member of its industrial committee, reflected the fears of the right wing trade union leaders only a fortnight before the General Strike, when he declared "to talk at this stage as if in a few days all the workers of the country were to be called out was... letting loose a pack that might be difficult to control". Thomas and Bevin were terrified thought of a general strike against the Government. As good reformers the possibility of a strike which changed the "constitution" or even one which got out of their control and raised the question of who ruled, the workers or the bosses had to be prevented at all costs.

Neither did the 'lefts' on the General Council have any alternative to offer. While they could verbally acknowledge the need to overthrow capitalism, as soon as they found themselves in a situation where they had to lead such a battle, to organise and fight for it—they retreated. This is why Swales, Hicks and Purcell could be prominent leftist leaders of the TUC before the General Strike—but concede the leadership to the likes of Thomas and Bevin during the crucial period of struggle.

The TUC's industrial commission frantic search for a compromise which would prevent a general strike went on right up to the very eve of the general strike. While the big May day demonstration seen since the revolutionary years after the war was gathering in Hyde Park, Thomas and Co were closeted with the Government in Downing Street trying to achieve agreement on the basis of the Samuel report. As Thomas himself was candidly to put it, "I suppose my usual critics will say I was growling and it is true. In all my long experience I have never begged and pleaded like I begged and pleaded all day today."

The trade union leaders growling failed to impress Baldwin and the emboldened Government broke off talks and threw down the gauntlet. The excuse was the refusal of NATSOPA chapel to print a Daily Mail leader article attacking the general strike as subversive. The Mail was then as it is today, in the forefront of a yellow press campaign against the unions. Its presses churned out a daily diet of slander and insults directed at workers and their allies. Despite the General Council's cringing repudiation of the printers actions, the Government refused further negotiations.

CONTINUED ON PAGE 6

strike 1926

...re to secure victory in the face of a capitalist offensive every bit
...t the bureaucracy were able to defeat the strike so easily, on behalf
...ations of the rank and file, and of the revolutionary minority
...ing full well that a battle was inevitable led the general strike
...truggle it when they saw fit—nine days later. The bureaucracy is
...e Labour Party, command the loyalty of many of workers.
...utionaries pose answers that can win workers from their false
...f the Minority Movement, but direct it, this time onto a
...l claim the right to lead such a movement. We must build rank
...seat the class collaborationist officials who hold the reins of
...ads, price and supply committees—all the forms of organisation
...challenge the bureaucrats, the bosses and the government in the
...d for the Minority Movement in 1926: "We affirmed that it is
...of its open criticism that the Minority Movement could take form,
...ade unions while consolidating the position of communism."

...file movement are vital tasks for revolutionaries in this present

TROTSKY WARNS OF 'LEFTS' IN VAIN

The policy of the British CP in the period leading up to the General Strike was determined by its small size and influence in a working class dominated by the reformist Labour Party and trade union leaders. The tactic of the united front, elaborated at the 3rd and 4th Congresses of the Communist International, saw its application in Britain through the CP's efforts to build a National Minority Movement.

The starting point for the united front was the recognition by large numbers of workers, that in the face of a growing capitalist offensive there was a need for united action to defeat it. Trotsky pointed out that "the struggle for a united front is of such great significance in England because it responds to the elementary demands of the working class for a new orientation and grouping of forces." (Problems of the British Labour Movement).

This situation allowed the CP to unite with reformist workers and their leaders in action to defend the



immediate interests even if such joint action was on the basis of limited goals. The object was to win the trust of the masses in the course of practical struggle and at one and the same time demonstrate to reformist workers the treacherous role that their leaders would play even in limited struggles. This tactic was permissible on one condition—that the CP retained its absolute political independence from the reformist parties. As Trotsky put it:

"The ideological and organisational formation of a really revolutionary (i.e. Communist) party on the basis of a mass movement is only conceivable under conditions of a continuous, systematic, unwavering, untiring, and naked denunciations of the muddles, the compromises and indecision of the quasi left leaders of all shades." (Problems of the British Labour Movement).

In other words joint action was not an excuse for keeping quiet about the likely vacillating of the reformist leaders. Indeed, the united front was intended to open up the best possible conditions for gaining a hearing for such criticisms amongst the masses.

The danger in Britain in the mid-twenties was that in its eagerness to increase its influence over the masses, the young CP, under the pressure of the lefts and their supporters in the trade unions, would succumb to an opportunist use of the united front tactic—that it would curtail its criticisms of the lefts in order to gain "a better hearing" in the working class.

While this tendency to bend to the national forces of the class struggle could have been corrected by a revolutionary communist international, the centrist Stalin faction had already usurped control of the Russian Communist Party and therefore the C. I.

In 1926 it was Stalin who guided the policies of the British CP and he guided them in the direction of the united front applied in an opportunist fashion. Trotsky raised warnings against the dangers of such a policy. Neither the C. I. nor the British CP, however, heeded his words. In fact, his comradely criticisms and advice were met with repression by Stalin faction and Trotsky was slandered as an enemy of the working class. The result of Stalin's policies for Britain was that the General Strike in support of the miners was defeated, the working class remained disoriented for decades and the young CP missed the greatest opportunity it was ever to have for capturing leadership over wide layers of the British working class.

Trotsky vigorously encouraged the young CP to prepare itself to seize the opportunities that were opening up in the prelude to the General Strike. This meant developing, at every stage, the ind-

BIRTH OF OUR POWER Councils of Action Workers' Defence

The initial official impetus for the establishment of Councils of Action in 1926 came from the "Proposals for Co-ordinated Action" adopted by the TUC General Council on May 1st and which declared:

"The work of the Trades Councils, in conjunction with the local officers of the trade unions actually participating in the strike shall be to assist in carrying out the foregoing provisions (i.e. stoppage of work in various trades and undertakings of exceptions thereto) and they shall be charged with the responsibility of organising the trade unionists in dispute in the most effective manner, for the preservation of peace and order."

However effective Councils of Action went far beyond this formal coordinating role envisaged by the TUC and far beyond the normal functioning of Trades Councils. On the initiative of militants, moribund Trades Councils were revived. Existing ones broadened to bring in all types of working class organisations until they became real expressions of the whole working class movement and therefore potential organs of workers power.

The essential components of the most effective strike committees and Councils of Action were the Commissariats (distributing food often in conjunction with local cooperative societies), the workers def-

ence corps and propaganda bodies producing local bulletins. Where the right wing dominated the strike organisations, committees remained formal, often split and uncoordinated and ineffective.

As the strike developed the various strike committees and Councils of Action necessarily broadened their activities. The nature of the situation demanded daily meetings, in a number of the more effective Council there was always at least a sub-committee in permanent session day and night. Special Committees or departments were set up such as Finance, Propaganda and Publicity (including Information, Press, Intelligence, Relief and Prisoners Aid, Aid, Pickets, Permits, Transport, Entertainment etc.

Where picketing was most effective, it took the form of mass pickets of a united character organised by the Councils of Action. Successful mass pickets were most

common in militant industrial areas, particularly in the coalfields and on the railways. London was the scene of some of the most effective picketing. In West Ham and Poplar the streets were blocked except for transport "By permission of the TUC". The centralised picket at Bolton organised 2,280 pickets in two days on a duty roster of 4 hours on and 20 hours off.

On the Councils of Action and the strike committees fell the main responsibility for information—meetings, bulletins etc.—to counteract the Government monopolised BBC, the British Gazette edited by Winston Churchill, and many other reactionary news-sheets. The TUC's British Worker' reached a circulation of over a million by the end of the strike, but added little to the organisation and fighting capacity of the strikers. The gaps were filled by hundreds of local Bulletins edited by the Councils of Action. About half of the 140 Councils of Action and strike committees who answered a Labour Research Department enquiry after the strike, had produced local or area bulletins. Most of the bulletins appeared daily, in some cases with a circulation of up to 10,000.

In the face of police attack and scabbing by the OMS workers defence corps played a vital role in defending the strike and the activities of the workers organisation. One such defence corps was formed in the Fife Coalfield. Here the Trades Council formed a Council of Action which, in its turn, formed a Workers Defence Corps along with sections on Food and Transport, Information and Propaganda later adding others on Prisoners Aid and Entertainment. Reporting just after the strike a member of this Council of Action wrote:

"The organisation worked like clockwork. Everything was stopped—even the railway lines were picketed. The Council had a courier service second to none in Britain with 3 motor cars, 100 motor cycles, and as many push bikes as was necessary. They covered the whole of Fife taking out information and bringing in reports sending out speakers everywhere, as far north as Perth." (reported in 'Workers Weekly' No 173 11.6.1926). and on the Defence Corps the report continued:

CONTINUED ON PAGE 6

Police picket busters yesterday and today.



John Sturrock (Report)



dependence of the masses from the trade union bureaucrats, who were so well entrenched in the birthplace of trade unionism and consolidating the CP as an independent political force. This line was summed up in his attitude to the rank and file movement, the Minority Movement, that the CP had built. On the one hand the CP had to tirelessly build it, but on the other they had to be seen as separate from it:

"While giving all round support to the movement of the truly revolutionary minority and particularly while giving support to acceptable candidacies of representatives of this minority for this or that position in the trade union movement (always on the basis of a specific practical programme), the British Communist Party must not in any circumstances or under any conditions identify itself with the Minority Movement or merge the organisations. The British Communist Party must maintain full freedom of criticism with respect to the Minority Movement as a whole as well as with respect to its individual leaders, their mistakes and vacillations." (Writings on Britain Vol 2 p200-201—New Park Edition).

ESSENCE

In Trotsky's view this was the essence of the united front tactic with regard to the trade unions in Britain. Applying the tactic on this basis was vital in a situation where the masses had enormous illusions in the left reformist leaders on the General Council of the TUC, such as Hicks, Purcell and Co. To give these 'lefts' any room to manoeuvre, any credentials as potentially 'revolutionary' or uncritically identify with them would be suicidal for the CP. This was why Trotsky was particularly critical of these characters. The illusions of the most militant sections of the working class in them made them even more dangerous than the 'moderates' on the General Council. Before the strike Trotsky pointed out the real mettle of the 'left' gentlemen:

"It should be thoroughly understood that leftism of this kind remains left only so long as it has no practical obligations. But as soon as the question of action arises the left wingers respectfully cede the leadership to the rights."

Despite Trotsky's warnings, despite his insistence that the CP should remain a clearly independent revolutionary force, an opposite line was adopted, and this, in part, paved the way for the rapid defeat of the General Strike. It was not that the strike lacked determination that it failed, but because the right wingers on the TUC shamefully engineered a betrayal, the

'lefts' allowed them to do this without so much as a whimper, and the CP, having based its strategy for victory on relying on the 'lefts' to lead the strike, were thrown into confusion when they did not do this. What lay behind this debacle?

To answer this we have to look beyond the borders of Britain and beyond the central committee of the CPGB. The British General Strike took place at a time when, not only the revolutionary wave in Europe was on the ebb, but also when reaction, in the shape of the bureaucratic Stalin faction was marching forward in the Soviet Union itself. Part of this forward march was the policy of Socialism in one Country. Stalin wanted to give up on the international revolution, something that Lenin and Trotsky had argued was not an option but a vital necessity for the safeguarding of the Soviet State as well as for the real liberation of the world working class. Stalin replaced this with the reactionary nationalist utopian goal of socialism within the borders of one country, Russia, alone. To achieve this, Stalin had to pursue a foreign policy that sacrificed the interests of the revolution to the aim of keeping imperialism happy, thereby preventing it from invading the Soviet Union. To do this Stalin reduced the Communist International to the pliable instrument of his foreign policy aimed at appeasing imperialism. National CPs were forced to pursue policies that would serve the Soviet Bureaucracy even if that meant, as it invariably did, abandoning a revolutionary perspective.

In Britain this policy manifested itself in the way in which the Anglo-Russian Committee (ARC) was developed by the



Stalin faction. Formed in 1924 Trotsky viewed this temporary bloc between the Russian Trade Unions and the British General Council as a legitimate use of the united front tactic. The General Council had taken a step to the left under the pressure of the masses, agreeing to take up the cudgels against the social-democratic 'Amsterdam' TU federation in favour of unity with the Red International of Labour Unions. The formation of the ARC together with the campaign being waged in the trade unions by the British CP on the question was aimed at pinning the TUC to its commitment. Any retreat or vacillation on the part of the General Council would result in the breaking of the ARC by the Russian Trade Unions thus issuing a clear warning to the British working class of their leaders retreat.

LASTING BLOC

But the Stalin faction did not see the ARC in this fashion. They saw it as a lasting bloc with the leadership of the British trade unions—one which was predominantly aimed at preventing the British Government from intervening militarily against the Soviet Union. Stalin's 'realism' led him to place his faith in the vacillating bureaucrats as protectors of the Soviet Union in preference to developing a revolutionary strategy for the British Communist Party and working class.

Trotsky clearly pointed out the impact of this policy:

"A young CP who entire strength lies in criticism and irreconcilability reveals at a decisive moment a surplus of qualities of the opposite order. At bottom it is an false understanding of the united front. Day in day out the British CP was taught that union with Purcell and Hicks would aid the defence of the USSR. This could not pass without leaving its traces on the consciousness of the British CP." (Trotsky on Britain).

The CP therefore built its strategy for defeating the ruling class offensive around the 'left' leaders aided and prodded occasionally by the Minority Movement. "All power to the General Council" became the central slogan as the CP believed that the lefts on this body would, with such power, carry the strike through to a lasting victory. The effect of the policy in practice was somewhat different, as Trotsky had predicted. The strike was defeated and the CP was identified with the perpetrators of the defeat. In the wake of the betrayal Stalin refused to break up the ARC and instruct the CP to pursue an independent line—he steadfastly maintained the alliance. Eventually, having no further

CONTINUED ON PAGE 6

Birth of our power

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 5

"After police charges on mass pickets, the Defence Corps, which 150 workers had joined at the outset, was reorganised. As numbers rose to 700, of whom 400, commanded by workers who had been NCO's during the war, marched in military formation through the town to protect the picket. The police did not interfere again."

A daily bulletin was issued by the Council of Action, which took over the Cooperative Hall as its headquarters. It is not surprising that in this, one of the most militant and best organised areas of the strike, arrests were frequent along with arbitrary prison sentences and few acquittals.

In parts of the Fife Coalfield control of transport passed into the hands of the strikers. Abe Moffat, a prominent CP miner described this in the following way:

"Cowdenbeath, Fife... all motor vehicles had to get permission from the Trades Council before travelling up the

Great North Road... to ensure that no one would pass, miners had a rope across the road. If a motor vehicle has to pass it got through; if it had no pass it has to turn back."

The Middlesborough Central Strike Committee was an extremely effective committee. "It may be safely said that we have never known a strike entered upon with such enthusiasm and determination by the workers before" its secretary reported afterwards. It met daily, kept an emergency committee on duty at night, organised an efficient despatch riders service. CP executive committee member Murphy reported that it was so authoritative that it secured the withdrawal of all mounted police and special constables from the streets "in the interests of order."

In Sheffield the Trades Council formed its industrial section into a Central Dispute Committee, which refused an official offer

of cooperation from the CP, but also sought the support of its individual members. In response the CP and the Minority Movement organised, in Sheffield, an unofficial strike committee, which produced a daily bulletin of around 10,000 copies. After 5 days the duplicating equipment was finally seized by the police, but the No 6 'Special Strike Bulletin' appeared on May 11th, prepared secretly from somewhere in the A.E.U. Institute in Stanley Street.

The organisation, enthusiasm, and initiative of the health Councils of Action, stood out starkly against the inertia and cowardice of the TUC. In fighting for a general strike in the present period, we must build such organisations, based on the rank and file, that can not only run an effective strike, but can also lay the basis of a challenge for power.

Andy Smith

Trotsky warns...

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 5

use of ARC as a provider of left cover for their treachery, the TUC broke the alliance when they complained that the Soviet Union's financial aid to the striking miners constituted external interference in the affairs of a British trade union!

Trotsky crisply summed up the outcome of the whole affair:

"The masses knew as the leaders of the movement only Purcell, Hicks and Cook, whom, moreover Moscow vouched for. These 'left' friends, in the first serious test, shamefully betrayed the proletariat. The revolutionary workers were thrown into confusion, sank into apathy, and naturally extended their disappointment to the CP itself, which had only been the passive part of this whole mechanism of betrayal and perfidy. The Minority Movement was reduced to zero; the Communist Party returned to the existence of a negligible sect. In this way thanks to the rad-

ically false conception of the party the greatest movement of the English proletariat, which led to the general strike, not only did not shake the apparatus of the reactionary bureaucracy but, on the contrary, reinforced it and compromised communism in Britain for a long time." (Trotsky—On the Trade Unions).

Against this bankrupt policy Trotsky and the Left Opposition inside the Russian Communist Party, argued for a revolutionary internationalist line. Revolution not bureaucratic diplomacy was the key to proletarian victory and therefore also the best guarantee for the defence of the Soviet Union against imperialism. But Stalin disagreed. For him the united front was merely an opportunist device to serve the bureaucracy's needs. As such he was prepared to unite with leaders against the masses. Trotsky correctly accused him of having:

"turned over the Minority Movement

bound hand and foot to the gentlemen of the General Council. And in the Minority Movement itself you likewise refused to counterpose and are incapable of counterposing genuine revolutionists to the oily reformists." (Writings on Britain Vol 2 New Park).

Against the the perfidy of the Moscow reactionaries and against the rotten leaders at Congress House, left and right, Trotsky urged a consistently revolutionary policy for the British working class, independent of its organisations and for a General Strike organised and led by councils of action, defended by workers defence units, and for a decisive battle with the capitalist state machine. Stalin's victory over the Left Opposition inside the Soviet Union, almost complete by 1926, ensured that these urgings went unheeded, and sometimes unheard, by the British CP.

Mark Hoskisson



Bosses' showdown

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 5

With the miners already locked out and a conference of trade union executives already convened the General Council was forced to go ahead and call out its troops on Monday May 3rd. The Government gave no alternative to the craven trade union leaders just as Thatcher and Joseph forced Sirs and the ISTC leaders to take action they desperately avoided.

The response was overwhelming. The strike was solid. Even now the General Council did not call out all the trade unions—the engineers and shipyard workers were kept "in reserve". The ruling class, of course, had no such qualms about using the full force at its disposal. The Army was deployed in force, with two battalions of guards complete with cavalry and armoured cars being sent to occupy the London docks the day after the strike began. Warships were anchored in the Mersey, Humber, Tyne and Clyde, and special constable and the civil constabulary reserve were mobilised to protect the strike breaking volunteers of the OMS. The British Gazette, the Government's propaganda sheet run by Churchill, was clear that what was involved was a political challenge to the Government which needed to be crushed. But if the Government and employers were clear as to what was at stake and prepared to fight to the finish the TUC leaders desperately searched for ways of avoiding an all out fight with them.

With the strike solid and Councils of Action springing up throughout the country the General Council became ever more frantic to end the strike. Charles Dukes summarised the nightmare of the trade union leaders faced with a growing General Strike:

"Every day that the strike proceeded, the control and the authority was passing out of the hands of responsible executives into the hands of men who had no authority, no control."

"Negotiations" proceeded throughout the strike if not with the Government then through intermediaries like Lord Wimbourne, liberal landowner and industrialist who Thomas was in the habit of dining with. Herbert Samuel's offer to be intermediary was seized upon by the TUC's "negotiating" committee. The

first meeting took place on Friday when the committee offered to accept wage cuts for the miners in return for implementation of the rest of the Samuel Report. The Government was unimpressed, feeling sure it had the trade union leadership on the run. Cabinet members, Churchill and Birkenhead declared that "mere acceptance (of wage cuts) was not now enough" it was a question of a "fight to the finish".

By Tuesday the "Samuel Memorandum" was agreed to by the TUC which involved wage cuts for the miners and calling off the General Strike. Last minute efforts were made to persuade the miners leaders to agree—without success. On Wednesday 12th May the negotiating committee led by Pugh, Thomas and Bevin delivered their surrender to Baldwin's assembled Cabinet. Baldwin refused point blank to give any assurances on reinstatements or victimisations nor on acceptance of the Samuel memorandum. Birkenhead was later to write to a fellow MP that "their surrender was so humiliating that some instinctive breeding made one unwilling even to look at them".

The 'lefts' were silent. Even the miners leaders while continuing to reject wage cuts merely registered that calling off the strike was the "sole responsibility of the General Council" and thanked the "wonderful display of loyalty displayed by all workers". No attempt was made by Cook and Herbert Smith, the miners leaders to rally the rank and file trade unionists against the betrayal of their leaders.

The CP and Minority Movement had put themselves in a similar situation. Having failed to prepare their members and supporters for a potential sell out by 'lefts' as well as rights they were as bewildered and disarmed as the rest of the working class and unable to mobilise any resistance. The CP's paper 'Workers Weekly' had declared in the last issue before the strike "Our party does not hold lead positions in the trade unions. It is not conducting the negotiations with the employers and the Government. It can only place its forces at the service of the workers—led by others." This passive, fatalistic approach flowed directly from the disastrous policy of muting its criticism

of the left reformist leaders on the General Council and thus failing to prepare an alternative leadership, via the Minority Movement, that could take control of the strike out of the hands of the TUC leaders the minute they inevitably moved to betray the General Strike.

The General Council's decision to end the General Strike was met with disbelief and incredulity by the workers on strike. All the evidence suggests the strike was growing stronger day by day as the Councils of Action organised. The employers responded to the surrender with waves of victimisations of militants and attacks on previous hard won conditions. A defeat was only prevented from turning into an immediate rout by the magnificent response of rank and file trade unionists. The day after the strike was "called off" a 100,000 more workers were on strike against the employers victimisation campaign. The ruling classes euphoria evaporated as it appeared that the worst had happened—a general strike out of control of the trade union leaders. The 'Daily Mail' turned from howling 'Disolve the TUC' and 'Revolution Routed' to calling for 'No Reprisals' the following day. Baldwin entreated the bosses "let us get the workers calm as soon as we can".

Of course after the workers were back at work the onslaught started in earnest once again. General Strikes were made illegal and the right to picket restricted. Thousands of militants were victimised and workers left the unions in droves. TUC membership by 1927 had fallen below 5 million for the first time since 1916. The miners fought on alone for 7 months until, driven by starvation, they were forced to accept the employers terms.

The General Strike of 1926 was defeated not because the forces of the state were stronger than those of the working class, nor because of a lack of resolve on the part of rank and file trade unionists. It was beaten because its leaders had no wish to see the strike through to its conclusion. The trade union leaders, 'lefts' as well as rights, were frightened of a revolutionary situation developing and preferred defeat to revolution.

Stuart King

Women

The SWP d women...

A DEBATE on women is raging openly in the publications of the Socialist Workers' Party (SWP). The issues and tempo of the debate have been forced by women who are active in Women's Voice and in disagreement with the general line of the SWP on work amongst women.

The Women's Liberation Movement (WLM) is becoming ever more fragmented into distinctly demarcated tendencies with Socialist Feminism and Revolutionary Feminism representing the two extreme wings. There has been no national WLM conference since 1978. Under the impact of the current capitalist crisis it is becoming more and more apparent to many women activists that the WLM as a whole cannot lay the basis for a mass women's movement based on working class women. The debate in the SWP, therefore, is taking place at a crucial time. It is essential to provide a political lead with the programme, strategy and tactics that can both answer the problem facing working class women and provide an alternative to the political stagnation and growing reformism of the WLM.

The positions of the major protagonists in the SWP debate — Joan Smith and Lindsay German — do not provide these answers. Each of them falls into major errors in their analysis of women's oppression and the struggle for women's emancipation.

Joan Smith

Joan Smith is attempting to distance herself from the old IS/SWP tradition that simply saw women as workers who were hard to organise. The SWP leaders, traditionally viewing the world through the spectacles of militant trade unionism, ignored the specific oppression of women in capitalist society until the women's movement of the 1970's 'infected' their organisation with its concerns and aspirations. In seeking to break with the worst aspects of this tradition, Joan Smith has adopted many of the mistakes inherent in the feminist women's movement.

All feminists, be they 'socialist' or 'radical', adhere to a theory of patriarchy which locates the roots of women's oppression in the seizure of control of women's reproductive capacities by men. Some feminists see this as being inherent in men's nature and unrelated to the economic relations of society. For them, patriarchy preceded class societies. Others

regard women's oppression and patriarchy as 'ideological' and autonomous from the economic base of society.

Marxists have always argued that the root of the continuation of women's oppression in capitalist society does not lie in political inequality as the bourgeois feminists claim. Neither does it lie in a patriarchal system independent of capitalist relations of production as the radical feminists believe. It lies within the totality of capitalist relations, in the condemnation of women to domestic slavery within the family. Hence, for us, the centrality of one of the most crucial demands for breaking down women's isolation in the home — the socialisation of housework.

Joan Smith, while formally acknowledging that women's oppression was the direct result of the emergence of private property, class society and the family, falls into the feminist trap. She asserts that there are two distinct spheres within capitalist economy. These she describes as the Mode of Production (labour) and the Mode of Reproduction (the family). For her all women, regardless of class, are oppressed within the Mode of Reproduction and it is within this sphere that women should organise their autonomous struggle.

For Joan Smith, 'In all societies the mode of reproduction is i) the reproduction of the next generation and ii) the reproduction of relations between the sexes.' (Women and the Family, International Socialism 100) Reproduction within the family is cheaper for capitalism and also essential in socialising and teaching children skills. Housework is not productive work and is distinct from production. But the jump she makes from that distinction to the identification of reproduction as an economic mode, a distinct economic sphere within capitalism, is unexplained. Nor does she explain the relationship of production to reproduction, only its distinction. This she defines as a contradiction: "Within the capitalist system there is thus a contradiction between the demands of production (women into the labour force) (here she incorrectly asserts that capital always wants to draft women into production, thus implying a constantly expanding capitalism — JD) and the demand of reproduction (women into the home)." (ibid.) But in her analysis this supposed contradiction has no dynamic effect, it is static, effectively separating women from from production and it does not reflect the fact that capitalist production is not constantly expanding.

Further, Smith's invention of a new economic 'mode' within capitalism is based on a mistaken understanding of the categories of Marxist economic analysis. To

strategy against inflation

Continued from page 3

wages is one part of a programme aimed at doing just the opposite.

It has been argued that this is impracticable, that if it were tried it would only give the bureaucrats another way of controlling the rank and file by producing 'experts' to calculate the claim. Certainly it is wise to warn against what the bureaucrats would try to turn the sliding scale into — but that is not very different from the present situation where the research departments and Ruskin College decide what the workers should fight for in many major sections of the class. The sliding scale, based on the calculations of the rank and file is actually the best way of asserting workers control over this vital area of policy.

At present any shop stewards' committee worth its salt takes inflation into account when formulating its pay claim. What the slogan argues for is the involvement of the mass of workers in this process, on a regular and formalised basis. In this way the workers are kept far better informed and are in a far stronger and more united position when it comes to the fight for the claim. So who is against that?

and housewives

Thousands, indeed millions, of pious words have been written on the Left about the need to draw women, especially isolated housewives, into the struggles of the working class.

What better way could there be of bringing women into the struggles of the working class? and not in any patronising, "They could help with the typing" way either, but centrally, playing an indispensable role in the fight on the basis of their own experience and daily needs. In fact, the first price-watch committees were set up by housewives, in Germany in 1922 when inflation soared to astronomical levels.

A predictable outcome of involving women in this way, by reserving seats for them, as of right, on the plants' price-watch committees, would be the ability to mobilise those same women in support of strikes who are so often used by the bosses and their press as a battering ram, a fifth column, against workers' struggles. Once again we say, 'Who is against that?'

WHAT WOULD BE THE EFFECT ON INFLATION

The first point that has to be made is that the sliding scale is not some kind of improved wages policy that can 'solve' inflation. As we saw in the first part of this article,

Debate on

argue that reproduction of the proletariat is separate from, indeed contradictory to, the needs of the 'mode of production' reveals total confusion on the actual relationship that exists between the family and production.

Superficially, a worker's wages appear as payment for work done, but, as Marx showed, in fact they are the price for the reproduction and maintenance of labour power in the form of free labourers. Wages, therefore, are divided (normally within the family) between the 'personal' expenditure of the worker and the needs of the family. The precise proportions of this division are flexible — as is shown by capitalism's ability to provide, in socialised form, elements of the reproductive role of the family through hospitals, social work etc. This is undertaken when capital is expanding and drawing women into production.

Thus, where Smith sees a contradiction between production and reproduction, there is actually only a historically determined division of labour serving capitalism's needs.

What Joan Smith is really driving at becomes clearer when she attempts to extend her 'Mode of Reproduction' to take in the public sector — particularly education and health. "Certain state activities become part of the mode of reproduction of society, such as education, health etc." She continues, "In the 20th Century the enormous development of productivity has given rise to a class of public servants. In the sphere of education 67% of these workers are women and in the sphere of health 75%. I would argue that these workers should not be classified alongside of the other unproductive workers in the sphere of production. Instead they should be seen as workers in the necessary base (reproduction) of the capitalist mode of production, engaged in the necessary reproduction of the working class." (ibid)

Of course it is no coincidence that women do the 'caring' jobs in the public sector — it is an extension of their role in the family. However, this, and their low wages, are not simply an extension of their oppression. Workers in these areas exchange their labour power for wages. As Marx explained labour exchanged for revenue is categorised as unproductive labour. Their wages are

paid out of surplus value created by productive workers and accumulated by tax on wages and profits. Marx himself characterised the labour of teachers as unproductive. To describe this labour as 'necessary' simply because it contributes to the reproduction of the workforce fails to distinguish between labour in the home which is not exchanged for a wage and labour in the public sector which is. Smith's analysis is an analysis of convenience, not a Marxist analysis. What about the male workers in these sectors — are they oppressed since their work enters this reproductive sphere?

Why does Smith develop this 'economic' analysis? Firstly, because it enables her to describe all women, regardless of class, as oppressed within the family itself. Secondly, because she can combine that with an orientation to working class women in the public sector.

Joan Smith, in her analysis of women and the family, presents a rationalisation of feminism. Women's oppression in the structures of the family overrides their exploitation in production — which she limits entirely to manufacturing work. The logic is the women's movement aimed primarily at women in the home and those carrying out the 'caring' jobs within the public sector, and it is precisely this autonomous movement focused on women within this separate economic mode that Joan Smith wants Women's Voice to become.

This analysis would seem to lead Smith logically to ignore women in manufacturing industries. She seems to imply this when she says, "it is possible to work (in the trade unions — JD) through the rank and file. It is possible to forge links between public sector workers (a majority of women) and manual workers (a majority of men)." (ISJ 1.p.104) What Joan Smith ignores here, if she accepts her own logic, is that in the building of a women's movement, based on working class women, it is not simple numbers that are important but organisation, willingness to fight and economic weight within capitalism. That is why women workers in manufacturing industry must provide the basis for a mass working class women's movement.

The logic of Smith's theory leads her to advocate a women's movement to "Unite all women — public sector workers, factory workers, women at home. Because capitalism oppresses all women the material basis for such an organisation exists." (ibid.) She wants to build an organisation of 'revolutionary feminists, all women, regardless of class, harnessed to a working class party to give it a class content. Why this should be organised separately from



the socialist feminists is not clear. Its relationship to the revolutionary party is unclear and unspecified. The party (read SWP) is supposed to link the all-class women's movement to the working class, how we are not told.

Lindsay German thinks she has a clear idea of what women's oppression is all about. She thinks a women's movement is needed because, "the fundamental division is not between the sexes, but between those who produce the wealth in society and those who rob them of it. Of course, within such a society, women through their oppression are inferior to men (sic). That is why we need a women's organisation. A communist women's organisation" (Socialist Review 5)

Her aim is primarily party-building. But she recognises the existence of women's oppression (even if she can't analyse it) and that women, because of this, are difficult to recruit. Also ten years of the WLM and the development of socialist feminism with its attraction to many women who might otherwise have joined a left organisation, has forced her to look more seriously at the need for new methods of organising women. She attacks Smith's position only on the basis that Smith is advocating a separate org-

anisation of women. For German, this is to undermine the building of the SWP. She would prefer to see a women's organisation politically and organisationally tied to the SWP.

German's answer to feminism is that things have now changed. "In a period of crisis, a purely feminist solution is not enough ... socialism has to be the only way to achieve women's liberation. Whereas in the 1950' and 60's it was possible to campaign for equal pay, contraception, nurseries and so on as part and parcel of the increased living standards of workers, which capitalism was conceding, now one comes up against the arguments about national interest, women's place being in the home and so on. The only way to cut through that is to present the alternative of a planned socialist society." (ibid) However, when it comes to specific campaigns to "cut through" these arguments she talks only of campaigning on, housing, unemployment, low wages, abortion and new technology. She offers no programmatic demands that could enable women to go forward from these struggles to a struggle for power and the overthrow of capitalism. The "planned socialist society" is only a utopian ideal in German's head. As such she offers no alternative to the perspectives of the feminists except joining the SWP.

Significantly, German is oblivious to the strength of reformism amongst working class women. "It's important to remember that the left in 1968 was very different from what it is now. The revolutionary left was at a much earlier and weaker stage of development and the CP was much stronger than it is now. It was the reformists who were dominant." German is not only blind to reality, that the forces to the left of the CP are minute and have no real influence in the working class, but also completely overlooks both the labour party and the role of the trade union bureaucracy. No women's movement built within the working class can ignore the hold of reformist ideas and the misleadership of the TU bureaucrats and Labour Party leaders

both 'Left' and 'Right'.

In their own ways both of these warring parties bear the stamp of the politics of their parent organisation — SWP. The SWP's politics are formed in the mould of 'economism' — the belief that the economic struggle of the working class will, of itself, generate a socialist consciousness in workers. A party is needed to encourage and develop this struggle, tailoring its political programme to what is acceptable to workers in today's struggles.

The struggle for socialism is seen as a matter for more or less lucid portrayals of the ideal future, abstracted from, and of no immediate relevance to, the existing struggles of the class.

The trust in spontaneous struggle to generate political consciousness — the hallmark of the SWP — has taken a different form for the SWP women activists in the face of the women's movement of the 1970's. Breaking with the cruder economism of the SWP tradition they have, with more or less sophistication, adapted to and positively tailed the feminists. With German this takes the form of advancing and supporting the major feminist campaigns while arguing for their supporters to join, "The Party". For Smith it takes the form of consciously theorising the need for an autonomous women's movement with an ill-defined relation to the party. As with the SWP in the trade union milieu, so both Smith and German tail the feminists in the women's movement.

Neither method will offer a way forward for the activists who look to Women's Voice to give a lead. German can offer nothing but a Women's Voice that is a stale appendage of the SWP. Smith can offer only a Women's Voice organisation that is inexplicably separate from the socialist feminists, incapable of challenging their perspective, while ultimately hamstrung by its ties to the SWP.

Jill Daniels

settlement in Autumn 1978 played a big part in convincing both the lorry drivers and the public service workers of the need to fight in the winter of 1979. We can say quite confidently that a determined fight for the sliding scale of wages would transmit itself through the working class like lightning, laying the basis for the bringing forward of other claims and helping to weld together the fighting unity which will be necessary to take on the capitalists as they try desperately to defend their system.

The sliding scale of wages should not be seen as a magic demand. Nor should it be counterposed to other wage demands such as equal pay, catch-up claims or the minimum wage, but all these other demands need to be protected against inflation — and that is best done by the sliding scale of wages — ONE PER CENT RISE IN TAKE HOME PAY FOR EVERY ONE PER CENT RISE IN THE COST OF LIVING AS CALCULATED BY COMMITTEES OF TRADE UNIONISTS AND HOUSEWIVES.

Steve McSweeney



... economism tailing feminism

inflation is rooted deeply in capitalism, the working class should take no responsibility for it. The task of the sliding scale is to combat the effects of inflation on wages. To oppose it on the grounds that it might make inflation worse, is to accept that workers should help the capitalists to get out of the mess in which their system has landed them.

Although inflation is, basically, caused by the expansion of credit to finance investment, it would be ridiculous to say that capitalists do not pass on higher wage costs in the form of higher prices. If they can get away with it they will — what else would we expect? The point is to develop a strategy that prevents this from destroying workers living standards.

The first point that socialists normally make when discussing inflation is that, "Workers must not pay the price of the bosses' crisis." As a slogan this does not actually tell us very much, but, as a statement of principle, of intent, this is absolutely right. With regard to inflation we have already seen that a sliding scale of wages is the most effective way of ensuring that workers do not pay that price.

WOULD IT CAUSE PASSIVITY?

That the workers would become passive if wages were guaranteed against inflation is an objection which,

in certain circumstances, could have a grain of truth in it. If inflation is low, or at least stable, then a regular 'topping up' of wages could take the steam out of the annual wage negotiations. This was the intention behind Heath's threshold policy and also behind the Italian 'escalator' deals.

Two points have to be made about this. Firstly, those deals were not the sliding scale of wages. Heath's only allowed 40 pence for every 1% rise in the RPI. Not only is the RPI phoney but it had to rise a full seven points before the first 40 pence could be paid. Similarly the Italian deals only allow payments after a trigger point has been passed and then only 0.6% for every 1% in the government index.

At the same time it should not be forgotten that even Heath's policy served to generate several large scale struggles, even amongst previously non-militant sections of the working class. For example, in June 1974, 6,000 workers at the Plessey plant in Beeston, Nottinghamshire, occupied the plant to force their employer to pay the threshold money that they regarded as theirs by right.

Secondly, we are at present in a period of rising inflation. As a result the bosses will fight tooth and nail to resist all demands for inflation protection, let alone one which will, necessarily, increase month by

month. There can be little doubt that, even after the scale of struggle necessary to win a sliding scale agreement, they will renege on the deal, as soon as possible, as they would on any decent wage agreement.

Whilst the sliding scale certainly would not mean an automatic ability on the part of the working class to defend itself against such attempts, the regular monitoring of prices that it would require would help to ensure that workers were constantly aware of the need to defend what had been won. This is not a recipe for passivity.

HOW DOES THE SLIDING SCALE LINK UP TO THE REST OF THE CLASS STRUGGLE?

The sliding scale of wages is only one part of the programme that WORKERS POWER fights for in the working class movement (for the whole Action Programme see WP Journal 7, Autumn '78) If it is not seen in the context of that program it is no more than an important reform demand.

The transformation of the working class into a class that will seize and wield state power will not be based on a single demand. At the same time every single demand that revolutionaries raise should

play a part in generating that transformation.

The sliding scale of wages can do this in three ways. Firstly, as an effective tactic against inflation, it can help to prevent the demoralisation caused by steadily declining living standards.

Secondly, the formation of price watch committees is important both in transforming the often sterile and stagnant union organisations and in creating a greater involvement of the rank and file in the formation of policy and the carrying out of struggles to win it.

Thirdly, possibly most importantly, it can play a vital role in overcoming division within the class. Clearly the strongest sections of the class are in the best position to fight for it, as they would be for any other wage demand. The advantage of the sliding scale is that it can be more easily seen as a demand that is of immediate importance to the rest of the class — those who otherwise the bosses might succeed in turning against the strikers. Once taken up by strong sections, the sliding scale would make it possible to explain concretely why it is in the interest of all workers that it is won.

It has always been possible to see the effect on the class of a successful wages fight by key sections of workers. For example, the Ford

workers power

South Yorkshire flops

On Monday February 18th, almost 5,000 workers from the AUEW, all the public sector unions, the TGWU, steel strikers in the ISTC, and Labour Party members marched in Sheffield in protest against the public expenditure cuts. Similar marches took place in Manchester and Liverpool.

The significance of the Sheffield march was that it was supposed to part of a one day general strike in the area, called by the South Yorkshire Association of Trades Councils. However, the functionaries of this august body ensured that the general strike was reduced to a passive protest. No section of workers came out on all-out strike action.

Despite his offer last November to strike against the cuts, Arthur Scargill sent only a handful of token delegates from the pits. One NUM militant commented that there had been no pithead meetings, no information about the general strike, and no attempt to organise for its implementation. In the engineering industry 8 factories, led by the Shardlows plant, had voted to strike. These decisions were reversed, however, the Friday before the strike, because the Communist Party-led Confederation of Shipbuilding and Engineering Unions had made no attempt to give a lead and pull out all the engineering plants. The 8 factories felt out on a limb, and decided only to send delegates to the march.

The refusal of the bureaucrats to lead the action that they themselves had initially called, for fear that it would meet with a militant response from workers, was highlighted by the activities of local NUPE leader Ken Curran. He had sworn support for the general strike at two Trades Council meetings in November and January. When it came to the crunch, Curran ordered dis-

not, of course, prevent Curran from mouthing militantly at the rally after the march, on what should be done to fight the cuts. He was joined on the platform by local Labour Party leaders such as Bill Owen and Council leader Roy Thwaites, whose presence of fighting the cuts is somewhat undermined by the £10½ million cut and 40% rate rise that they are currently over-seeing. A collection of MPs and union officials also went through the customary demo day rhetorical motions, but there were few calls to action. Euro MP Richard Caborn did call for the bringing forward of the TUC's May 14th Day of Action to before the May local elections, something the TUC were consciously avoiding so as not to frighten the electorate. But even this electoral manoeuvre gives the Tories plenty of time to carry through their attacks.

Despite being a flop as a general strike, thanks to the machinations of the local union leaders, the size of the march, the work to rule by FBU members on the day and the original willingness on the part of the rank and file workers to fight the T sections of the engineering workers to strike, do point to a determination on the part of rank and file workers to fight the Tories' cuts. This must be built on and transformed into strike action if the vicious Tory cuts, implemented by Labour and Tory councils, along with the rest of the Tories' anti-working class policies, are to be defeated.



pensations for hospitals and told branches that they were not allowed to take decisions on whether or not to strike. In the end a tiny delegation, largely from within the bureaucracy, was the only presence that NUPE had on the demonstration. Even NALGO, which provided the largest contingent on the demonstration, left many of its members at work for the day. These instances of double-dealing did

HANDS OFF ZIMBABWE!

By SUE THOMAS

The period between the Lancaster House talks and the elections in Zimbabwe has confirmed that Britain has no intention of letting go of Zimbabwe for imperialism. The election campaign has been marked by continued repression, now under British direction, and a massive propaganda campaign against ZANU in both Britain and Zimbabwe.

While Patriotic Front forces have been confined to the camps and thousands of political prisoners remain in jail, the white Rhodesian Security Forces and 20,000 auxiliaries have free reign to intimidate and bomb.

Mugabe has survived two assassination attempts, while two Selous Scouts (a special Rhodesian Army squad of provocateurs) blew themselves up whilst planting a bomb which was to be blamed on Mugabe's ZANU, thus exposing where the wave of bombings in Zimbabwe stemmed from.

The so-called "free elections" have been characterised by a massive harassment campaign of ZANU candidates and activists, a number have been killed and many arrested. Soames has continually threatened to "suspend" electoral districts where support for Mugabe is strongest. Muzorewa's party is meanwhile receiving millions of dollars in financial aid from the South African government.

At best Britain hopes to have its puppet Muzorewa in power, but it is quite willing to settle for a coalition containing Nkomo. If the election rigging and intimidation fail to

prevent Mugabe winning then the stage is set for a possible white Rhodesian coup, backed by South Africa, or for South African intervention in favour of a Nkomo/White coalition on the pretext of a "total breakdown in law and order".

Two combat battalions of South African paratroops and a squadron of Mirage fighter bombers are already integrated into the Rhodesian Security Forces.

The propaganda campaign in Britain purporting to show ZANU as responsible for a wave of bombings and widespread intimidation is designed to prepare the ground for such an intervention if necessary. Carrington's proposals to keep British troops stationed in Zimbabwe after the elections fits in with these plans.

All these manoeuvres are designed to achieve the best possible results for imperialism in Zimbabwe. This does not mean that the Mugabe leadership of ZANU itself poses the real threat to imperialism's interests in Zimbabwe. Indeed, the ZANU election programme has virtually abandoned land reform, promising a slow pace and full compensation for landowners. Mugabe has announced no plans for nationalisation and indeed has gone on record as favouring a "capitalist" Zimbabwe.

What the imperialists fear most are the forces behind Mugabe - not just the guerillas who have remained outside the camps, but the workers and peasants who have supported ZANU in the expectation of land reform, national liberation and a more just society. A victory for Mugabe holds all the dangers of unleashing these forces to the point



Auxillaries disembark from troop carrier in Southeastern Zimbabwe

where even the petit-bourgeois leadership of ZANU loses control and with it its ability to compromise with imperialism.

But the British government's possibilities of preventing such a situation and beheading the anti-imperialist movement have been improved dramatically by the Lancaster House agreement. Mugabe's agreement to these rigged elections has involved delivering thousands of guerilla fighters into camps where they can be easy prey for the Rhodesian and South African armed forces. The Lancaster House agreement should be broken off and the fraudulent elections boycotted.

Despite our criticisms of Mugabe and the leadership of ZANU in the conflict between British imperialism and its agents in Zimbabwe, we are in no sense neutral. We must fight to prevent the murderous onslaught being prepared by the British Governor Soames. British workers must

immediately demand the withdrawal of all British troops, police and military advisors from Zimbabwe, and the blacking of all arms shipments to Zimbabwe and South Africa. In Britain socialists have to launch a counter offensive against the lies and distortions of the capitalist press.

**HANDS OFF ZIMBABWE!
BLACK ALL ARMS TRANSPORT!**



Robert Mugabe

Steel strike ...

CONTINUED FROM FRONT PAGE

To beat the police attacks, every picket line must be protected from the intensified police thuggery. It is no good simply calling for mass pickets or "resistance", in the face of co-ordinated police attacks. Mass pickets, as Grunwicks, Hadfields and Sheerness all show, do not prevent workers from being beaten up or arrested. It is vital that steel strike committees and strike support committees organise sections of their members into disciplined defence units. Such organisation, if implemented, will make picket lines solid against scabs and safe against state violence.

It has to be faced up to that, despite slogans on the left that 'Pickets Can Win' (Socialist Worker), picketing in and of itself is not sufficient to win the steel strike. The CBI have predicted that stockpiles will last another 13 weeks. "The Economist" gleefully reported that imports were still flowing into the country. Obviously the movement of steel must be halted. In every industry where steel is used, workers must implement total blacking. No lorry drivers should move any steel anywhere. But even with this

action, the slump, the falling-off of production in industry, will mean that the economic effects of the strike will still not bite for some time yet. In that time the bosses, the government and the Sirs leadership could get away with murder.

The real key to victory lies in making the strike in the private sector solid and fighting for other sections of workers to strike now alongside the steel workers. At the moment the private sector workers, out on the basis of solidarity, see nothing to gain for themselves in the strike, and are uncertain and reluctant allies. Mass picketing has brought plants out, but when it has stopped workers have gone back to work - this happened at private firms in Manchester and Bidston. In Sheffield ISTC members at Firth Browns and other firms are pushing for a return to work. Merely picketing these plants will not make them bastions of the strike - it will paper over a few cracks for a short time.

A clear strategy is needed to bring these workers out solidly with the strike. This can be done by forcing the

leaders of all the unions involved to bring forward the pay claims of workers in the private sector, and wage a fight around a national claim of 20% with no strings for ALL steel workers. Where workers do return to work, steel strikers should demand the right to address mass meetings of such workers to put their case. Furthermore other sections of workers must be brought into the strike. It must be extended into a fight to defend every steel job, and every job in other industries likely to be affected by the steel closures. To this end the leaders of the TUC must call for a general strike against the closures.

These demands can break the deadlock and place the strike on the path to victory. Sirs must be forced to take these demands up. At the same time, however, it is vital that steel workers organise now to defeat the treacherous Sirs leadership, while the strike is on. The strike has thrown up new leaders in many areas, rank and file leaders capable of challenging the stale old rightwingers of the ISTC. They must not be allowed to become isolated in the aftermath of the strike - Sirs must

not be let off the hook. His intentions are clear. He is going to act against the militants as soon as he can.

In a letter to the most militant strike committee, the Rotherham committee, Sirs warned them that he is going to "deal with them". His frenzied witch-hunt last year against the Reform Movement in that area gives a clear picture of what he means. The opportunity to use the new militant leaders to bear this bureaucrat must not be squandered.

A rank and file movement to fight Sirs must be built now, while the strike is on. A national strike committee to run and lead the strike should be forged out of the militant local committees that have been formed in many areas. To this end the strike committees of South Yorkshire, by far the best organised and most militant, should convene a national conference of delegates from strike committees. The movement that could be built out of such a conference, national and well-coordinated, could wield a blow against the bankrupt Sirs leadership, the BSC bosses and the Tories, from which none of them would recover.

Subscribe to

WORKERS POWER

NAME

ADDRESS

Send £2 to the address below and receive 12 issues of the paper. Please make cheques or postal orders payable to Workers Power. Forward to Workers Power, BCM Box 7750, London WC1V 6XX.