

Workers Power

Monthly Newspaper of the Workers Power Group No. 14 May 1980

For a General Strike NOW!

Stop the

talk!

Stop the

Tories!

A DAY OF ACTION on May 14th and a Labour Party special conference on May 31st — these are the replies that our 'leaders' have come up with to meet the Tory onslaught.

The Tories aim to curb, "the power of the unions" to defend our jobs, social services, wages and political rights. Murray and the TUC have already rendered a tremendous service to the Tories. They blocked every attempt to mobilise Britain's 12 million trade unionists in solidarity action to win for the steel workers a speedy and total victory.

They sabotage the South Wales General Strike, turning it into an ineffective protest. Having damped down the spreading fires of resistance to the Tories they hope to turn May 14th into a harmless 'loud protest' — powerful enough to scare the Tories into recalling them for beer and sandwiches at No. 10, but not so strong that it might develop into real action to kill the Employment Bill, reverse the cuts and stop the sackings and closures.

For Murray and co. May 14th. is a safety valve to let off a lot of steam and give them the opportunity to carry on 'negotiating' away all the gains that have been won since the war.

Not that the union leaders are en-

tirely united. The unabashed bosses men, Boyd, Duffy, Chapple, Sirs are dead against even such feeble class-wide protest. Chapple muddies the already filthy pages of the Daily Express with his articles attacking the 'Day of Shame'. It is wreckers like these that the Tories want to provide funds for ballots for. The cold war hysteria being generated by Carter and Thatcher will be echoed in the unions by anti-militant, red-baiting. But these men will be the, 'leaders of the future' if the Tories get their new laws and defeat us over jobs, cuts etc.

The 'Left wing' union leaders have been loud in calling for strikes - for the one day only. CP leader of the Scottish miners, McGahey, declared that the 14th should be the, "opening shot" in the struggle to force an early general election. Scargill has said he wants to force the Tories out with a campaign including industrial action. He has said that he will defy the new anti-picketing laws. In the steel strike both of them visited the picket lines with contingents of miners. But, what they did not do was to bring out their regions alongside the steelworkers.

Nor did they pledge immediate strike action alongside the South Wales workers.

Scargill is bringing his men out on the 14th. Good! But all these 'Lefts' shy away from the only weapon that can halt the Tories in their tracks — a general strike until the Tories cave in and/or get out.

Though the 'Lefts' may, sometimes, talk about a general strike when the crunch comes they pass the buck to the Murray's or Evans' who they know will surrender.

The seriousness of the crisis facing Britain's bosses dictates the sharpness of the attack on us. The attack is a political one, using the full weight of the state — the police, the courts etc. In no way can the normal routine of unpolitical trade unionism handle this, not even old-style militant rank and file trade unionism!

The problem of who leads our movement, how it is led, how it is organised, is now posed sharply in every partial struggle.

Faced with the Anti-Union Laws, we can neither wait for four years for another Callaghan government nor dissipate our strength in sectional struggles which might hasten the arrival of such a government.

We need to overcome the crippling separation between industrial action (via the unions) and politics (reserved for the Labour Party and the elections) We need to win our fellow workers to political strike action to stop the Tory attacks on our organisations and our living standards. To do this means overcoming the limitations of the unions — welding them together via shopfloor delegate-based councils of action in every locality. It means creating disciplined mass workers' self defence squads that can protect strikes, sit-ins and demonstrations against the police attacks.

Only such organisation can make a general strike massive and militant, can make it paralyse the wheels of profit and stop the state forces in their tracks.

It can stop them pressing on with their attacks on us — but it would be fatal to stop at that. In 1972 and 1974 we stopped half-way. The bosses retreated, to return to the attack more viciously at a later date. They are more desperate now and the struggle will be harder, more bloody. If we were to let them recover and re-arm we would face a terrible vengeance from them. A general strike poses the question, "Who should rule?" It poses the need to replace not just a bosses government but to break up the whole apparatus of the bosses' class rule, the judiciary, the state bureaucracy, the police force and the Army. Failure to do this can have terrible consequences as the Chilean experience showed.

This time we must answer, "The working class! — through its councils of action."

To do this, however, we need a new leadership, not the Duffy's and the Murray's, not the Callaghan's and not the Scargill's and the Benn's. All of these gentlemen are tied to the unions, to the Labour Party and to

Police preparations

If any workers had any doubts about the police force's supposed neutrality, the recent stepping up of police harassment and violence should dispel them, and make it crystal clear that the police exist to protect the interests and property of the bosses. Encouraged by the tough talking on 'law and order' of Thatcher and Whitelaw, 'Hammer' McNee of the Metropolitan Police, and his cohorts in the country's other constabularies, are busy refining their forces into sophisticated tools for the repression of the working class.

* Pickets during the steel strike were given no quarter by the police.

The specially trained picket busters of the SPG were used as a major weapon to weaken the steel strike by smashing picket lines and assaulting strikers.

* After persistent harassment of the largely black district of St Pauls in Bristol young blacks, and many whites, rose up in an expression of fury against the police. Despite the temporary withdrawal on the night of the fighting, the police have since come back with a vengeance. The

* At Peckham, Lewisham and Corby in recent months, the fascists of the National Front have been given red carpet treatment by the police.

* The cover up of the SPG officers known to have been present at the murder of Blair Peach last year, and the verdict of misadventure returned in the case of Jimmy Kelly who died in police custody after having been beaten up by the police, both indicate that the police and the courts are in cahoots. Workers then should expect no redress from that particular part of the capitalist establishment.

The police are perfecting their techniques in a number of ways. They are constantly learning from the ready made school of repression on their doorstep the North of Ireland—where the SPG, under Sir Robert Mark gleaned many of its tactics. Furthermore, pictures published in the magazine 'Time Out' have brought to light the existence of a police training ground in the London Docks. Here they have been mastering the art of smashing up picket lines, using hit squads and cavalry.

The working class and black communities, the main targets for the police attacks, must respond in kind. The events in Bristol may be exhilarating for a day but they cannot defend the black community permanently. The closure of Hadfields by a mass picket was tremendous but the same pickets were no match for the police at Sheerness. The only way that the working class and black communities can really rebut the violence of the state is through the development of well organised, disciplined and properly trained WORKERS SELF DEFENCE SQUADS.



Police practice picket busting in the London docks

PHOTO: Carlos Augusto (IFL)

Parliament, they are within the framework of the profit-system. Alongside the fight for a general strike must go the fight to transform the unions and the fight to build a new, revolutionary communist leadership.

Part of this fight will lead through further experiences with the Labour Party in government, including the possibility of such a government being the outcome of a general strike situation. In that event, whilst warning of the inevitable vacillations and treachery, we would have to fight to force that government to carry out, in full, the demands of the general strike and to go further along the road to a real break with the bosses.

We would demand that such a government hold itself responsible to a congress of delegates from the councils of action and that it arm the workers' defence squads. But, two facts are certain, a new mass revolutionary party, capable of winning the leadership of the class at the critical moment, must be built and the expropriation of the bosses, politically and economically, is not possible until real power lies in the hands of workers' councils.

Their war — and ours

CARTER, and the politicians who represent the imperialist masters of the US, are whipping up war hysteria. They are softening up the American people to accept a return of the draft, an increased military budget and even direct military intervention in the Gulf area.

The new Cold War is directed not only against the peoples of the world who have taken up arms against the US and its puppet tyrants, not only against the Soviet Union but also against the working class and its militants throughout the world.

While socialists can have no solidarity within Iran with a clerical obscurantist like Khomeini, or with fake anti-imperialists like Bani-Sadr or Gotzbadeh, while we stand four square against them and for the oppressed Kurdish people and the Iranian Left - at present suffering under the guns and knives of the religion-drugged dupes of the Ayatollah— we are not neutral in any clash between Iran and the US. We are for the defeat of the US.

If Carter wants his hostages released, let him 'release' the millions of dollars looted from Iran by the Shah and deposited in America. Let him hand over the Shah and his accomplices.

Thatcher's and Carter's war drive is directed also against the efforts of their own working classes to defend themselves against the effects of the deepening capitalist crisis. They want to cripple this self defence by stoking up the fires of chauvinism and by the pretence that there is a national interest to defend against the Russians and Iranians and that this takes precedence over the defence of working class interests. Further, they argue that the 'free world' must be defended against Soviet totalitarianism. Against this we say that the democratic rights of the working class, freedom of speech, freedom of assembly, freedom to form trade unions etc., were never given to us by 'our' bosses, Tory or Liberal. They were won by workers in over 150 years of struggle. These democratic rights are indeed under attack, but the attackers are not Russian or Iranian, they are the Tories, the CBI, the Lord Denning's and the McNee's. Our main enemy is at home and there can be no truce in the battle against it, never any common interest with it.

Callaghan, who appeared to be asleep as the Tories mounted their offensive against the workers, exploded with indignation at Thatcher's 'inadequate' defence of Jimmy Carter. The right wing Labour leaders are open and noxious agents of imperialism, US and British. We must fight to expose these patriotic warmongers. They have shown their treachery time and again, not least by lining up our organisations with the British bosses tyranny over the Irish people.

British workers, through their unions, through the Labour Party, should oppose all moves by Thatcher to support Carter. No to trade embargoes, boycotts and the theft of Iranian assets! No to naval blockades and military assaults on Iranian territory! If such moves are undertaken then British workers should enforce their own boycott — on all military supplies for the US and its puppets.

As for the Soviet bureaucrats — we Trotskyists have reason to know them as the bitter foes of the working class in Russia from whom they usurped political power and over whom they exercise a brutal dictatorship. We support every act of resistance against them by the Soviet workers — a resistance which we believe will and must culminate in a political revolution to create working class democracy, the soviets of 1917, and overthrow the parasitic caste that at present rules the Soviet Union.

Despite the bureaucrats' tyranny, the gains of the October Revolution, the planned and statified economy, the state monopoly of foreign trade, have not yet been overthrown and we defend them against the forces of imperialism. Should the present period develop into a war that threatened these gains it would be our internationalist class duty to defend the Soviet Union and to work for the defeat of imperialism, including British imperialism.

The Labour Lefts claim to oppose Thatcher's warmongering, but most of them hide behind mealy-mouthed pacifist phrases. We are not pacifists — the class war goes on day in and day out. In Britain in the past, in most of the world today and in Britain in the future, it has and will again take an open military form. The bourgeoisie will never give up its banks, its factories and its farms peacefully. The working class can never be pacifist. We are against imperialist war — but for all the methods of the class struggle to block the war drive.

To the Labour MP's who say they oppose the war preparations we say, Act on the old socialist slogan — Not a Man, Not a Penny for this system! They should campaign for workers to block any war effort by direct action and support every movement against the war that develops within the Armed Forces and every movement against the draft that develops outside of them.

Our task, the task of revolutionary internationalists, is to fight the war danger, but not with the honeyed words of pacifism. The National Peace Convention, attended by assorted writers, bishops, even a cardinal, and peddled by the British CP presents a deluding utopia to the working class — a capitalism without war, or an end to war without an end to capitalism.

The Labour Party NEC's June Peace Rally will contain more of the same tripe. No! There is only one way to finally defeat imperialist war and the threat it poses to life itself on our planet — and that is to win the class war.

Decline and crisis

The "American Empire" was based on the enormous economic preponderance of the US after the second world war. In the early '50s the US accounted for over 60% of the OECD countries total production, and 27.3% of the world's manufacturing exports originated in the US. Now Europe and Japan have outstripped the US, and have economic interests at odds with those of Wall Street.

The total GNP of the EEC now amounts to more than that of the USA. America's vast economic strength and military might enabled it to install or maintain a string of military dictatorships throughout Latin America, the Middle East and South East Asia. The Shah was simply the most grandiose of them, because he occupied a key strategic position as policeman of the Gulf, and because Iran had enormous oil resources itself.

The Shah acquired for himself a massive slice of American banking and industrial capital, thereby becoming virtually a member of the American ruling class. Hence the bitterness of the Rockefeller's, the Kissinger's and the Nixon's at what they call Carter's last minute "betrayal" of the Shah.

But Carter has limited room for manoeuvre. The reason that Carter now looks so weak is not because of any personal failings, but because he represents a system that is wracked by crisis.

Iranian bourgeois politicians, like Bani Sadr and Ghotbzadeh, would willingly take on most of the role that the Shah played for the US, and strike a new deal with Washington.



Carter — his indecision reflects America's crisis

Yet Carter cannot hand the blood-stained megalomaniac Shah over to them. Why not? Because every American backed military dictator from South Korea to El Salvador would be destabilised if he did so.

The lower echelons of their military bureaucratic machine of repression would desert them and become prey to various nationalist or populist forces. The upheavals in El Salvador, the overthrow in Liberia, the metal workers strike in Brazil, all testify to the shifting fortunes of pro-US regimes throughout the world.

At the same time the US economy

is dipping into its second major recession in ten years. Unemployment stands at close to 7%. The motor and construction workers are faced with severe slump. Thus unemployment in an industrial state like Michigan stands at 11%. At the same time the underlying annual inflation rate in the first quarter of 1980 is calculated to be 18.1%, and because wages have lagged far behind this, industrial workers' real disposable earnings have fallen by some 8% over the last year. Faced with these problems the American ruling class is divided as to its response.

The end of Detente

The "Detente" policy was the product of the defeat of the US in Vietnam. Nixon and Kissinger hoped that a deal with the Soviet bureaucracy would gain the US breathing space. Firstly, strategic arms limitation would free resources to re-equip ageing American industry and increase its competitiveness. Secondly, they hoped that the deal with the Kremlin would include scaled down "subversion" in the US's semi-colonies. Thirdly, they hoped that they could pit China against the USSR and thus keep the Russians occupied.

All these considerations underestimated the destabilisation in the USA itself. The Watergate scandal temporarily crippled the CIA, the nervous system of the "American Empire". The presidency - a virtual elective monarchy from the 40s to the 60s - was considerably weakened, and Congress began to poke its nose into matters from which it had been hitherto rigorously excluded.

Carter hoped to maintain the benefits of Detente whilst strengthening the US's position against the Russians by giving it a "human rights" component. This was built into the Helsinki Accords, and was aimed at strengthening the "dissidents" in the USSR, and isolating "communists" in the West. The problem with this scheme was the "human rights" records of Somoza, Pinochet, Videla, Pahlavi and the rest of Carter's crew, which cried out against the US. Carter's tentative and half-hearted criticisms en-

couraged opposition to these regimes. Indeed, "human rights" rebounded on Carter with a vengeance.

Now the American ruling class has a powerful "get tough" faction. Re-armament, cold-war hysteria and uncompromising support for its agents in the Third World are the order of the day. Carter's administration has been riven between 'hards' and 'softs', Brezinski and Vance. Its inner-most deliberations have been leaked to the media. Vance's resignation indicates the direction of the "debate". Old vultures of the Right like Nixon,

Kissinger and Reagan cast hungry eyes on the Presidency.

The US is driven to re-armament by its international problems and stagnating economy. Not only does the Carter administration hope that an increased arms budget can stave off some of the effects of economic decline, it will also equip the US ruling class to reassert itself militarily and diplomatically. Its trade embargo on the USSR and Iran, its plans for military intervention in the Gulf to maintain its oil supplies at strategic bases all need the back-up of new rounds of armament.



Brzezinski in characteristic pose

fuel US war drive



America's 'arc of crisis' - a question mark over each country

Strains in the alliance

The slackening of U.S. world hegemony relative to European and Asian powers (particularly Germany and Japan), is the source of the 'strains' in the 'Western Alliance' that the commentators are all complaining about. The US ambassador to Japan, Mike Mansfield has remarked that "We can no longer expect responses like we used to get automatically from our allies". Carter is reportedly "just as mad at the allies as at Iran".

The British bourgeoisie has no divided loyalties - it is solidly pro-American. After Suez it went into liquidation as an independent agent, and became an acolyte of the US. It has its recognised sphere of influence - mainly in Africa - and is the US agent within the EEC. Nor is there any serious disagreement between the leaders of the two parties.

In the last analysis the European

and Japanese bourgeoisies remain tied to the US, incapable of a strategic break. As Helmut Schmidt put it: "We know that the fundamental security of the Republic is with the US, even when one has doubts about some of the measures demanded from us".

But if the European ruling classes, particularly those of France and Germany, cannot defy the Whitehouse on any key strategic question, they can now give the President the tactical run-around. By delaying economic sanctions against Iran (and refusing to move beyond an Olympic Boycott over Afghanistan), they are effectively neutering Carter's policy on both these issues.

The capitalists in both Europe and Japan have good reason to oppose boycotts and sanctions against Iran. 12% of Japan's oil needs come from Iran. Indeed, the balance of the EEC's

trade has shifted dramatically towards the Middle East.

The economically more buoyant and successful West German bourgeoisie has little interest in a renewed Cold War. In 1979, the Federal Republic's trade with East Europe stood at \$7.6 billion; France, with a trade of \$3.7 billion, is also eager to increase its penetration of this market. Likewise the Middle East has become a veritable hive of EEC activity. France has important ambitions in Iran, and the Gulf States, as the French President's relatively pro-Palestinian stance on his recent visit to the Middle East, and his granting of exile to Khomeini both show.

No wonder then that Carter and his aides, backed by Thatcher, are increasing the pressure on their allies to fall into line.

The Soviet 'threat'

It is not Soviet intervention that the American ruling class fears, but the indigenous revolt of the oppressed masses throughout the 'arc of crisis' in the Middle East and South Asia. Social instability, unconnected to "Russian subversion", is characteristic of virtually every state from Egypt to India. It is "caused" by the chronic social misery of the masses, the inability of native capitalism to develop these economies, their obvious exploitation by US, European and Japanese Imperialism, and the weakening of the local agents of imperialist domination.

The fall of the Shah sent shock waves through all the neighbouring states so that even Saudi Arabia is threatened with internal disruption. The US war-fleet that lies at the entrance to the Gulf, Carter's open promise to intervene militarily against anyone who tries to overthrow the rotten feudal monarchies of Arabia, identify the real target of US war preparations.

Does this mean that the dangers of war are not great? Not at all. Wars are not by any means the result simply of conscious policy on the part of one or more combatants. The 'arc of

crisis', The Arab/Islamic world is riven with explosive contradictions. Imperialism for the best part of a century has economically exploited it for raw materials, has underdeveloped and warped its economies, and has politically divided it. It has artificially maintained primitive and backward regimes, has created an expansionist settler state (Israel) in order to weaken the Arab states.

Because the Russian bureaucracy is both economically and militarily at a disadvantage with regard to Imperialism, it has to rely upon the counter-weight of the national liberation movements in the semi-colonial countries as an indirect ally. Whilst it has betrayed these allies many times, it could find itself in a position where it was obliged to resist US military aggression.



American missiles on the West German border

Parity Commission following a well worn path

In October 1979, a split took place in the United Secretariat of the Fourth International (USFI), over the tactics to be pursued by revolutionaries in relation to the FSLN regime in Nicaragua.

The immediate cause of the split was the decision of the USFI to direct the largely Latin American based "Bolshvick Faction", led by Nahuel Moreno, and the supporters of the Leninist-Trotskyist Tendency" (LTT) (LTT), to refrain from building organisations independent of the FSLN in Nicaragua, instead directing all Nicaraguan members and supporters of the USFI to act "as loyal militants in the framework of the organisation which led to the overthrow of Somoza, and leads this revolution". (For an analysis of the USFI's positions on Nicaragua and the split, see WORKERS POWER No. 11, Dec 79/Jan 80).

Following the split, the Bolshevick Faction and the LTT joined forces with the Organising Committee for the Reconstruction of the Fourth International (OCRFI), of which the French OCI is the major component, to issue a declaration for an "open conference", aimed at reunifying the Trotskyist movement and "rooting out revisionism". The conference was to be open to all groupings standing of the Trotskyist programme, and was to start a "democratically organised and exhaustive discussion". To organise the conference, a 'Parity Commission' was set up, consisting of the OCRFI, the Bolshevick Faction and the LTT.

Workers Power pointed out at the time of the formation of the Parity Commission that while such a conference was being called on such a basis as to aid this process.

We pointed to the deeply opportunist record of the Moreno grouping in Latin America, and the history of adaption to social democracy by the OCI; the deep political differences between the three organisations forming the Parity Commission, which meant that they had "no common programme which can be tactically applied in a revolutionary situation"; and to the ambiguous nature of the declaration which both covered up the differences between the OCRFI, the Bolshevick Faction and the LTT, and appeared to allow the exclusion of many organisations claiming to be Trotskyist.

Despite these reservations, WP and the IWG jointly approached the Parity Commission, seeking clarification on the basis for attending the conference, declaring our willingness to attend "a truly open conference with no preconditions other than each grouping claim to Trotskyism" (WP 11). We are still waiting for a formal reply.

The actions of the Parity Commission over the last months have significantly clarified the political direction of this amalgam. The projected 'open conference' for which the Parity Commission was supposedly set up has receded into the background, with all indications suggesting that it will not now take place.

The "rules" of the Commission

have been published, which clearly aim to keep this body, supposedly organising an 'open' conference, the preserve of the three tendencies already on it. Prospective members not only have to declare that they regard the OCRFI, Bolshevick Faction and LTT as "fighting on the basis of Trotskyism", and be accepted unanimously by the three tendencies, but even then will have only a consultative vote. The only exception to this is the USFI, which is offered a deliberative vote, presumably because it has made clear its intention not to join the Commission.

Further, the Parity Commission has clearly set itself the task of politically consolidating itself into an international tendency. It has made statements on various international questions, such as Iran and Afghanistan, which are not only politically wrong (their statement on Afghanistan, for instance, implies that the guerrilla opposition in Afghanistan is progressive, "forming part of the general mobilisation of the masses in the region"!), but are also studiously vague when it comes to putting forward strategy and tactics for revolutionaries in these areas.

Such vagueness, which would either paralyse a national section in the area, if it existed, or more likely leave it to its own devices, unfettered by a democratic centralist international, is necessary because of the wide political differences that exist between the members of the Commission. These differences were openly admitted when the Commission was founded: "It is clearly recognised that there are major areas of disagreement between for example the OCRFI and the BF, not least the characterisation of the European situation and the class nature of the Cuban state" (Bolshevick Faction Bulletin in Britain No.3). However, since then the method of the Commission has been to concentrate on the areas of agreement between the tendencies, rather than resolving the differences through programmatic discussion.

The forces making up the Parity Commission are following a well-worn path in the history of post-war "Trotskyism" - the road to unprincipled fusion. The fight for a revolutionary international based on programmatic clarity and democratic centralism with authoritative congresses and an international leading body, is replaced by the cobbling together of a rotten centrist combination, with tacit agreements of non-interference in the national sections.

This was the method of "building" internationals used by the leaderships of the International Committee in

1953, the United Secretariat in 1963, and most recently enshrined in the method of the OCRFI. It is a method which will produce further splits in the fragmented forces claiming to be Trotskyist, and one which will make the Parity Commission one more stumbling block on the road to rebuilding a revolutionary international in the tradition of Lenin and Trotsky.

Europe in the 1930s was reeling under the combined impact of economic depression and acute social upheavals. The fascists had conquered power in Italy and Germany, defeating the strongest working class movement in the world as they did so. Against this background the working class of France, in 1936, rose up in a massive strike movement — one that had the potential to alter the balance of forces in favour of the working class on a European scale.

But the French workers failed, not because they lacked determination, but because their reformist and Stalinist leaders preferred collaboration with the bourgeoisie to proletarian revolution. Stalin's criminal ultra leftism in Germany, where the social democrats were characterised as 'social fascists' and therefore equally as bad as the Nazis, resulted in tragedy. Unable to correct his error on the basis of Marxist principles, Stalin, pursuing his own short term needs, swung violently to the right. Distorting the working class united front policy of Lenin and Trotsky he forced the parties of the Comintern to adopt the class collaborationist policy of the Popular Front — alliances with the Social Democrats and bourgeois parties, in which working class needs and demands were to be subordinated to the defence of 'democracy' against fascism — bourgeois democracy that is.

Following the Stalin-Laval pact in May 1935, the French CP (PCF) loyally carried out the new line. The People's Front in France was formed in June 1935, comprising the PCF, the French Socialist Party (SFIO) and: "the imperialist bourgeoisie, in the shape of the Radical Party and smaller tripe of the same sort." (Committees of Action — Not People's Front — Trotsky) In the May election of 1936, the Popular Front (PF) won 376 seats as against the right wing parties' 222. But this parliamentary victory for 'progress' was accompanied by a major betrayal of the working class' most fundamental interests.

With the victory of the PF, the French workers, regarding it as their government, went on strike and occupied their factories in pursuance of their demands. The strike rapidly developed bringing France to a standstill within days. The PCF were a major force within the unions. After the formation of the PF, the two main union federations, the PCF dominated CGTU and the reformist CGT had fused. The influx of young militants that this stimulated greatly strengthened the CP's influence in key manufacturing unions. The young workers, uncontaminated, as yet, by the despair and demoralisation that years of treacherous leadership inevitably leaves in its wake, provided the backbone of the strikes and could have been turned into a force that would have been able to challenge and drive out the bureaucratic traitors. The CP, however, worked overtime to ensure that this potential was never realised.

The revolutionary opportunities that were opened up by the French strikes of May/June 1936 were enormous. The Stalinists had no interest in seizing them. Their position of influence in the PF however, gave them a very real interest in containing the revolutionary developments. It was left to the Trotskyists, in the Bol-

shevik-Leninist group in France to argue and propagandise for a revolutionary strategy for the French working class. Their resources were small and their impact limited — but their contribution was far from negligible.

As Trotsky said: "On fertile soil, a handful of seeds gives a big yield. Thus, under conditions of social crisis and of the indignation of the masses, a small organisation, poor in material resources but armed with correct slogans, has exercised an unbought influence on the course of revolutionary events . . . (The New Revolutionary Upsurge and the Tasks of the Fourth International). The lessons of their intervention in, and of Trotsky's appraisal of the French strikes of 1936 are invaluable guides for revolutionaries today.

The '36 strike wave

The economic depression in France had dire effects on unemployment and wages. For example wages for miners in the south of France had fallen from 30 Francs in 1929 to 28 Francs for the double the amount produced in 1936. Inflation hit the petty bourgeoisie hard as well, eroding pensions and income from fixed-price rents. In this context the time was ripe for the fascists to increase their influence, especially among the unemployed and petty-bourgeoisie.

On February 6th the fascists attempted to storm the French Parliament. This prompted the frightened resignation of the president Daladier, and the appointment of the right-winger Gaston Doumergue in his stead, on February 7th. It was vital to stop the growing power of the fascists. Trotsky and his supporters called for workers militia squads to crush the fascists before it was too late. Workers were ready and willing to confront the fascists with force and, heeding the mood of the militants, the French SFIO called a general strike on February 12th.

By this time Moscow had reversed its decision against co-operating with social democrats, and the PCF and the CGTU, which was still independent from the CGT, decided to give official support to the strike at the last minute. One and a half million workers mobilised in a magnificent display of unity forged from below while the fascist dare show their faces on the streets.

This success was followed by the creation of the Popular Front. (PF) Its programme argued for anti-fascism and limited social reforms, but explicitly guaranteed capitalist property and institutions. An attempt by the SFIO to make it more left wing was defeated by the combined votes of the Radical Party and the Stalinist PCF. The desire for united action against the ravages of the economic crisis nevertheless encouraged workers to put their faith in the notion of the PF inspired by its programme. For its own largely electoral purposes, the PF found it useful

to encourage increased political and economic activity amongst the workers who looked to it. It hoped to transform this activity into votes.

When the PF won a majority in May 1936, Leon Blum, the socialist leader, formed a government. The PCF, led by Maurice Thorez refused to take any ministerial positions — not because of opposition to the government, but because they were anxious that their presence may alienate bourgeois support for the government. Initially, their caution was unsuccessful as millions of Francs were pulled out of the country. However, as Blum had confidently predicted, the Francs returned but only after the working class had been defeated in a decisive contest with the capitalists and had had the concessions they initially won snatched away from them — a defeat made possible by the treachery of the PCF.

Early in 1936 (May), strikes and occupations began. At Le Havre, for instance, a struggle developed in response to the sacking of two workers; at the Bloch air craft factory in the Parisian suburbs of Courbevoie a strike was called demanding wages and condition improvement. Bloch workers sent a huge contingent to the 600 000 strong demonstration on May 24th, commemorating the heroic uprising of the first revolutionary state — the Paris Commune. Engineering factories around Paris were either occupied or on strike, and on May 28th 35 000 Renault car workers came out. On May 29th L'Humanite, the PCF organ, reported 100 000 workers on strike.

This wave of strikes and occupations accelerated through the end of May, reaching smaller factories by early June. Major centres outside Paris were affected, and significantly, a whole new section of workers who had no previous experience of industrial action were drawn into the struggles. By June 4th the movement had shut down newspaper distribution, restaurants and hotels, locksmiths, jewellers, the clothing trade, gas, building, agriculture as well as heavy industry. Important sections of the petty bourgeoisie took action with the workers. Many strikes were supported by local shopkeepers who donated food, either free or at reduced rates.

It seems that most of the activity did not start out with clear demands or coherently organised strike committees and leadership. In any case, none of the strikes were made official by the CGT before June 4th, when Blum hastily formed his cabinet. It was then, that the CGT bureaucracy and the PCF both at a national and local level, moved to take action to derail this upsurge of workers action which was proving an embarrassment to the newly elected government.

The union officials were reluctant to let control slip out of their own hands. By June 10th over two million were on strike, by now with official union backing, and also with the participation of many rank and file PCF members. The PCF, while it had never encouraged or instigated the strikes, had to save its face with militants, while the leadership manoeuvred its way rather ineptly along side the PF. The government was attempting to rush measures which might satisfy workers, as well as moving up squads of armed troops to surround Paris.

Trotsky propagandised for accelerating the tempo of the struggle. Against the dead hand of bureaucratic control, he argued for new forms of direct, rank and file organisations, committees of action, defence squads, bodies that could become the basis for working class power. He wrote on June 9th: "the first self-mobilisation of the masses has outlined and in part brought forward the first elements of the revolutionary leadership... The old organisational shell has by no means dropped away. On the contrary, it still retains its hold quite stubbornly. But under it the new skin is already visible".

Now was certainly not the time to call a truce. The chance for workers to replace their old leadership with new fighting organs forged in the experience of the struggle, was of the utmost importance. But the PCF urged workers to return to "order" and "calm", and accept the concessions their government had negotiated with the bosses. Maurice Thorez, head of the PCF, made a speech declaring: "One must know how to end a strike". Indeed, Thorez knew better how to end it than how to begin it!

On the same day, June 12th, the government closed the offices of the Bolshevik Leninist paper *Lutte Ouvriere*, seizing copies of the issue containing the article by Trotsky quoted above, entitled "The French Revolution has begun". The front page headline was bold and uncompromising: "In the factories and in the streets, Power to the workers".

In fact most of the strikes and occupations folded when workers accepted the Matignon agreements, ratified on 10th - 11th June. These gave workers a 40 hour / 5 day week, paid holidays, 7%

1936/38: General Strike in France

wage increases for higher paid workers, an and 15% for the lower paid. In addition, collective representation by unions was recognised.

Although sporadic strikes still continued to break out even after many of the major industries had returned to normal working, the high point of militant action had passed, without workers having been able to oust the CGT and PCF leaders from their ranks, or challenge the bosses for power. Thus when communist unionists recommended compromise and a return to work, many workers had no arguments to counter these proposals. The metal workers union in Paris, for example, rejected the advice of its PCF leaders to return to work on 9th and 11th June, but their own demands were so confused that eventually they decided the only solution was to call for the re-opening of their plants under government control.

The Matignon agreements, hailed as a victory by the CGT and PCF leaderships, were undoubtedly forced from the bosses by the efforts of the workers themselves. However in many cases bosses refused to implement them at all, and those bosses who did were soon openly flouting the new conditions, as the militancy of the workers subsided. Also, since the Popular Front left the capitalist finance houses intact, inflation continued to eat into the wage rises as soon as they were negotiated by the unions. The reduction in hours that was won was soon to be used by the bosses, because the agreements were not under workers control, to carry through speed-ups, introduce new machines, and increase unemployment!

Having betrayed the workers moves to force the Blum government to meet their demands, the Stalinists switched, after Matignon, to opposing the Popular Front from the left. In September 1936 they supported two large protest strikes against Blum's refusal to help the Republican cause in Spain. This was partly a belated response to rank and file pressure, partly dictated by Comintern/foreign policy. August and September saw renewed strike action from large sections of workers. Government employees struck in August, and a whole series of textile strikes and occupations broke out in Northern France, sparked off by dismissals of union workers and a fear of lockouts.

Miners, metalworkers, weavers, dockers and shipyard workers soon followed suit. By the autumn, thousands of workers were engaged in a new mass strike wave, which sought to stave off the increasingly vicious capitalist counter-offensive of lockouts, victimisations, mass sackings and rising prices. The Matignon agreement was proved to be a hollow deal. Thousands of workers were disillusioned with the government that they had regarded as theirs. But Blum had won time, having defeated the first and decisive strike wave, he allowed the second one to peter out of its own accord, which, leaderless and directionless it inevitably did - despite the fact that it embraced more workers than the May June struggles had.

While Thorez and Co were tailing the militants to suit Stalin's international interests with regard to Spain, the CGT president Jouhaux did not pretend to change his spots. On September 26th 1936, he regretted the impulsiveness of the the great mass of newly unionised workers, who wanted "immediately full satisfaction for all their demands", and denounced "trouble-making elements inside each factory". He concluded that it was necessary to "develop in the masses a sense of discipline" i.e., let the union leaders prevent workers from developing their own organisations.

by
Gen Doy
and
Nick Green



Miners on strike; resisting the b

Trotsky predicts

Throughout the period of pre-revolutionary turmoil in France, Trotsky mapped out a clear and consistent Marxist strategy to guide his French followers a series of pamphlets and articles. He set up the key questions of the nature of the Popular Front, the tactics necessary of the strikes, the nature of the general strike and the crucial question of how to transform the strike wave into a final victory over capitalism.

The general strike has long been at the centre of a political tug of war between anarchists and the revolutionary marxists in the labour movement. The anarchists are unceasingly loud in their praise of the general strike as the highest expression of the proletariat's ability to go it alone in socialism, without the leadership of a revolutionary party. On the other side Marxists, from Luxemburg on, have argued while the general strike does represent spontaneous energy and militancy of the working class it cannot sustain itself on that alone. To win it requires leadership organisation, defence squads, and consistently fought for goals. If it is to challenge for power the working class cannot rest content with the withdrawal of labour; the conquest of state power requires more than a strike but an insurrection.

While the general strike can create conditions for a rising, it is not the rising itself. Only a revolutionary party can lead the forces mobilised in a general strike to this task. These facts are always overlooked by the anarchists, whose policies have always been guided more by romance than realism. The French general strike of 1936 bears out this marxist understanding of the tactic. Trotsky was clear on the general strike's nature from the very outset "Once Again, Whither France?", he predicted to the full implications of the general strike slogan:

"The general strike, as every Marxist knows, is one of the most revolutionary methods of struggle. The general strike is not possible except at a time when the class struggle rises above the particular craft demands, and extends over all occupational and district divisions, and wi



Leon Blum

The Strike



David Seymour /Magnum

away the lines and the parties, between legality and illegality, and mobilises the majority of the proletariat in active opposition to the bourgeoisie and the state... The entire history of the working class movement proves that every general strike whatever may be the slogans under which it occurs, has an internal tendency to reform itself into an open revolutionary clash, into a direct struggle for power".

The general strike paralyses the economy of the country, but also the power of the state, which

"remains suspended in mid air. It must either subjugate the proletariat by famine and force and constrain it to set the apparatus of the bourgeois state once again in motion, or retreat before the proletariat. Whatever may be the slogans and motive for which the general strike is initiated, if it includes the genuine masses, and if these masses are quite resolved to struggle, the general strike inevitably poses before all the classes in the nation the question: *Who will be the master of the house?*"

How was the proletariat to answer this question that the general strike would inevitably pose to it? Against the menace of the fascist terror gangs Trotsky had argued for the formation of workers' militia. Besides fulfilling an obvious need, such bodies also represented an embryonic form of proletarian power. But what were these militias to be accountable to, whose interests would they serve? Again, Trotsky was unequivocal in his answer. Central to the victory of the strike was the building of committees of action, workplace and community based, embracing all layers of the proletariat. Such bodies could directly serve the workers interests and could be counterposed to the parliamentary cretinism of the PCF and SFIO. The function of these committees, however, need not be restricted to organising a general strike. They could organise the working class on an entirely new basis, giving workers a first taste of real power, real control over their own lives - they constituted the basis for a new form of power, proletarian power. As such they could be counterposed *governmentally* to the Popular Front parliamentary coalition:

"The soviets have always been born out of strikes. The mass strike is the natural element of the proletarian revolution. The committees of action cannot be at present anything but the committees of those strikers who are seizing the enter-

prises. From one industry to another, from one factory to the next, from one working class district to another, from city to city, the committees of action must establish a close bond with each other. They must meet in every city, in each productive group in their regions, in order to end with a congress of all the committees of action in France. This will be the new order that must take the place of the reigning anarchy." (*The Decisive Stage* 5th June, 1936).

Such a course was not followed by the socialist or "communists" who did not want to upset the Popular Front apple cart. They were desperate to maintain their alliance with the Radical Party, so as to prevent the latter being driven into the arms of reaction. So they appeased the Radicals and accepted the policy of collaboration, imposed, as Trotsky pointed out, by "the Radical bourgeoisie, by the Socialist businessmen and careerists, by the Soviet diplomats and their 'communist' lackeys".

So the Popular Front existed to serve the capitalists. The Blum government had defused the mass strikes of May and June by offering concessions. On the basis of these they forced through a return to work - largely marshalled by the PCF in the factories. But did they move against the capitalists who refused to implement the Matignon agreements? On the contrary, they moved against the workers who later struck to try and win what should have already been guaranteed them. For Trotsky the key thing about the Popular Front was precisely this - the workers' parties were prostrate before big capital; workers' interests were sacrificed on the altar of profit, so that the Radical Party could be kept happy and the Blum government preserved. This, despite the fact that the bourgeois order of the 3rd Republic was actually dependent on the workers parties for its survival - without the rotten leaders of the PCF and SFIO it is quite possible that the May/June events could have cleared the way for the conquest of power by the workers.

While this situation existed there was no possibility of the French working class being able to consolidate their gains - there was a governmental obstacle to them doing it. Trotsky argued for the following tactical orientation to attempt to break the PCF and SFIO militants from their leadership's disastrous policies:

"...Radicals are the least line of resistance for the revolutionary critique. By concentrating your fire against the Radical Ministers, with really concrete examples you will easily get the ear of the Communist and Socialist workers. You may rightly add: 'Unfortunately, the Communist leaders support the radicals against the Socialist leaders'. At any rate our slogan cannot be 'Down with the Blum government!', but 'Drive the bourgeois Radicals out of the Blum government!'...It is extremely important for this period, but it does not at all mean that we 'protect' the Blum government". (*A Hasty Formulation on the People's Front* - July 1936).

But this tactic had to be applied alongside a resolute struggle for the setting up of Soviets. In this respect it can be likened to the Bolshevik policies in 1917 with regard to Kerensky's government - Kick Out the 10 Capitalist Ministers, All Power to the Soviets. To argue for this policy in France was not to give support to the PCF or SFIO, but to exploit the contradiction that the militants of these parties found themselves in when faced with huge class battles.

Trotsky recognised that the general strike itself, no matter how broad and sweeping, could not resolve the historical choices facing the French proletariat. But, as a weapon of class struggle it could be used alongside tactics and demands that

would enable the proletariat to either force a break between their parties and the bourgeoisie, or break, to the left, from their parties. The resultant conflicts and turmoil that would result from either development would offer the best possible basis for revolutionaries to build a revolutionary party that could transform a general strike into an all out struggle for power. Only by thus preparing for a new general strike could the consolidation of the concessions granted after the May/June events, and their further advancement, be guaranteed. Trotsky put it thus: "The precondition for the success of a new general strike is factory committees and soviets" (*New Stage in the French Revolution*).

Only on the basis of these, the bedrock organisations of proletarian power, could the gains be made lasting. The failure of the working class to resolve this governmental question, the survival of Blum and the truth of Trotsky's predictions, were starkly revealed in the events that followed 1936.

... and, in '38, the chickens come home to roost

Early in 1937, the Popular Front government came under increasing pressure from international capitalism. Blum was forced to resign, having served his purpose for the French bosses in June 1936, as his programme of public works designed to boost the economy merely induced the French bosses to take their money out of the country, and wait for better times ahead. After Blum stepped down in June, the revamped Popular Front administration "floated" the franc, and without any government control of exchange, inflation was rampant.

In this mounting economic panic, the fascist forces, at their peak in 1935-6, took to the streets in large numbers once again. At Clichy, on the outskirts of Paris, a fascist demonstration protected by the police was opposed by militant workers. In ensuing attacks on the counter-demonstrators, 5 workers were killed and 300 injured. The Popular Front was increasingly driven to show its true colours to those who had voted it into office. Extreme right-wing terrorist gangs flourished in France, attacking workers. Trotsky's advice on self-defence and armed militia for workers and strikers was never more relevant, for what protection could they expect from *their* government, which has brutally attacked them at Clichy earlier in the year?

On the economic front, the gloss of the Matignon agreement was becoming tarnished. Arbitration inevitably meant a sell-out to the bosses, negotiated by the CGT via the Popular Front. The Goodrich tyre factory workers suffered such a be-

trayal late in 1937, followed by public service workers and shop workers in the fashionable "Grands Magasins". On their return to work after "arbitration" agreements, militant shop workers were sacked.

Early in 1938, aviation workers went on strike for demands well within the Matignon agreement, but were dragged back to work by the Popular Front with the support of the CGT, who claimed their action was in the "national interest". The CGT meantime mounted campaigns against "militants" and "Trotskyists". Suppression of strikes became increasingly vicious and in August 1938 a strike by dockers at the port of Marseilles was smashed by Senegalese troops brought in by this "workers' government".

In 1938 the threat posed to central Europe by Hitlerite Germany was used by the French government as a pretext for further attacks on the gains won by workers in 1936. Blum came and went several times during 1937-8, as the bosses tried various "soft" and "hard" lines of class attack. When Blum no longer headed the government, the PCF and the CGT would encourage militant workers in order to preserve their own power base, since they could now claim that Blum, the workers' friend, had been ousted by reactionary elements who must be opposed. In contrast to the leaders of the Comintern, Trotsky always pointed out that the Popular Front was rotten to the core, which ever puppet was at its head.

The bosses' reaction inside France was as tough as international opposition from outside the country. As the Popular Front demanded the increasing flouting of the Matignon agreement in the interests of nationalism, military production, etc, the bosses' organisation, the CGPF, refused to make any concessions in arbitration, and set up its own scab unions in factories.

By late 1938, the Popular Front was riven by internal and external pressures. Even the PCF was forced to split and move into opposition, while the Radical Party remained true to its reactionary class origins and left the Front to move rightwards. With political and economic crisis looming at home and the fascist menace, which had so far been left to flourish, lurking on France's eastern frontiers, the class-collaboration which had fooled most of the workers for some time was now on the brink of complete disintegration.



Trotsky arrives in Paris 1932

In this atmosphere, the CGT held its annual conference in the Atlantic port of Nantes in November 1938. While the union delegates spoke of such issues as peace, the political independence of the unions, etc, the burning issue should have been the recent decrees of the minister Reynaud. These decrees, which Reynaud had broadcast to the nation on November 12th, should have galvanised even the CGT into action. Their implementation meant that the Matignon agreement was in tatters. Firms could force workers to do up to 48 hours plus overtime at very cheap rates, eg first 250 hours overtime at 110%, from 250-400 hours at 125%.

The five day week was abolished, penalties were imposed on workers who refused to perform overtime "ordered in the interests of national defence" including dismissal, loss of holiday pay and redundancy money, prohibition from signing on the dole for 6 months, etc. If trade unionists propagandised against these measures, they could be fined 100 - 1,000 francs, and 6 days - 3 months in jail. Further repressive measures concerned action against union privileges and the rights of foreign workers.

The franc was revalued, direct taxes increased, price control was abolished on wholesale goods but remained for retail, hitting the working class and petty-bourgeoisie hard while favouring the capitalists; food, transport and postal costs increased. Public works were sacrificed to military spending. Reynaud ended his broadcast with the words: "To the foreigners who are listening in, I say to you that in France the week of two Sundays has ceased to exist." The bosses could ask for nothing better.

But what was the CGT's response to this? CGT President Jouhaux did his utmost to avoid the issue altogether! Eventually Peria, a railway union delegate, presented a

motion signed by the communist unions: "The government's only concern has been to inspire confidence in the capitalists who, for the last two years have exported tens of millions of francs...the working class is ready to make the effort necessary for economic recovery, but is not prepared to accept socially regressive policies...the CGT expresses the will of the organised working class to oppose the socially reactionary plan of the (Reynaud) decrees". There was no call for a general strike, nor mention of how the "organised" working class was to organise and what actions, defensive and aggressive, it was to take. Nevertheless, even this was too much, and Jouhaux refused to allow the motion to be put.

This lack of leadership was fatal. As soon as the new decrees were announced, a wave of strikes and occupations broke out all over France, apparently the spontaneous reaction of a rank and file disgusted at its leadership. Many incidents were provoked by the bosses themselves, who hoped thereby to smash workers' resistance with a short, sharp lesson from company thugs and state police and troops. The leadership in both unions and the PCF refused to legalise these strikes and occupations. In many cases communist union officials did their utmost to defuse the militancy of late November, calling for calm. The metal-workers union, staunchly communist, condemned "any premature action which might be prejudicial to union discipline" (*L'Humanite* 25/11/38). In fact, most of the left papers did not even publicise the wave of strikes and occupations.

Meantime bitter fighting continued round the steelworks at Denain-Anzin in Northern France, where eventually the communist mayor organised a sell-out. Immigrant workers, mainly Poles and Italians who lived in terror of deportation, were brought in as scabs.

In Paris, the Renault plant was occupied and during Chamberlain's visit to Paris on 24-25 November, troops and police besieged the buildings. After tear gas canisters had been thrown inside, socialist and PCF leaders arrived to coax the nauseated workers out to imprisonment and trial. The Renault occupation showed the bravery of the workers, most of whom lived locally and were young and unskilled, but rank and file militancy without leadership was not enough.

Only after these spontaneous protests by French workers had been almost destroyed did the CGT decide to call a one-day general strike, on 30th November. They were even more tardy than the PCF leadership, who had delayed as long as possible, and then either tailed the rank and file, or else intervened merely to put a brake on the strike. This token one-day strike, an insult to the recent heroic efforts of the French workers, came when they were exhausted, politically disoriented, and in many cases, physically injured. The strike, said the CGT, was "intended only to protest against the (Reynaud) decrees" and could not "be exploited politically, nor as an insurrectionary manifestation". All meetings, occupations and processions were expressly forbidden!

Even so, the loyalty of the workers under these conditions was amazing. Textiles, building, metal and chemical industries responded well. Even the battered North supported the call. Rural areas, traditionally conservative, made a poor showing, as did white collar workers. The fragile class alliance of workers and petty bourgeois was effectively shattered, but worse was to come.

The disastrous misleadership of the PCF and CGT merely gave the bosses the chance to move in and smash the demoralised workers completely. Militants were identified, arrested, fined and sacked. There were numerous lockouts, and new extremely disadvantageous contracts were forced on the humiliated workforce who had to return on the bosses' terms or starve. Organisations of militant workers were broken. The gains of 1936 were gone, and disillusioned workers left the unions in droves. Estimates for late 1938 put union membership only slightly above the pre-1936 level. The last straw came in August 1939 with the Stalin-Hitler non-aggression pact, when the fate of the PCF was sealed. It had already lost many of its members but in September it was officially banned. This also split the CGT, which reverted to its previous class composition of working class and reformist white collar sections.

The Vichy government imposed whatever measures it desired on a mute and profoundly disillusioned workforce. Strikes were made illegal, a repressive legal mechanism was set up, inflation and exploitation sucked the life-blood from the workers as they paid the price of supporting an army of occupation. The less fortunate were taken to German factories where even higher rates of exploitation were enforced. Such was the sad legacy of the drastically mistaken trust the French workers placed in the Popular Front government.



The first night of the Renault occupation Robert Capra /Magnum

As NUPE workers take on troops...

Bureaucrats back Army

By B. O'KANE



Soldier using gyroscopically stabilised binoculars for surveillance

Picture: Alain le Garsmeur (Camerawork)

For the minority Catholic anti-unionist population, life in Northern Ireland comprises endless rounds of harassment and humiliation at the hands of the British Army and the Royal Ulster Constabulary. In the face of assaults, surveillance and searches, the anti-unionist population has sustained its own armed force to defend the ghettos — the IRA. Given the weakness of the organised left, the Republican movement has been free to channel the hatred felt for the British occupation into their rallies and their organisations. An important strike of Belfast hospital workers last month pitted a predominantly anti-unionist workforce against the British troops. It saw the Trade Union organisation, built by these workers to improve and defend their living standards and conditions of work, temporarily mobilised to do battle with the Army and its backers. We print this account of the strike, written by a member of the Irish Workers Group (the fraternal organisation of Workers Power in Ireland) because it vividly demonstrates the role and nature of the British occupying troops and the complicity in that occupation of British and Northern Irish trade union officials. It brings out the lessons of an important struggle by a group of workers who found themselves up against not only the British Army but also the officials of the union that claims to represent them.

On Friday 11th April, 1200 NUPE ancillary workers at the Royal Victoria Hospital in Belfast struck against the increased presence of armed troops in the hospital, and the mounting harassment of the predominantly Catholic workforce by the British Army.

The Army claim to maintain a presence in the hospital in order to guard injured or wounded Army or RUC personnel from possible attack. In fact the hospital - a vast complex of buildings which straddles the anti-unionist ghetto of West Belfast - has become a base for the surveillance of the Catholic population.

Hospital workers have discovered soldiers using rooms and offices as vantage points from which to observe the surrounding republican anti-imperialist bases in the anti-unionist ghettos. They know that plain clothes military intelligence officers are active in the hospital, and are firmly convinced that their own personnel files and those of the patients are freely available to the Army.

At present, seven whole wards in the hospital - including a section of the Outpatients - are completely controlled by the Army. Other wards and corridors are patrolled by armed soldiers who regularly question and search visitors to the hospital.

The NUPE branch in the hospital has a record of resisting the Army's presence. They successfully foiled one attempt of the Army to build an observation post at the entrance of the Outpatients department. In November last year, against the objections of NUPE and the Broadway Tenants Association, the Army went ahead and built an observation post on top of the Broadway tower block on the perimeter of the hospital.

Not content with this degree of "security" and surveillance, the Army went ahead earlier this year to begin to install closed circuit TV in key parts of the hospital. In this they were backed by the rantings of Loyalist politicians such as Paisley, who claimed that the Royal workers were plotting to turn the hospital into a Republican fortress.

The ancillary workers who make up the NUPE branch have borne the brunt of endless Army harassment, intimidation and thuggery. On one occasion a NUPE shop steward was thrown against a corridor wall by soldiers, who threatened and abused him, whilst pushing a high velocity

SLR rifle, loaded and cocked, against his head. In another recent incident, several shots were fired in an Intensive Care Unit, the incident being glossed over as just another "accident".

This regime of violence and terror, directed almost wholly against the ancillary workers, is part of continuous round of harassment and intimidation. Soldiers seem to take delight in tripping up porters on their way around the hospital with trolleys and supplies, and there are repeated, unnecessary identity checks - often on porters with urgent medical supplies.

This running battle between the troops and ancillary workers came to a head on Easter Monday, when soldiers taking food on a trolley to their base in the Out Patients Centre charged down the corridor with the trolley, apparently intending to ram into two patients, who were being moved by a couple of porters. As the troops pulled up just short of the patients, a sub-machine gun toppled off the trolley. It fell to the floor, and discharged. Luckily only one round was released, and this was embedded in the corridor wall, a short distance from the 4 men. Had the gun accidentally discharged a burst, the porters or patients would almost certainly have been wounded or even killed. Press and media reports in the North, at the behest of the Army and in agreement with the hospital management, covered up the incident as an "accidental discharge", giving no details of the incident.

The porters, in consultation with their shop stewards, immediately blacked the area, maintaining only emergency cover.

At a mass meeting on Friday April 11th a resolution calling for the complete civilianisation of the hospital and the withdrawal of all troops was passed unanimously. The decision to strike was taken after the meeting heard that management had suspended 39 women domestics and 20 porters who were blacking the Out-Patients Centre.

Hospital management and the Area Health Board have consistently backed the Army in its conflicts with NUPE members. So too have the NUPE officials, at local and national level, fought to prevent the ancillary workers challenging the British Army's presence in the hospital.

Up until November 1979 the NUPE branch had negotiated security matters directly with management, through a Security Committee of shop stewards and their secretary. As the British Army intensified its presence in the hospital, so it increasingly refused to treat with the troublesome NUPE branch. Instead they began to make approaches directly to top officials of the Area Health Board and NUPE Area full-timer Coulthard.

The Army simply made decisions, relayed them to the Union officials or the Area Board, who, being fully behind the Army's role in the North, and therefore accepting the necessity of its activity in the Royal Victoria, readily agreed and instructed hospital management to that effect.

As the NUPE branch resisted the Army's plans, so Coulthard, with the full agreement of Alan Fisher in London, simply took over the role of the branch's Security Committee, leaving the workers powerless to negotiate.

Last November Coulthard chose the occasion of a joint meeting of NUPE (ie himself!), the hospital management and Humphrey Atkins (Tory Minister of State for Northern Ireland) to disempower the branch by refusing them admission to the meeting. In response the branch passed a motion of 'No Confidence' in Coulthard, and repudiated his claim to represent the ancillary workers in any way.

As the recent dispute flared up, so the NUPE officials did everything in their power to keep negotiations with the employers in their own hands, and to undermine the fighting strength of the NUPE workers. Coulthard went into negotiations with the employers two days after the Easter Monday machine gun incident at the hospital. He came out claiming to have "pressed" for "the ultimate demilitarisation of the RVH site, and what we'd term as a low military profile", whilst admitting that "there was value in the meeting in that it helped to plan and set out the areas of disagreement". He lashed out at the local union branch leadership, claiming that restored powers over security negotiations could only be achieved "if the local secretary (Brian Sullivan) accepts the union structure"...in other words, if the branch toed the line of the NUPE officials.

Coulthard set out to isolate Sullivan, the branch secretary, and to portray the fight as being one between "the official Trade Union structures" and a recalcitrant and ambitious branch secretary who was leading the workers by the nose in a personal fight with his 'legitimate' union boss.

Once the mass meeting voted for strike action, Coulthard moved into top gear as Sullivan, expressing the unanimous view of his branch, announced: "As a servant of my branch I cannot sit down and talk to Mr. Coulthard." Blaming the media for giving "credibility to the unofficial leadership", Coulthard maintained that without press coverage "the industrial action would have fizzled out because of sheer lack of support" and uttered not one word about the events that had sparked off the strike.

Over the weekend, an emergency meeting of the NUPE National Executive Committee was held

in London. Speaking for the Executive, Alan Fisher deplored the strikers' "decision not to provide emergency cover when taking industrial action". This was a slander on the branch, for far from refusing to provide emergency cover, the branch had been prevented from doing so in the first place by the hospital management, who had suspended the 20 porters - including those providing emergency cover. Fisher went on to say that his Executive refused to make the strike official "because of the refusal of the Branch to accept the presence of the Northern Ireland Officer of the union in any joint negotiations about security arrangements in the hospital".

Under a hail of blows from press, media, loyalist and nationalist politicians, the NUPE bureaucracy and the Irish Congress of Trade Unions (ICTU - the Irish equivalent of the TUC), the strike leadership vacillated and eventually caved in. The workers returned to work on Wednesday 16th after a mass meeting, where Sullivan and his shop stewards presented a meaningless "compromise" to save face. They called on the Northern Ireland Committee (NIC) of the ICTU, through its secretary, Terry Carlin, to conduct an "independent enquiry" into events at the Royal, and Coulthard's consistent betrayal of the branch. Carlin responded typically by saying that discussions between management and the NIC are continuing, and will continue as before!!!

Such a response is not surprising, given the background of Carlin. The NIC, of which he is secretary, is the bureaucrats' formula for maintaining a purely formal "unity" of the Irish Trade Union movement, north and south, while bowing down to the imperialist partition of the country and surrendering to loyalism. As top official of the NIC, Carlin has a record second to none in acquiescence to the British Army, the RUC and loyalism.

On May Day 1978 he refused to allow the Trade Union Campaign Against Repression (TUCAR) to march on the parade, calling on the police to seize the banner and arrest TUCAR members if they attempted

to march. He has flown in the face of demands from the NIC and ICTU itself that he quit his post on the Northern Ireland Police Authority, which has whitewashed allegations of torture and brutality upon Republicans and political activists in police stations throughout Northern Ireland, and in particular in the notorious "holding centre" at Castlereagh, where a young trades unionist, Brian McGuire of the AUEW/TASS died by hanging in a bare cell while under "interrogation". In the same week the body of a teenager - last seen in Castlereagh three weeks before - was found in the River Lagan.

In a recent mass march against Tory cuts, which was orchestrated and rigidly controlled by the NIC, Carlin as its chief officer denied the mainly Catholic workers of West Belfast - including the RVH workers - a right to march through the area of West Belfast, to join up with the main march in the city centre. He instructed them to form up in either Donegall Rd or the Shankill Rd - both fiercely Loyalist areas!

A bureaucrat steeped in collaboration with the Army and the RUC, and so much compromised with Loyalism, Carlin could hardly be expected to respond sympathetically to a strike calling for the removal of the British Army from the RVH. As a Trade Union bureaucrat he was bound to defend Coulthard, his fellow bureaucrat, in a struggle with the NUPE workers.

The strike was stabbed in the back by union leaders who are as wedded to maintaining the northern sectarian state as they are to bargaining with the bosses within that state. They accused the strikers of political motives.

The strike committee replied by insisting that their strike was not political, that it was an ordinary dispute. That was a recipe for isolation and defeat. By securing the industrial backing of the anti-unionist workers as part of a fight against Army brutality and the British occupation, the workers of RVH could have foiled NUPE's attempts to isolate them. They would also have blazed a trail for all anti-imperialist workers to follow.



Picture: Andrew Ward (Report)

Alan Fisher has struck a serious blow against the RVH workers in Belfast, and for the occupying army in Northern Ireland. NUPE militants in Britain and Northern Ireland must organise to pass resolutions condemning Fisher and Coulthard's actions, supporting their brothers and sisters in Belfast, and calling their NEC to account.

SWP tails steel militants

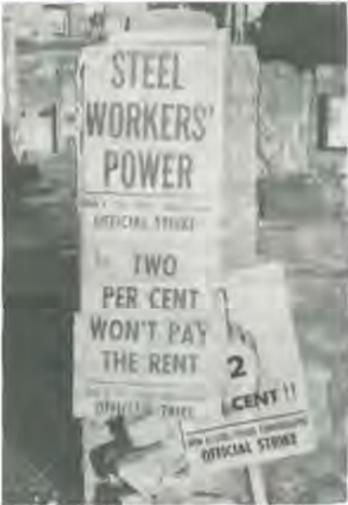
This article is an abridged version of a pamphlet produced by our Sheffield branch contrasting our record during that strike with that of the SWP. Copies are available from the following address: Workers Power: BCM Box 7750 London WC1V6XX

By DAVE GARROCH and MATTHEW COBB

The thirteen-week steel strike was one of the longest and most important battles waged by a major section of British workers in the last decade. The strikers were faced with two enemies, the Tories who wanted to defeat them as an example to other workers, and their own leaders who were determined to keep control of the strike.

The strike was a test for the groups on the Left who claim to put forward a revolutionary strategy for the working class. This was particularly true of the SWP—the biggest of such groups and the only one with any implantation in the steel industry.

The task of revolutionaries in the steel strike was to argue for a strategy which could mobilise steelworkers for victory and, at the same time offer a perspective for defeating the Tory offensive as a whole. It is against this task that the record of the SWP in the steel strike must be judged.



Picture: Workers Power

Tony Cliff, in Socialist Worker (12th April) tries to summarise the lessons of the strike. He correctly points out that the conflict between union leaders and the rank and file was a major theme of the strike. He goes on to argue that the key to victory was basically a question of organisation "If the rank and file had organised independently from Bill Sirs, the strike would have been victorious."

He points to the many loopholes in local organisation, to the 'lack of integration between steelworkers and other workers and concludes that "Had there been national rank and file movement in steel things would have been different."

In typical SWP fashion, Cliff presents the question one-sidedly. Local rank and file organisation was certainly necessary and so was the need for democratic strike committees, local and national solidarity action, mass pickets and blacking. What Cliff leaves out are the policies around which these bodies and actions could have been built.

The concentration on organisation and the failure to pose a political strategy for the steel workers doomed SWP members and those militants who looked to Real Steel News (RSN—the SWP steelworkers bulletin) to fighting for just a more militant conduct of the strike, and in the end, to a fatalistic acceptance of the sell out.

Even on the question of building a rank and file movement to which the SWP is formally committed, the SWP has failed miserably. Pete Clark of the SWP Industrial Department argued at the second national RSN meeting, "After the strike RSN will have to take up issues like the reform of the ISTC and the fight against redundancies as well as the general

political argument." (quoted in SW). . . . After the strike! This is the classic method of the SWP, "wider political issues" the redundancies and even the building of a rank and file organisation are left till after the immediate struggle. As a result the SWP reduced itself to a 'servicing' role in the strike, arguing only for more militancy. Socialism was only propagandised for as a dim and distant goal.

By contrast the first issue of the Workers Power strike bulletin (eleven of which were printed in the Sheffield area) on the first day of the strike, argued that there were two central tasks, to take control of the strike by setting up a "National Strike committee composed of delegates elected from local strike or action committees" and secondly, "the need to link the pay claim with a fight to defend jobs and oppose the planned redundancies."

During the strike the SWP failed to raise any strategy for linking it to the struggle against unemployment and the Tory offensive. This was most glaringly revealed in the SWP's "strategy" to stop private steel production. Although mass pickets of private steel were vital, to rely solely on this and on calling for solidarity from private steelworkers was totally inadequate. While SW insisted that, "solidarity with the steelworkers is the elementary duty of every trade unionist. It is also the self-interest of every trade unionist." (SW 668). Workers Power was clear that, "the problem is to unite the two sections of workers so that their interests are one and the same, and that requires political answers. We should argue that the private steel workers bring forward their claim from April, and fight for it alongside those in

the public sector, thereby strengthening both sides. The division between private and public sector workers will lead to defeat of both sections until they fight for a common claim together." (Sheffield strike bulletin no 7).

Despite headlines in Socialist Worker like 'Union officials pose big threat; Our worst enemy' (SW 673), neither the SWP nor RSN made any criticism of the role of the local leadership in the sell-out. In our April 1st bulletin we wrote: 'Keith Jones has been at the forefront of calling for "20% with no strings". What is his attitude to the latest offer? He has argued for acceptance of the Executive's decision whatever it is. He refuses to call mass meetings to argue for the Executive to reject the offer, and he refuses to argue in the Executive for rejection...should the Executive reject the offer, Jones will put on his 'left face'. But remember what he is saying now - he will accept the sell-out if recommended. This is the limit of all 'left' bureaucrats' (Sheffield strike bulletin 10). That was exactly what Jones did: he refused to break with Sirs and reject the sell-out.

After the strike, Tony Cliff discovered that pay was not the most important issue, because "Money disappears through your fingers as a result of inflation". SWP members should compare this echoing of the bosses' favourite argument with Workers Powers' calling for a strategy which could both strengthen the rank and file and defend any gains from the impact of inflation, "Any settlement must be protected by a 1% increase in take home pay for every 1% increase in inflation (as calculated by elected workers committees—not the phoney government index)". (Sheffield strike bulletin no 3).

At the end of the strike the SWP as if convinced by its own inability to develop a way forward, could only throw up their hands in surrender to Sirs sell out. At no point did RSN or SW call for 'No Return to Work'. RSN No 13 given out at the Clifton Park meeting in Rotherham which accepted the sell-out, contented itself with declaring that the settlement was a sell-out, and suggesting no way of fighting it.

A Workers Power bulletin to the same meeting argued "The only way

to prevent Sirs selling out. . . is to call mass meetings of steel workers to reject the offer. To give that voice greater weight the mass meetings must call for a renewed strike wave to strengthen the strike and stop any more bogus 'mediations'. (Sheffield bulletin No 10).

The actions of the SWP during the steel strike were the natural result of that Party's economism—the belief that militant struggle will spontaneously generate socialist political consciousness. It is this which explains the SWP's refusal to raise demands that went beyond the spontaneous militancy of the strikers.

The SWP's record in the steel strike shows that not only does this prevent the linking of everyday struggles to the struggles for working class power—it also fails to provide a strategy for defending the class living standards and past gains.

The building of a fighting rank and file movement led by revolutionaries cannot be accomplished except by winning militants to a strategy which goes beyond the economic struggle by linking it to the struggle to overthrow the capitalist system itself. The SWP is incapable of fighting for such a strategy. It offers only a dead end for militants.

Women's "Fightback" Conference

On March 22nd, 500 people (mainly women) attended a national "Fightback for Women's Rights" conference called by the Socialist Campaign for a Labour Victory. Mary Corbishley, from Workers Action, declared that it had been called to turn the trade unions and Labour Party outwards toward the struggles of women against the Tory attacks.

The conference took no resolutions, and discussions were fragmented within the various workshops. In the Labour Movement workshop - by far the largest - speakers pointed to the importance of fighting the cuts and combatting the Employment Bill. The necessity to bring as many women as possible out on May 14th was repeatedly emphasised. But beyond anti-Tory declarations the conference left women with no perspectives for taking action against the Tory measures.

Many women present had been disillusioned by the passivity of the Women's Liberation Movement, disarmed in the face of the Tories' combined assault on living standards and conditions and rights. The "Socialist Feminist" current, with its turn towards contemplative "theory" and consciousness raising was no alternative to women who wanted to fight back. It was to the Labour Party that many of these women turned, seeing it as a means of resisting the Tories, in a way that none of the previous women's organisations were.

Beyond calls to build women's sections in the Labour Party, and ensure that the manifesto included a mention of women's issues, these women had no coherent programme to challenge the reformism of the Labour Party. In turn the organisers of the conference refused to challenge reformism or the illusions that many of the women attending had in it. They thereby kept up a semblance of unity - but avoided the key question of what actions women need to take in order to defend themselves.

This lack of clarity has not prevented the organisers from committing the planning committee to organising a second conference in Birmingham on June 21st. Again this will not be a delegate conference. Furthermore, Women's Fightback groups are to be set up in the localities immediately, without any programme of action, and in opposition to various other groupings of women militants, such as those in Women's Voice.

Against such good intentions and cosy alliances, we believe that a decisive break needs to be made with the merry-go-round of conferences and fragmented groupings that has characterised the recent history of women's politics. The demise of the Working Women's Charter Campaign, the inability of the IMG-inspired "Women in Action" to even get off the ground, and the re-absorption of the Women's Voice grouping back into the SWP after a temporary taste of semi-independence, all indicate that a new strategy is desperately needed.

We would argue that at the present time the mobilisation of large numbers of working class women against unemployment, the Employment Bill, cuts and declining living standards is a real possibility. To realise this potential, the activists in all the various women's organisations, in the cuts committees and the Trades Council sub-committees, need to be welded into a fighting alliance, oriented to working class women, and won to a clear programme of action that gives a working class answer to the attacks on women's rights that are underway. Whether or not the Fightback campaign can be won to play a positive role in this struggle is yet to be seen.

Shrewsbury: whose conspiracy?

'SHREWSBURY - WHOSE CONSPIRACY? The need for an inquiry' by Des Warren. Published by New Park

by MIKE ROOKE

At a time of renewed pressure from the ruling class for legal repression of picketing and other trade union rights, it is timely to recall the successful use of the law against building worker pickets in 1973. As plenty of evidence at the time revealed the building employers, the Home Office and the police conspired to frame 24 building workers from the North Wales area on criminal charges in relation to the events of the 1972 national building strike. It was openly admitted by Judge Mais who presided over the Shrewsbury trials, that the vicious sentences handed out were intended to have a 'deterrent effect against effective trade union picketing'.

Nor were the building workers a chance target. They had hit the building employers hard during the 1972 strike, but nevertheless were still one of the weaker sections of the trade union movement and therefore less able to resist a legal attack. That the pickets served their long jail sentences is a damning indictment of the inaction of the TUC and UCATT leadership. As Des Warren (who received and served a three year jail sentence) puts it in the pamphlet: "Shrewsbury plays a key role because it not only exposes the conspiracy of the ruling class against our movement - it also shows how the leadership of our movement measures up to the heat of the class confrontation. Perhaps this is why Shrewsbury is such an embarrassment to sections of our movement who would like to forget all about it".

Warren begins by asking the question, how was it that, despite the massive condemnation of the trials and the sentences from all sections of the labour movement, 'it would or could not act to ensure our freedom'? He points to the abject failure of the trade union leaders - left and right - to mobilise any action to force their release (UCATT completely abandoned the pickets to the fate of the law), and also to the complicity of the Labour Government which 'appeared not only to have upheld but defended and sustained the frame-up'.

But even more significantly Warren's criticisms extend to the Communist Party of which he has been a member for the last 16 years. He claims that the CP is in the 'strangle hold of reformism' and that 'advocates of the British Road to Socialism stick their heads in the sand. They do their best to ignore anything which is a contradiction of the British Road, and this includes Shrewsbury'.

The CP dominated North Wales Defence Committee campaign in support of the pickets restricted its efforts to the reverential legal defence of those on trial plus moral pressure on the TUC to protest to the Labour Government to show clemency for those jailed. They refused to mobilise the only force capable of effecting the release of the pickets - the rank and file of the trade union movement. Only two years previously it had shown its militancy and power in the mass strike wave that forced the release of the jailed dockers from Pentonville. But the CP refused to build up such a movement, relying instead on cultivating an alliance with those bureaucrats in the TUC who were willing to lend them an ear. The end result, after two years of conferences, rallies and demonstrations, was that the pickets remained in gaol!

After failing to successfully defend Warren the CP tried to force him to comply with ruling class judgement. While he was inside, the Party advised him to co-operate with the prison regime and submit applications for parole. Such actions would have meant 'recanting and accepting guilt for a political trial', which as Warren

correctly points out would have been used to slander the movement and underpin the deterrent effect which the Tories hoped the sentences would have.

On top of this the CP rejected Warren's request of producing a pamphlet on the whole Shrewsbury affair. That CP member Des Warren has been forced to publish his pamphlet with the assistance of the Workers Revolutionary Party, while Lawrence and Wishart (the CP's publishing house) have recently published a history of UCATT by its General Secretary Les Wood, which does a whitewash job on the role of the leadership in the 1972 strike and the Shrewsbury campaign, speaks volumes about their utterly compromised, reformist politics!

THE DECLINE OF THE BUILDING WORKERS' CHARTER (BWC)

In 1973 the CP, the BWC and the LCFTU could, without doubt, have brought out many thousands of workers in defence of the Shrewsbury pickets. The BWC, despite its CP leadership, was at that time the largest and most influential rank and file organisation anywhere in the trade union movement. The BWC had since 1970 made a powerful impact on the rank and file of the building unions and was largely responsible for the groundswell of militancy which forced the UCATT leadership into a national strike in 1972. The CP, which set up and controlled the BWC, had been forced into a militant stance largely because of the right-wing anti-communist regime of George Smith, the UCATT General Secretary. This afforded the CP few chances of winning official positions within the upper echelons of the bureaucracy, thus it was forced for a while to mobilise the rank and file against the right-wing.

In 1973, however, these tactics began to change as the effect of amalgamation of the construction unions and the 1972 strike opened up opportunities for the CP within the official apparatus. The emphasis gradually shifted away from mobilisation of rank and file building workers towards cementing a 'progressive', left-wing bloc with a section of the UCATT bureaucracy. The ill-fated Shrewsbury campaign was the first mature expression of this approach. By 1975 and the end of the Shrewsbury campaign, the BWC had disintegrated, and by 1978 almost all the leading CP activists of the early 70's had accepted full-time organisers posts in UCATT and the TGWU.

In addition there was a sizeable representation of the CP members on the leading bodies of these unions and the BWC had been formally wound up. Small wonder then that Warren's insistence on raising the issue of Shrewsbury and his imprisonment is an acute embarrassment to the CP and their cosy alliance with the 'left-progressives' in UCATT.

The importance of Warren's pamphlet lies not only in his criticisms of the left and right of the trade union leadership, but also in revealing the shameful complicity of the CP in refusing to face up to the real lessons of Shrewsbury. The fault of the pamphlet is that it does not draw the correct political lessons from its denunciation of an inadequate and betraying leadership. The fact remains that a rank and file movement must again be built in the construction industry as well as in the rest of the trade union movement. Such a rank and file movement - built in opposition to all sections of the trade union bureaucracy - could provide the force to ensure that any future Des Warren's are kept out of the bosses' prisons.

workers power



These men must be stopped



Terry Duffy



John Boyd

THE DUFFY/BOYD right wing leadership of the AUEW scored a decisive victory at the first meeting of this year's National Committee in Blackpool on April 21st. They took all five positions in the elections for the standing orders sub-committee. Last year the NC, which decides policy for the union's 1,235,000 members, was split 26-26 on most major issues. This year, however, all the proposals coming from the Communist Party-dominated Broad Left delegates have been voted down by the right by 29-23 with monotonous regularity.

This new right wing domination of the NC opens the way for a series of rule changes which Boyd and Duffy want discussed at the coming Rules Revision Conference in June.

Callaghan has been trying to pull a substantial group of right wing union block votes behind him for the next conference. He already has Weighell, Basnett, Sirs, Smith and Chapple to rely on. Duffy would be a powerful addition if he could use the entire block vote against the delegation's wishes. No surprise then that Callaghan eagerly accepted an invitation to address the NC!

To counter this development a struggle must be waged to take control of the block vote away from the bureaucrats and give it to the bodies that represent the rank and file membership at all levels of the union — from the representation of branches on local Party GMC's up to the delegation to annual conference.

There is a second major threat in this swing to the right. Recently, Duffy has been stating that he wants to see more amalgamations in the trade union movement. As all AUEW members know, he is at present attempting to amalgamate the four sections of the AUEW — foundry, construction, engineering and sheet-metal workers. He also desperately wants to EPTU to join this 'happy family'. Chapple, however, won't join until the AUEW structures have been revised along the lines of his union — massive branches, appointed officials (Branch Secretaries etc) and virtually no involvement of the rank and file.

The bosses have shown delight at the developments in the AUEW. The Economist commented, "The political march to the right of Britain's engineering workers' union could yet be more significant than its national strike last year." (April 26)

Rank and file militants must wipe the smug smiles off the faces of the bosses and Duffy. Militants, in both the Engineering Charter and the Broad Left, must be won to a programme that can challenge Duffy and Boyd. They must not only defend the existing structures, which has been the tenor of their propaganda so far, but must fight for a complete renovation of the union.

There must be a campaign for factory branches with meetings in work-time in order to lift the branches out of their present moribund state.

Alongside this, area committees need to be established to cover groups of factory branches and composed of democratically elected representatives.

The NC must be made accountable to, and recallable by, the members. Between conferences the Executive should be accountable to a more frequently meeting NC.

While we support the amalgamation of the four sections of the AUEW on the basis of the maximum of rank and file democracy, the amalgamation with the EPTU must be opposed by militants in both unions. The consolidation of such a block, especially under the control of Chapple and Duffy, would neither increase the bargaining power of either section of workers nor would it be a step toward industrial unionism.

The National Shop Stewards' Conference, which met twice late last year, should be recalled and opened to resolutions from all delegating bodies. It must set as its task the building of a rank and file movement that can oust the rotten Duffy/Boyd leadership and place the union in the hands of the members.

Evans' gift to Edwardes

By STEVE McSW'EENEY

The rights of trade unionists at BL Cars, fought for over decades, have been given away by Moss Evans and Terry Duffy. Over the last ten years union officials have made a career out of selling the conditions and living standards of their members—but this time they didn't even ask for a price. The central planks of union organisation at BL were presented to Michael Edwardes as a gift.

The imposition of Edwardes's 'Slaves Charter' on Wednesday 9th April was not accepted meekly by workers, as management had expected. Within days 18,000 were on strike. Management responded by threatening all strikers with the sack. In the face of this developing showdown between the unions and employers the attitude of the union officials was clearly shown by Grenville Hawley, chief negotiator for the T&GWU. Such a threat, he said would, 'Poison the atmosphere' at the talks which his boss, Moss Evans had pleaded for with management. As usual the main concern of the bureaucrats was to maintain their relationship with the bosses, not to give leadership in the fight that had developed to maintain jobs and conditions.

'Slaves Charter'

The 'Slaves Charter' is no minor alteration to the established custom and practice at BL cars. At one go it removes the key gains that trade unionists have made over the years. Among the most important changes it makes are:-

- Mutuality—the agreement that all changes in conditions must be accepted by shop stewards.
- All custom and practice—from now on the conditions of the 92 page management plan are to be recognised as the 'status quo' in negotiations.
- Lay off pay—in future there will be no lay off pay for loss of work as a result of a dispute anywhere in the Leyland combine.
- Shift patterns will be changed at management's decision.
- Flexibility—the plan dictates that workers can be transferred from section to section at management's will.

However, what the Daily Mail joyously greeted as the 'Absolute Surrender' of Evans and Duffy does not mean the absolute surrender of the workers at BL, despite the return to work by most of the strikers.

So enormous and far-reaching are the changes introduced by management that, almost before the ink was dry on Evans agreement, welders at Longbridge and painters at Pressed Steel Fisher were on strike against them. As the full meaning of the plan becomes clear to workers such walk-outs will increase in number. The militancy that Evans prevented from developing into a concerted, national action against Edwardes and company is in danger of being frittered away in localised, sectional disputes.

It is against this background of management offensive, union leadership surrender and rank and file bitt-

erness, that the Leyland Action Committee has called a national conference of BL workers. Such a conference is an absolute necessity and is long overdue. It should be supported and built for by all militants in the BL Combine.

What are the tasks that the conference must set itself? Firstly, it is now clear to everyone that the established shop floor leadership in BL dominated by the Communist Party, is totally incapable of leading a fight. Ever since its acceptance under Derek Robinson's leadership, of the participation scheme it has become more and more distant from the members, less and less willing to defend their interests against the attacks from management. A new leadership must be built. A National Shop Stewards Committee, composed of directly elected delegates from the plants must be established.

The 'old' shop steward movement in the plants developed out of the demands of the piece work system. Its task was to represent workers in the day to day fight to improve pay and conditions. As a result it was strongly rooted in every section and shop. But its horizons were limited, it confined itself to bargaining for the best deal in the given circumstances. When confronted with the declining profitability of BL its leaders found themselves, willingly or not, sucked into management's plan to make the workers pay the cost of restoring profits.

New leadership

A 'new' shop stewards movement will not grow spontaneously as did the 'old' one. The introduction of Measured Day Work has taken away much of the basis for this. The new conditions have completed the job. On the contrary a new movement will have to be consciously built and to do this it will have to base itself on a clear answer to the problems of the Eighties. The involvement of the rank and file in decision making was almost automatic when it was a question of deciding piecework rates, now it has to be recreated. The fact that no mass meetings were held at Longbridge and Cowley during the recent dispute shows above all the weakness of the leaderships in those plants. Mass meetings, of course, are not the be all and end all of shop floor democracy, equally important are section meetings at which arguments can be thrashed out, at which all shades of opinion have the right and the opportunity to speak out.

Democracy alone, however, will not create a leadership armed with the policies, adequate to the tasks that will face it. Militants have to be clear on what they must argue for within the meetings and in their leaflets and bulletins.

The crucial planks of the policy a new shop floor leadership must b

- Workers control—not just the fight to reestablish mutuality but the fight to impose a workers' veto on all management plans.
- Open the Books and Committees—against management 'participation' we call for the right of workers and their representatives to examine all internal and external accounts, all management plans and policies and all committee records.
- Work sharing with no loss of pay—against all redundancy and productivity dealing, shop stewards control of volume and pace of work and control of hiring and firing.
- The sliding scale of wages—as inflation goes up worker pay must not fall behind, for the creation of plant based price watch committees and the full involvement of all workers in the formulation of pay claims.
- Nationalisation under worker control of the entire motor industry, including the components companies, without compensation.

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.