

workers power

MONTHLY NEWSPAPER OF THE WORKERS POWER GROUP

INSIDE: BENN
IRISH ELECTIONS
ANSELL'S
PEOPLES MARCH

For an Unemployed Workers Union!

PROTESTS WILL NOT stop unemployment. Thousands of workers have demonstrated against unemployment in Liverpool, Glasgow and around the Peoples March. Thousands more will take to the streets of Cardiff on July 4th. Yet Thatcher's government still presides, more or less comfortably, over an economy that has condemned over 3 million people to the dole queues. Her resolve has not been shaken one bit by the various demonstrations, including the Peoples March.

SPORADIC PROTEST

The responsibility for this shameful inertia in the face of mass unemployment lies squarely on the shoulders of the reformist leaders of the working class.

The campaign of restricted and sporadic protest is the creation of the trade union and Labour Party leaders. It serves their purpose of letting off steam without posing any serious threat to the Tories. Further, it can be used by Foot and Murray to disguise the fact that they are refusing to lead an active fight against unemployment.

This strategy has a deadening and demoralising effect on workers who want to resist the bosses' offensive in the here and now. Attention is diverted, by the bureaucrats, away from workers actually fighting to save jobs - like those at Ansell's, Plansee and Lee Jeans. Periodic pro-

tests are posed as substitutes for occupations, for direct action to resist closures and redundancies as they are occurring. This way the bureaucrats keep the militants isolated, as they did at Ansell's, and pave the way for defeats.

CRIMINAL INACTION

It is high time that this criminal inaction by the leaders of the labour movement was challenged. The battle against unemployment can and must be waged on the basis of militant direct action by, in the first place, all those workers threatened with, or actually on, the dole queue.

The drift from the unions must be halted. Complacency on this question can only lead to the strengthening of right-wing forces. The fascists will use unemployed ex-union members against employed trade unions. Every worker who loses their job must be maintained in the union with full rights and minimum subs.

Campaigns must be launched by the unions to recruit unemployed people, particularly the youth. The bureaucratic rules that hinder a drive to unionise the unemployed must be swept out of the way. For example the fact that TGWU unemployed members are not eligible for any union benefits until they have paid full subs for 39 weeks discourages thousands of unemployed people from joining that union. Likewise the GMWU's refusal to allow minimum subs rates for the unemployed unless they have previously paid 12 months subs at full rates makes

membership impossible for thousands of unemployed.

But in arguing for the unemployed to stay in or join unions, we need to prevent them from being neutralised in "holding" branches under the direct control of the officials. The unemployed branch of the TGWU in Liverpool, which did a lot of work to build the Peoples March, shows that unemployed branches do have an active role to play. But they must have full rights and representation at every level of the union. Workers in the Ansell's TGWU branch in Birmingham similarly need to fight for their branch to become a recognised unemployed branch.

But the unemployed cannot simply be organised in the trade unions. They need an organisation that enables them to organise as the unemployed, within the labour movement. An unemployed workers union in every town and a national union, must be built. Such a union will not separate the unemployed from the trade unions. Groups like the Workers Revolutionary Party, the International Marxist Group and the Spartacist League, who argue that it would do so, merely echo the worst prejudices of the Labour aristocracy and bureaucracy, jealous of their "trade union" privileges.

SUPPORT FOR PICKETS

An unemployed workers union, with full rights at every level of the trade union movement, would act as the organised voice of the unemployed within

the labour movement. It would provide the backbone for linking up the unemployed with the employed, by organising support for pickets, strikes and occupations. It would force the labour movement to support campaigns which would directly benefit the unemployed. That is, campaigns of pickets, of occupations of council premises, government buildings, to force through demands for:

- * Free transport for the unemployed.
- * Free leisure, sporting and educational facilities for the unemployed.
- * Provision of social services (meals etc) for the unemployed.

APPEAL TO THE YOUTH

Crucially an unemployed workers union, making the unemployed a visible force, through pickets, demonstrations, meetings, social activities etc, would have a direct appeal to the youth. School leavers are often obstructed from joining unions. They can become easy prey for the fascists. A militant unemployed workers union would win youth to the ranks of the labour movement. Such a union would link up with employed workers in struggle in committees to coordinate action around the fight for jobs.

An unemployed workers union could prevent the TUC from turning the centres they have established, into MSC-controlled sympathy centres. The TUC have 12 unemployed centres running full-time and 30 that are part-time.



Their view of the role that these centres have was made clear in a circular:

"should any trade union body seeking to establish a centre act outside TUC guidelines in any way that could damage the interests of the unemployed or the trade union movement or could put at risk the public funding of the centres, it would be for the TUC Regional Council concerned to inform the TUC and the appropriate local authority".

The centres are being funded by councils and the MSC. They are for counselling, advice, and little else. They are run by appointed management committees. Once again the TUC can present itself as concerned - but will in fact join hands with Tory and Labour councils and the MSC to pull the teeth from any centre that looked like becoming a focus for action.

Against this we say that unemployed workers must take over the centres. They should demand:

- * Funding from councils, MSC and the TUC with no strings attached.

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LABOUR: END THE SILENCE! BREAK WITH THE TORIES!

THE DEATH OF Bobby Sands MP and the other H-Block hunger strikers may not have broken Thatcher's determination to see the strikes broken through to the last death. But it has opened up the issue of the British occupation of the six counties in the labour movement.

A monstrous conspiracy to silence any debate or dissent whatsoever has been maintained for years by the Labour and Trade Union leaders. The reasons for this are simple. To be trusted in office by the bosses, bankers and generals Labour ministers have to be 'trusties' i.e. they have to possess a proven record of slavish fidelity to the interests of British capitalism—to be proven 'patriots'.

The Prime Minister, the Home Secretary, Foreign Secretary, the Northern Ireland Ministers the armed services ministers, must all be 'reliable' from the point of view of the rul-

ing class. These ministers know most of the secret workings of the bosses state. They know its secret police, its spying network, its contingency plans and all that passes under the term 'national security' and is in fact the 'security' of the bosses property, the safety of the capitalist system.

Look at the list of Labour ministers entrusted with these areas Callaghan, Roy Jenkins, Merlyn Rees, David Owen, Roy Mason Denis Healey. All of them have an impeccable record for unswervingly defending every blood-deed of British imperialism.

Foot, to an extent, comes from outside the immediate charmed circle of the hard-nosed Labour Right. According to the testimony of Benn and others he was kept in the dark about many issues whilst he sat in the cabinets of Wilson and Callaghan. He was, by then, a completely spent force as a 'left' obligingly fixing deals with Enoch Powell's Orange bigots to

keep Labour in office. But his earlier record of rhetorical left wind-bagging and tearful moralism doubtless left a big question mark on his security screening file.

Since his elevation to Labour leader Foot has been working overtime to prove his loyalty of course he has always been a red-white-and-blue socialist. But his craven echoing of the obscenities Thatcher hurled at the dying hunger striker Sands stuck in the craw of many labour supporters. His post haste despatch of the odious Don Concannon to carry a message to Sands that he need not hope for any assistance from the Labour Party deeply shamed thousands of honest Labour militants. Even those who had not thought much about the issue before smelt a rat when they heard Foot backing the hated Thatcher to the hilt.

Typically Tony Benn knew his moment. He knew the enormous subterranean unpopularity

of the war in Ireland (opinion polls have revealed 60% in favour of withdrawal). For this very reason the Labour and Tory chiefs have for ten years maintained an absolute black-out on debate. Exposed to the air and light of discussion in the Labour movement the Wilson-Callaghan-Foot policy of propping up the Orange statelet by brute force, and the expenditure of millions of pounds in order to take or ruin thousands of lives, would crumble to dust.

Herein lies the merit of Benn's statement. It breaches the wall of silence. It insists on the right to speak out on Ireland—a right long stifled in the Labour Party and also by TUC directives and the disaffiliation of dissenting Trades Councils like Tameside.

Benn's 'solution' is a weak one. He does not call for immediate and unconditional with-

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TROOPS OUT OF IRELAND NOW!

Against Healey, we stand with Benn and his supporters. With Benn's supporters, and against him when necessary, we stand for a programme of action that can launch an immediate and meaningful fightback.

TONY BENN IS riding a mounting tide of support, both in the constituencies and in the trade unions, in his challenge for the Deputy Leadership of the Labour Party. His well-timed offensive comes at a time when Healey has clearly been discredited among Labour activists and Trade Union officials alike, and the trade union leaders are incapable of uncovering an alternative candidate amenable to themselves yet capable of beating Benn and Healey. They can only agree that they have no alternative to put up to the decrepit Michael Foot, who they were forced, reluctantly, to accept as the least unpalatable candidate for Party leadership. That is why they cling to the ailing and ageing Foot.

Backed by the fanfares of Fleet Street, Foot has thrown down his challenge to Benn to take Foot on in a no-holds barred wrestle for the leadership. But this fading warrior offers his challenge out of weakness not strength. He wants to avoid coming out four-square behind Healey for fear of alienating Labour's activists and the TUC itself. He can only hope to have appeased the right in the TUC and PLP by this feeble, quixotic attempt to save Healey from an open fight at conference.

FIGHT THE ENFEEBLED FOOT

That Benn spurned Foot's challenge is no surprise and no sign of weakness. Benn can afford to turn down an immediate fight with Foot with the same disdain as if he were refusing to pick a dead flower. The tide in the Labour Party is flowing against those who are directly responsible for the last Labour Government and who still defend its record. Benn is out to put himself at the head of that tide by taking on Healey. To fight the enfeebled Foot would be a diversion, at present, in his drive for leadership in the Labour Party.

Benn's decision to stand against Healey was considered by his supporters to be the best method of defending the decisions of the Wembley conference in January, to broaden the franchise for electing the Party's leadership. Putting the proposed procedures into operation was their best means of ensuring that they were not scrapped.

It was also seen as the best way of furthering the success of Benn's programme for the Labour Party. This programme has been whittled down to five points for this election bid. In this election he is standing for: *Withdrawal for the EEC; *Commitment to a non-nuclear NATO; *Support for full employment through the Alternative Economic Strategy; *A policy of expanded social services; *and a panoply of measures designed to increase and protect individual liberties and make government more open and accountable.

The Wembley decision on the electoral college - to give the Unions 40% of the votes, MPs and Constituencies 30% each - was itself the result of an inability to agree amongst the far right union leaders (Chappell, Duffy, Weighell) and the centre-right (Basnett, Gormley, Sirs) over the relative weight of the PLP in the college. Since the conference the trade union leaders have regrouped their forces, unified behind Foot and are determined to reverse that decision in the autumn. They want to replace the Wembley decision with a 50-25-25 solution (with the PLP having 50%), which they consider offers them their best bet for re-establishing PLP and union bureaucracy control over the direction of Party policy.

Initially the majority of trade union leaders saw Benn's candidacy as a minor irritant which they could counter by a combined strategy of dinner-table deals

and bureaucratic manoeuvre and pressure. Behind the scenes deals resulted in Foot securing the services of the ASTMS Executive, and the TGWU, who put pressure on Benn not to contest the election. However, the early results from the union conferences have clearly rattled the right in the PLP and the TUC.

Skillful campaigning has enabled Benn to mobilise significant activist opinion in the unions over the heads of the union leaders. At the conservative USDAW and APEC conferences, Benn received surprisingly large minority support for his candidacy. More alarming for the PLP, USDAW actually confirmed their support for the 40-30-30 electoral college arrangement.

The decision of the ASTMS conference to actually support Benn against Healey, together with the recent NEC decision to firm up the reselection procedure for sitting MPs has forced the hand of the Centre of the Party around Foot, to identify themselves more firmly with Healey. They are beginning to panic. Foot's endeavour to force the new aspiring deputy into a premature High Noon with Marshall Foot is a sign of that panic in the leadership of the PLP, not that Foot is brimming with daring and vitality as rinsed-out Peter Shore has claimed.

But there are very real problems for the PLP and the trade union leaders in pinning their defence against Benn on Denis Healey's candidature for Deputy leadership. Even within the PLP, Healey has lost his main props of support to the Social Democratic Party (SDP). Hence he is chronically dependent on the Centre of the Party, and on Fleet Street.

Healey, as Chancellor under the last Labour government, was primarily responsible for devising the savage attacks upon the working class that the union bureaucrats were forced to transmit - the Social Contract. The total inability of union leaderships to sell the final installment of this to the membership, in the winter of 1978/79, left a bitter taste in the mouths of many a labour bureaucrat.

HEALEY REMAINS PROUD

Nor is Healey promising anything different next time. He stands by Labour's record, would do the same again, and only retains any credibility because this Tory government have surpassed his dismal record. His is an image of the Labour Party that it is impossible to sell to party activists, nor is it likely to stir the hearts of Labour voters. It could not offer a credible ideological alternative to Thatcher. Although Foot and Benn too were responsible for the attacks of 1974-1979, they attempt now to distance themselves from it. Healey remains proud of it.

For these reasons it will be extremely embarrassing for several union leaderships, such as NUPE, ASTMS, TGWU to endorse Healey. That's why they would have preferred no contest. The ASTMS conference rejected the advice of their executive. Meanwhile, the centre-left leaders of the TGWU and NUPE hope to avoid the problem by either balloting the membership or leaving the decision in the hands of the delegates to the Labour Party conference.

Benn's great strength is his onslaught on the last Labour Government's record. He says what hundreds of thousands of Labour Party and trade union activists feel and know - the Labour shamelessly abandoned its promises of 1974 as soon as the militancy of 1972 to 1974 had been demobilised, Wilson, Healey and Callaghan turned on the unions in the years 1976-1979 as uncritical lackeys of the CBI and the IMF. Benn says this loud and clear and everyone knows it is true.

Furthermore, Benn offers a "solution". Accountability and democracy. Basically he says the Labour Party's programme and policies are fine. They are not discredited. They have never been tried. The Parliamentarians, free of all control, are elected (launched

PUT BENN TO THE TEST

into orbit like a missile, to quote one of Benn's most graphic similes), and yield immediately to the pressure of the CBI and the IMF on the one hand and the civil service mandarins on the other. Benn's solution is to subordinate the PLP, and the leaders and cabinet it elects (including a Labour Prime Minister), to the "decisions of conference". Thus the "untried", "moderate reform" programme can be put into action. None of Benn's rivals can offer an alternative half as credible to disillusioned activists.

Benn is not the wild demagogue that his enemies depict him as. He does not rely on the spontaneous, unorganised enthusiasm of the masses to lift him to power. That would be too uncertain and too dangerous. He is, rather, a well-seasoned and astute manoeuvrer. Having outrun his Tribune rivals and organised a formidable base in the constituency parties, Benn has recognised the trade unions as the decisive battle-ground.

For over 18 months Benn has, through the Labour Coordinating Committee (LCC), been studiously cultivating a wholestratum of middle-level trade union officials - regional or divisional bureaucrats, seasoned lay delegates and branch secretaries. It is this layer that forms the bulk of the delegates to union annual conferences. If they can be won over, then Benn can neutralise the hostility of the national union leaderships to his cause. Benn's longstanding relationship to bodies like the Institute for Workers Control (IWC), also serves this purpose.

Benn is not a hasty and vainglorious grab for power. He has spent years cultivating this soil. At events such as the July 18th LCC Trade Union Conference, he hopes to gather some of the fruit. The union conferences over the summer will prove whether the yield of such labours is sufficient to tip the scales against Healey in the autumn. But even if he is frustrated by the big union bosses, the movement "from below" will continue to grow.

The revolutionary critique of Benn and his programme is two-fold. Firstly, it is utopian to seek to "reform" capitalist power away via a parliamentary majority. The CBI's economic sabotage, the Whitehall bureaucrats obstruction and the delays of the House of Lords are merely the outer perimeter defences of capitalism. They are sufficient usually to break the half-hearted reformist pipe-dreams of the average Labour or Social-Democratic government.

A SINCERE FOOL

Behind these outlying trenches lies the real fortress of the army, the police force, the judiciary and the monarchy. If Benn thinks these will yield to the pressure of the ballot box and the mass protest demonstration then he is either a sincere fool or he is calculatingly deceiving the working class as to the enemy it really faces.

Secondly, Benn's tactics today are a blind alley now in the middle of an unparalleled Tory offensive aimed at decimating jobs, curbing wages and cutting the social services to shreds. Benn openly abdicates his responsibility as a leader to formulate a programme of active resistance. In a recent interview he said:

"I think the role of leadership is to analyse, to encourage, to support, but not to order or to call in that sense. That has to be done by the people directly involved...I do not think it's for the parliamentary leadership to tell people what to do" (Socialist Challenge Issue 200)

This is a devious and dishonest reply. Benn is no anarchist or spontaneist. He is standing for Deputy Leader of the Labour Party. Benn's objections to action calls refer solely to **extra-parliamentary direct action**. Benn is prepared to call, urge and lead - as long as it leads down pacific protest, and ultimately electoral channels. He distances himself in principle from direct working class action - strikes, factory occupations etc, strategically central to the struggle for socialism - demagogically saying that they lead to Stalinism.

He only supports industrial action **tactically** when he is confronted with it and only in so far as it does not challenge the authority of Parliament to make political decisions. As in 1971 (at the Upper Clyde Shipbuilders work-in) and 1981 (the Lee Jeans Occupation), Benn is prepared under pressure to express solidarity with workers in struggle **against the Tories** only because he believes that with a Tory government in power, the working class's **political** aspirations are blocked. Once an "accountable" Labour government is in, however, there will be no need for such action.

Nevertheless, Benn's support in the rank and file is growing and will continue to grow. The more the betrayals of the trade union leaders and the defeats of the isolated struggles serve to confuse and demoralise militants, so the larger looms the image of Benn and a Bennite Labour government as the only solution.

Benn is now under the constant attention of the active vanguard of the working class and must be put to the test of action. Within the Labour Party, militants must not allow Benn to draw back from a confrontation with the right as the spineless "Left" Eric Heffer advocates. He must not be allowed to bend to "party unity" or "collective responsibility". His loyalties must be **solely** with the needs of workers in struggle.

Benn has helped to open up debate on numerous questions on which his own prescriptions are limited and in error - Ireland for example. Revolutionaries can and should intervene in these debates, sharpening and focusing them towards action by the wards and constituencies.

Within the unions, every attempt must be made this summer and beyond to break the stranglehold of the union bureaucrats over the block vote. A fight to take the block vote of the unions into the hands of the rank and file of the unions would automatically go beyond the question of the Deputy Leadership election, although such a step would virtually guarantee Benn's election. It would begin to break down the barriers between political and trade union questions, between trade union tactics and parliamentary and municipal vote-catching. It would raise the whole question of trade union democracy and the "accountability" of the bureaucrats. In this ferment the task of revolutionaries is not to present beautiful pictures of a "transformed" Labour Party, but to show the links between workers democracy and successful direct action against the bosses and capitalism.

We advocate a critical vote for Benn in the autumn elections. Benn's careful manoeuvrist strategy, together with his programme, offers no way forward. Yet his limited mobilising appeal must be exploited, because through Benn, the rank and file express their elemental hostility to the candidate of the IMF and Fleet Street and the CIA. Against Healey, we stand with Benn and his supporters. With Benn's supporters, and against him when necessary, we stand for a programme of action that can launch an immediate and meaningful fightback. ■

KEITH HASSELL

▶▶ STILL AVAILABLE! ◀◀

Back issues of WORKERS POWER on developments in the Labour Party and the tactics revolutionaries should adopt.

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WHENEVER OSTENSIBLY TROTSKYIST organisations take up opportunist positions, it is normally done in the name of 'anti-sectarianism'. This is convenient camouflage. The Trotskyist movement has been dogged by splits. Any declaration of intent to fuse Trotskyist organisations can appear to be a break from this apparently 'sectarian' tradition. The Workers Socialist League, as we predicted in Workers Power 21, have made such a declaration. They have announced that they will be fusing with the International Communist League, whose supporters are grouped around the paper Socialist Organiser.

Workers Power does not underestimate the damage done to revolutionary communism by the existence of numerous small organisations claiming to be Trotskyist. We have declared ourselves to be in favour of regroupment. But, for us, regroupment can only last, can only be prevented from breaking up into further, potentially demoralising splits, if it is carried out on the basis of a revolutionary programme. Goodwill and non-aggression pacts are no substitute for the hammering out of the real political differences that do exist between the organisations that claim to be Trotskyist.

The proclaimed fusion of the ICL and WSL is not taking place on such a basis. The battle against sectarianism, with no specification of the political content of the sectarianism referred to, is the major point of agreement between the two tendencies. The WSL's soon-to-be wound up newspaper, Socialist Press, made this clear:

"both the WSL and the ICL have for some time committed themselves to a struggle against sectarian isolation from the mass movement, and sat out to intervene in the struggle within the organised working class". (Socialist Press 14th May 1981.)

There are few organisations who would declare in favour of 'sectarian isolation'—but that does not mean that a basis for unity exists.

FORMAL DECLARATIONS

The WSL obviously recognise the shortcomings of their own position. In their report on the fusion they are unclear on whether the new organisation yet has a principled basis, or whether it in fact has to find one:

"The fusion is the most substantial attempt so far to find a principled basis to tackle the problem of the Trotskyist movement in Britain" (our emphasis).

If this is the case then it would be reasonable to expect some political accounting for the differences that have previously separated these organisations. Only last summer the WSL wrote a series of polemics against the ICL, which went so far as to accuse the latter of being "engaged in a process of political adaptation to the left reformist forces now engaging in the Labour Party: an adaptation which involves the junking of previously established political positions" (SP 6th August 1980).

But no such accounting has ever appeared in the WSL's press. What is apparent, however, is a shift in their own position on the Labour Party. A shift which has placed them on the same opportunist terrain as the ICL despite their apparently rigid, but entirely formal, declarations of adherence to Trotskyism.

The political and organisational liquidation of the ICL can easily be traced. Their supporters switched from the ICL first to becoming Workers Action supporters, then to the Socialist Campaign for a Labour Victory (SCLV). Out of the SCLV Socialist Organiser supporters groups were born (which involved dropping Workers Action as a regular newspaper), and now there is to be a new Socialist Organiser Alliance, which will include Socialist Press supporters in the Labour Party.

This political equivalent to musical chairs has, at every stage, involved greater degrees of political adaptation to the left reformists inside the Labour Party. The SCLV, which included, and initially apologised for, Ernie Roberts, Ted Knight and Ken Livingstone, was a rotten propaganda bloc that never once acted to put its left supporters to the test of action. For example it covered for Ernie Roberts in 1978 when he went along with the ANL's refusal to direct their carnival to challenge the fascists who were marching on the same day.

NOT SCIENTIFIC

The SCLV's paper, Socialist Organiser, was fashioned to fit in with joint activity with the reformists around democracy and accountability within the Labour Party. When Workers Action was dropped in the summer of 1980, Socialist Organiser made clear that it was not based on a revolutionary programme inside the Labour Party: "The political platform contained in our Where We Stand column is not a scientific programme" (SO 30/8/80).

The battle for Labour Party democracy was described as the most crucial aspect of the class struggle.

Before closing down, Workers Action had spelt out the premises for this position. It advanced the idea that the depth and temper of the capitalist crisis, together with the democratic reforms within the Labour Party opened up the possibility of "transforming" the Labour Party into "a real instrument of the working class". A "real instrument" was a handy substitute for the revolutionary party, which was, after all, proving difficult to build.

In addition the ICL proclaimed that the democratic reforms of the 1979 Labour Party Brighton Conference "demonstrates that transforming the political wing of the labour movement is a possibility, and thus that it is possible to raise the transitional demand

AN EXERCISE IN POLITICAL LIQUIDATION

SOCIALIST PRESS ★

Socialist Organiser

for a workers government in Britain, where in the initial stages such a government would inevitably have the Labour Party as its major or only component" (Workers Action No 174 26/4/80).

Prepared to settle for second best with regard to the party, the ICL were also prepared to settle for second best as far as the Workers' Government was concerned. A Workers' Government which was, in effect, a left reformist led Labour government, made more accountable through the reselection of MPs, was posited by Workers Action as a definite and desirable stage of the class struggle.

As long ago as the summer of 1980 the WSL approvingly quoted Zinoviev against the opportunist position of the ICL:

"Woe to us if we allow the suggestion to creep into our propaganda that the workers government is a necessary step, to be achieved peacefully as a period of semi-organic construction which may take the place of civil war" (Socialist Press No 202 16/7/80).

Then the WSL said it was only permissible to raise the slogan "workers government" "in the context of the overall strategy of socialist revolution in which the objective is not simply another parliamentary Labour government but to establish a government genuinely representative of the working class, a workers government based firmly on the independent strength of the workers movement, organised through councils of action. Only on this basis can such a government take the necessary steps of nationalisation and destruction of the machinery of the capitalist state" (Socialist Press No 207 16/7/80).

This position quite clearly has little to do with the one put forward by the ICL.

NO EXPLANATION GIVEN

The reader of Socialist Press has not been given any explanation of the WSL's change of position on the workers' government question. Yet, changed it has - in the direction of the ICL version of the slogan that had formerly been described as "liquidationist". From at least February 1981, the WSL was abandoning its original position. Thus, SP 236 proclaims in the wake of the miners victory: "the only guarantee of protection for jobs and living standards is the mobilisation of the labour movement for a general strike to bring down the Tories and to press home the fight for socialist policies from a Labour government". (Socialist Press 25/2/81).

Tied to this is a refusal to take on and criticise the "lefts" who are going to lead this new Labour government. This was later made explicit in the joint SO/SP, People's March Supplement: "Build a new leadership in the workers movement prepared to fight for these policies against the right-wing and the Communist Party!". The "socialist policies" referred to above, which included correct calls for direct action, are apparently not under threat from the "lefts" like Benn - but merely from Denis Healey and Gordon McLennan. Such a position actually serves to bolster illusions in the likes of Benn and prepares the way for defeats of the working class as a result of left reformist treachery.

Taken as a whole, together with the absence of the old WSL call for a revolutionary leadership and the absence of a call for Councils of Action as the base for this government, these positions represent a complete surrender to the positions of the ICL and SO.

In the joint Peoples March paper, the WSL dropped all pretense of opposing the formula on the workers government pioneered by Workers Action:

"All this will require the stepping up of the campaign for democracy in the Labour Party and the trade unions, so that the Labour movement can take on the capitalist state and impose a government accountable to the movement - a workers' government". Benn and Co become an indispensable bridge in the transition to a workers state. How different from the statement by the WSL-led Trotskyist International Liaison Committee (TILC):

"It is on the construction of such a Trotskyist leadership and not on any ability of the reformists and Stalinists to transform themselves into a revolutionary force that the fate of the struggle for a workers government and the dictatorship of the proletariat must depend" (Socialist Press 207).

Further, the capitulation to Socialist Organiser does not stop at the question of the Labour Party. At the recent National Left Wing Youth Movement Conference, the WSL's youth wing, the Socialist Youth League (SYL), voted against a Workers Power call for a "revolutionary working class youth movement", which they themselves had hitherto called for. They also argued that the ANL, formerly denounced, correctly, as popular frontist, now represented a positive arena for anti-fascist work. On both of these points, they were conceding to the positions of Socialist Organiser, so as to hold together the new alliance.

We are not surprised at these shifts in position by the WSL leadership. Our paper has polemicalised against the weakness of the WSL's political method on a range of issues. In discussion with them last summer and autumn, we pointed out the instability of their positions, arguing that it was a consequence of their method. A method which failed to understand the interconnection of principles, strategy and tactics. Thus despite repeated proclamations of loyalty to the principles of Trotskyism, the WSL are now uncritically trudging along the opportunist path of political capitulation to left reformism. What lies at the root of this development?

REACTIONARY CASTE

The WSL have always had a clear conception of the nature of the trade union bureaucracy as a betrayer of working class struggles. But the working class, upon which this reactionary caste sits, was presented by the WSL as virtually homogenous - always willing and able to struggle against a bosses offensive. The union bureaucrats, particularly Stalinists, were constantly working to hold back this struggle. All that was needed was a party, armed with Trotsky's 1938 Transitional Programme, to replace the union bureaucracy. While it is true that the bureaucracy will betray or try to betray every workers struggle, it is not true that workers are always struggling and are always defeated only by the action of the bureaucracy. Such a view is thoroughly undialectical. It underestimates the effect of the betrayals on the organisation and capacity to fight of the rank and file. It prevents the WSL from recognising defeats and periods of retreat in the class struggle.

In the April 1980 WSL conference perspectives, they did, for once, recognise the possibility of such set-backs: "Failure to understand that such a period (ie of retreat - WP) is one possibility, where the attacks of the employers and the government appear to be successful, will demoralise our comrades in the way it can also demoralise layers of militant workers". (SP 16/4/80). Yet in the Socialist Press review of British class struggle in 1980 by T. Smith (SP 12/12/80), we are presented with a scenario of undifferentiated betrayal and working class combativity. There is no understanding of the effect of the defeat of the steel strike (April), and TUC passivity (May 14th) on the rank and file. Factors which led to a serious retreat in the working class in the second half of 1980.

But if the analysis was wrong, the prescription was worse. A casual glance through SP during 1974-1979, the period of the last Labour government, will show that much time and energy was spent in exhorting (ie "make") the "lefts" to fight the right-wing leadership of Callaghan-Healey. We have always argued that this "Make the Lefts Fight" position was wrong. It is a sterile schema. It poses left social democracy in power (now graciously dubbed a "workers government") as an inevitable and necessary stage of the class struggle. There is a deeply embedded seed of opportunism in the slogan (which explains why the WSL are willing to concede on the question to the ICL).

It implies that the "lefts" do somehow represent a way forward for the working class. The real point is for revolutionaries to demand of any and all workers leaders that they fight for policies that represent workers interests, irrespective of the positions they occupy. Of course we recognise the possibility of a tactical compromise in which we would call on the working class to put the Labour lefts to the test of action, even to take governmental office. But this tactic does not form part of our programme - we do not raise the demand as a blanket demand always and under all conditions, as part of the struggle for power. To do so can

only imply that the "lefts" somehow represent a qualitative alternative to the right-wing. It spreads illusions - it does not combat them.

The WSL's schema in 1974-1979 appeared very hard, accompanied as it was by fierce denunciations of Benn's refusal to challenge Callaghan for the leadership. But under a Labour government the schema was inoperable since the "left" always backed away from a confrontation with the right in order to preserve the Labour government.

The opportunist core of the prescription has emerged since October 1980. Why then? Firstly, the WSL and Socialist Press continued to desperately look for the working class upsurge against the Tories, long after it was clear that a mood of caution and retreat predominated. Revolutionaries recognise that new tactics are required for such a period. But Socialist Press continued to fiddle while Rome burned. Yet the smoke eventually got up their nose. Recognising that the working class was not straining at its leash in the industrial front, and since it must be moving left somewhere, the WSL found that movement in the Labour Party, in Tony Benn's campaign around democratic reforms. Or, as the editor of Socialist Press, John Lister put it: "Telling confirmation of the emergence of a mass anti-capitalist current within the British labour movement was offered by this year's Labour Party conference" (SP No 218 3/10/80).

Since the "left" were now fighting, without the onerous responsibility of keeping a Labour government in office, it is no longer a question of "making" them fight, but of "helping" them fight. Enter ICL stage right.

A DEMORALISED ORGANISATION

The WSL have taken their time coming around to these positions. After all, Brighton in 1979 saw the beginnings of Benn's fight, and in 1980 the WSL still poured scorn on the ICL and Benn. But the WSL is now a demoralised organisation. T. Smith's warnings about "demoralisation of our comrades" have become a reality, in the face of a working class retreat that the WSL are not equipped to understand. The much-vaunted Cowley base is seriously weakened following two years of defeats in BL at the hands of the Tories. The WSL has not grown significantly. Added to this the WSL has been ravaged by two splits to the sectarian Spartacist League, and the leadership feels the possibility of another, on its right wing, by its Labour Party activists who have gazed enviously for years at the Socialist Organiser project.

The ritual proclamations of John Lister fool nobody: "The discussion has been marked throughout by an avoidance on both sides of any attempt to impose a "moratorium" on differences or "agree to disagree" formulae that have marred previous fusion bids and laid the basis for further splits" (SP No 246 14/5/81). Differences over Afghanistan, the ANL, work amongst women, and the EEC, at one time all symptomatic of differences in method, are now glossed over as "tactical", or simply conceded on.

The WSL leadership have already capitulated to the ICL on a number of points without a fight. Even more portentous they have "agreed to disagree" over "trifling" questions like the creation of degenerate workers states after the war, on which an analysis of and programme towards Stalinism depends. Without clarification on such questions, differences, like those over Afghanistan, will occur again.

An unprincipled fusion, psalms of praise for the Labour left, and the call for a "workers government" which will in fact be a "new" left/Benn-led Labour government, are all embraced by the WSL in their bid to avoid "sectarianism".

PROGRAMMATIC CLARITY

The "new" WSL is being founded on an "anti-sectarian" basis. For both organisations this formula is short-hand for discounting all obstacles and differences between themselves and between them and "the movement of the working class that actually exists, and as it actually exists, here and now in Britain" (SO 30/8/80). These obstacles are not merely organisational. They include "ideological formulas" (ibid), presumably such as the revolutionary programme and party.

Against this, we would insist that the failure, hitherto, to build Trotskyist parties is not because the revolutionary programme is an obstacle to intervention in the class struggle, but because it has either been trampled on by centrists or turned into a lifeless fetish by sectarians.

The starting point for any regroupment of revolutionaries, therefore, is the question of programmatic clarity, as the basis for revolutionary intervention in the class struggle. Trotsky made clear the essential relationship of these two things:

"How many times have we met a smug centrist who reckons himself a "realist" merely because he sets out to swim without any ideological baggage whatever, and is tossed by every vagrant current. He is unable to understand that principles are not dead ballast but a lifeline for a revolutionary swimmer" (p154 Writings 1935-1936).

In short, the WSL leadership, tired and demoralised, are in the process of "junking Trotskyism" as they accused the Workers Revolutionary Party (WRP) of doing. They are displaying a light-minded contempt for their membership who they hope will not remember the polemics or the lessons they tried to teach the IMG about "spurious unity".

To those in the ranks of both organisations who are alarmed, we say:

Examine your past positions! Demand an honest accounting of your leadership! Do not let them take you along the road of political liquidation in silence! ■

SWP put to the test

IN THE FIRST two weeks of May the Western Leg gave a hint of the potential that existed for using the march to link up the struggles of employed and unemployed workers. It did so because the rank and file marchers were unwilling to allow the organisers to have it all their own way in running the march. The organisers intentions for the Western Leg were exactly the same as those on the tightly-policed Eastern Leg. Their mistake was to lose the initiative at the beginning of the March. Their misfortune was that they presided over a rank and file that contained elements determined to seize the initiative.

The appointment of stewards was the first issue to provoke a dispute on the march. After two incidents it became clear that the appointed stewards were trying to ride roughshod over the marchers' wishes. On Friday 1st May they tried to stop women on the march from wearing sashes calling for a woman's right to work. Then, in the evening, after an attack on the school where the marchers were staying in Halewood, the stewards threatened to discipline four unnamed marchers. Their crime was that they had tried to organise defence against the attack, amongst the marchers.

BATTLE FOR DEMOCRACY

WORKERS POWER supporters on the march, along with other left-wing marchers, pushed for a democratic meeting of the whole march to sort out these grievances and settle the question of who was running the march. On Sunday May 3rd this meeting was held - and the stewards were put in their place. A regularly meeting democratic assembly was to be the sovereign body of the march; stewards were to be elected from each section of the march; a disciplinary procedure was adopted to prevent marchers from being thrown off arbitrarily; five chief marshalls were appointed. But Peoples Marchers were not to be allowed to sell literature while they were in uniform or marching - a compromise agreed to by the Socialist Workers Party (SWP)'s leading steward on the march, John Deason.

These gains were important. In themselves they did not immediately alter the orientation of the march. For example, the next day, May 4th, at a rally in Irlam, a Tory Mayor was allowed to speak from the platform! However, two things were allowed to develop - relatively free political discussion on the march and the right of marchers to send out delegations to workers in struggle. The organisers - the local henchmen of the TUC and their Communist Party (CP) backers - spent the rest of the march trying to defuse the potential for a militant march that this battle for democracy had opened up. Throughout the Manchester region, the marchers visited or were visited by, workers in dispute - United Glass workers from St Helens; workers from Royal Pride, Laurence Scott, Schreiber Furniture and others in Manchester. But nowhere - from Manchester onwards - was the march allowed to become a spur for action.

The reforms in the march's regime did not succeed in transforming the march into a focus for militant struggle. This was made abundantly clear in the West Midlands. The march could and should have linked up with the Ansell's workers to support and encourage their struggle, build and strengthen their picket lines and actively win industrial backing for their struggle against redundancy. There was sufficient fire in the march to twice drive TGWU official Mathers (architect of the sell-out at Ansell's) off the March platforms. But the organisers retained enough grip to attempt to keep Ansell's workers of "their" platforms and leave Birmingham without giving any real support to this continuing struggle for jobs.

BETRAYED BY S.W.P.

Mobilisations to greet the march in Manchester, Stoke, West Bromwich and Birmingham were made up largely of token delegations from workplaces. Nowhere did the call for strike action go out from the organisers or from the organisers of the delegations. In Coventry, a town whose once prosperous workforce is now staring in the face the grim reality of mass unemployment, a mass mobilisation did take place. It took place largely as a result of spontaneous strike action to greet the march. The town square was packed with workers, represented by about 60 trade union banners. Only in Sheffield, where the walk-outs that took place were ones that the Stalinist-dominated AUEW had negotiated with the bosses, was there such a large reception.

The TUC, spearheaded by their man in the South East Region, Jack Dromey, saw the warning signs. Any more Coventrys and the march could get out of hand. From then on - and particularly after Northampton when the Western Leg stewards were reinforced by Brennan Bates' very own Eastern Leg Special Patrol Group - the organisers reasserted control.

Democratic Assemblies were replaced by "information meetings" at which Dromey droned on. A promised assembly at Watford on May 27th was turned into an "information meeting" and when marchers protested, the organisers turned on the large TV screens (to show the European Cup Final) in order to break up the meeting. Part of the information given at this meeting was that political slogans, other than "Tories Out", were

henceforth banned from the march. As it approached London, with the TUC bureaucrats keeping their eyes on it, the organisers were out to silence the march altogether.

WORKERS POWER supporters on the march had been in the forefront of the fight for democracy on the march. We argued that it was always a question of democracy as a means of turning the march outwards. And while other organisations like the SWP, the International Marxist Group (IMG) and the joint forces of Socialist Press / Socialist Organiser kept a low profile, our comrades fought complacency on the Western Leg. A Bulletin we gave out on the way from Rugby to Northampton on Friday 22nd May argued:

"But as Northampton looms, Western leg marchers must organise to defend, and extend, these gains. Everything isn't rosy on the Western leg. The organisers tried to turn their backs on the Ansell's workers. Twice the platform attempted to stop Ansell's workers addressing the Peoples March rallies while the likes of Roy Hattersley were given the limelight. That the organisers do that, shows that the democratic trappings still don't mean that the march is in the hands of the militant unemployed. And it shows that the organisers will only reach out to workers in struggle if it doesn't embarrass in any way their pals in the Trade Union offices."

A significant number of marchers on the Western leg were members or supporters of the SWP. Unlike the IMG, who produced no independent bulletin and failed to maintain an independent, distinguishable profile, the SWP produced its own regular bulletin for the March. SWP leader John Deason was the chief organiser of the workplace delegations of the marchers. For that reason the march put the claims of the SWP that it fights the bureaucracy, left and right, to the sharp test of practice.

The decisive test for revolutionaries was not simply turning the march out to workers or fighting for more democracy in the running of the march. It was necessary from the start to challenge the politics of the march and to fight to make sure that delegations to workers in struggle did not simply call for support for the Peoples March on the terms of the reformists, but fought actively for strike action in support, for active solidarity for all workers in struggle as a means of establishing Action Councils and the nuclei of Unemployed Workers Unions in every area the march passed

through. But to have done so would have required a clear political fight with the reformist organisers, and this the SWP could not and would not do.

The SWP's whole approach was governed by a desire to avoid a conflict with the organisers on the march. They were not prepared to mobilise the rank and file of the march to challenge the grip of the Trade Union officials and Stalinists on the march. This is how SWP leader Deason expressed it: **"Nonetheless the contingents are together now and as one march we can build together for the massive show of anger against Thatcher on May 31st. Of course after the March is over the different approaches already mentioned will have to be argued out."** (Socialist Worker 30/5/81 - our emphasis). That is, don't rock the boat while people are actually mobilised and open to new ideas - wait



until they've all gone home and then, until the next time, the privileged few can argue about politics in the back rooms of pubs. This approach on the march meant that once Deason had secured control of the minibus to take out delegations from the march, he was quite happy to let the overall control of the march march rest with the reformists.

The SWP's actions were all conditioned by this approach. Their bulletins sang the praises of the march ("magnificent" etc) without warning against any of the dangers. Indeed they became so carried away that they joined in the CP's call for "unity of the people". Their Bulletin No 6 argued: **"It's solidarity which makes us strong and we believe the Peoples March has the capacity of uniting all people under the demand for jobs"**. It was no doubt this desire that led them to stop short of attacking the terror regime of the Eastern leg.

The SWP's Bulletin insisted that they saw the march as "political". But the march showed that they were quite prepared for reformist politics to dominate. On Tuesday 5th May after Bobby Sands had

died the SWP members wore black armbands on the march. The stewards objected and, ably helped by Deason, the marchers were forced to take them off and wear them under their anoraks! WORKERS POWER supporters argued in their section why workers fighting unemployment should solidarise with the struggle of the Irish freedom fighters against our common enemy - the British ruling class.

In the section we set out to get support for the following resolution: **"The Peoples Marchers condemn the Thatcher government for allowing Bobby Sands to die. We believe that all Republican prisoners should be given Political Status"**. When this was moved at a democratic assembly by one of our supporters, the Workers Revolutionary Party (WRP - sinister so-called Trotskyists who in fact did as much as the Stalinists to tyrannise marchers and silence it as an effective demonstration), moved "Next Business". The SWP said nothing, and in the vote John Deason abstained.

Again, on the issue of anti-fascism the SWP tailored their calls to the politics of the organisers. In place of the demand for militant defence organisation and action against fascist attacks in the Midlands, the SWP Bulletin called on the marchers not to be provoked and to leave defence to the police!!

The SWP did not even consistently and resolutely fight for democracy on the march. After a dispute with the marshalls in Kidsgrove when two marchers were thrown off without the agreed procedure being adhered to, John Deason rebuked those of us who were fighting for democracy saying: "Pick a spot for long enough and it becomes an open sore". Again, in Birmingham, when 6 marchers were asked to leave, Deason did nothing, describing the affair as "a storm in a teacup". With the coming together of the marchers and the extensive clamp-down on democracy, the SWP ended the march as they began. Refusing to challenge the organisers and merely tailing those who successfully did. They gave up the struggle for democratic assemblies and, once again, consoled themselves with control of the minibus.

During the first two weeks it was apparently too early to take on the organisers. During the second two weeks it was thought to be too late. That just about sums up the record of the SWP on the march! ■

DON'T LET THEM BURY THE M

THE LARGEST MOBILISATION of the unemployed since the 1930's could have been the spur to militant solidarity action behind all workers fighting redundancies. It could have encouraged workers to take on the employers and have given them confidence to organise and occupy in response to the Tories' attacks. In its wake should have been left the nuclei of Action Committees linking delegates of workers in struggle and of Unemployed Workers Unions prepared to organise the unemployed and reach out, in particular, to previously unorganised youth.

The organisers of the march never intended it to work that way and, bar a few scrapes on the Western Leg, they got their way.

The principle initiators and organisers were not, of course, Len Murray and the Congress House national trade union bureaucrats. The initiative lay with regional TUC officials like John Barnett of the North West and Jack Dromey of the South East, backed up by the CP and the Left Labourite network. The last few years has seen a marked increase in the role of these regional TUC bodies. They remain in much closer touch with local officials and full-time factory leaderships, but their relative strength in the recent period reflects a very real unwillingness on the part of the TUC and the national Trade Union leaders to initiate and build for any national coordinated fight against the Tories. Since Thatcher came to power the TUC has only one fiasco "Day of Action" to its credit. Like the clergymen, but less single-mindedly, the TUC blessed the march, but did not organise for it.

For Barnett and Dromey the Peoples March was a means to organising a broad coalition around the Trade Unions running parallel to, and interlinked with, the Bennite campaign in the Labour Party. As Dromey has put it himself:

"Some on the Left may criticise the Peoples March for being too broad. We utterly reject this...We want to see socialism in Britain, but we are not going to see socialism unless we reach out and persuade the centre ground in British politics to join with us" (article written with N. Sharman in Tribune, 5/6/81).



Dromey's strategy is to win friends for the trade unions in the previously anti-trade union sectors of society - the middle class. He wants to persuade them that the Trade Union leadership is "Responsible", "Caring" and "Humane". He wants to present the Unions as preservers of order in a harsh social climate that could well see the unemployed and youth get out of hand. Such action to win the middle ground will also provide a reforming Labour government with its electoral majority.

This leads Dromey to persistently attempt to take the sting out of any class battle. And it leads him to present workers in struggle - be they at Grunwicks or on the march from Liverpool - as objects of pity

MASTERS OF DE-MOBILISATION

The response to the march was low key throughout the North West - the area with the highest rate of unemployment in the country - and the organisers did nothing to change that. It was left to WORKERS POWER, for example, to bring the first representatives of workers in struggle onto the march, when we arranged for speakers from United Glass of St Helens to address the marchers.

The pattern in other towns was roughly the same. Relatively small demonstrations were marched into church services, or rallies, and dispersed. The partial exceptions, such as Coventry, took place despite the organisers, not because of them. In general militants in the towns en route failed to successfully challenge the deadly politics and crippling organisational grip of the Regional TUC's and their CP supporters.

The organisers wanted the welcomes for the march to be no more than one day affairs which would leave no lasting impression in the areas through which the march passed. This

was graphically demonstrated in Birmingham where 74,867 are registered unemployed, where the Ansell's workers were fighting for jobs and where the threat of mass redundancies hangs over Rover. Delegations from the major plants followed the marchers into Birmingham but nowhere had there been a serious and concerted attempt by the militants to pull the workforce out behind the Peoples March.

Instead over 3,000 militants were led by the organisers in the pouring rain into an open church service! They were left to make their own way to a rally that was to be held elsewhere in town and later in the day! No wonder then that the rally add the march out of town was far smaller than the initial Birmingham turnout. The organisers proved themselves to be masters of de-mobilisation and de-escalation.

The result was that the organisers were successful in mobilising an ineffectual, but occasionally massive protest. That was underlined in London at the end of the march where over 100,000 joined the marchers in Hyde Park, but where the rally at County Hall, on the very next working day, was pitifully weak.

The march organisers handed the job of politically representing the march to the Labour leaders. This is hardly surprising. The TUC did not want the job of organising a campaign against unemployment. The TUC leaders knew there are so many things they could do to make such a campaign immediately effective - making all action against redundancy official, organising effective solidarity action and blaming, bringing out the mass of workers behind workers under attack - that they have no wish to be put in the direct firing line. They would rather have been seen to have supported the Peoples March, used their bureaucratic expertise to keep it under control and let the Labour leaders take the limelight as the only ones with a solution to unemployment.

Eastern Leg

Peoples Front on the march

TO MANY MARCHERS on the Eastern Leg, the end of the march must have seemed like the granting of parole. In particular the trek from Yorkshire down to Northampton (where it met up with the Western leg) was marked by a prison house regime - organised throughout by the Stalinist Communist Party of Great Britain (CPGB). With the full might of the Sheffield AUEW District Committee (a CP bastion) behind them, the Eastern Leg marshalls, led by CPer Brennan Bates, made sure that there was no democracy, no orientation to the working class, and no possibility for the free discussion of different political ideas.

The Stalinists employed crude methods of intimidation which ranged from threats of removal from the march (simply for disagreeing with a steward) right through to actual violence. For example at a social in Mansfield on May 12th, a steward decided to physically remove a badge he objected to from a young marcher. In another incident in Nottingham on May 15th, the Stalinists threatened WORKERS POWER paper sellers with the police - despite the fact that they were selling in a public square at a public rally! The stewards carrying out these measures were all appointed - not one of them was elected by the marchers they were claiming to represent.

STALINIST TACTICS

No democratic assemblies were held, no delegations to workplaces were organised and nobody could sell papers or give out leaflets on the march. The stewards constantly fought to keep the march apolitical, and sealed off from workers' struggles against unemployment. From the very start of the march anti-Tory slogans were banned. Marchers who took exception to this were told that if they didn't like it then they could get off. This made the Eastern Leg a virtually silent march. On top of this, even badges were too much for the stewards. Workers from the strike at Plansee in Rotherham were actually stopped from wearing badges calling for support for their strike! At a social at Trent Polytechnic on May 14th, some marchers attempted to organise a collection for Plansee. Amazingly, CP stewards moved in to physically prevent it!

By the time it reached Leicester (May 16th), almost 40 marchers had abandoned the Eastern Leg -

either disgusted or demoralised. At every step of the march, they were prevented from giving vent to their protest against Tory policies, yet when they got to each town, they were subjected to round after round of boring 'anti-Tory' speeches from free-loading councillors, trade union bureaucrats and MPs. The leaders of the labour movement were allowed to mouth off: the marchers were turned into dumb exhibits in a freak show - "Look at the poor things! But don't let them speak!"

To add insult to injury the fascists of the National Front, kitted out with iron bars and all, started to harass marchers. When the stewards told marchers to "ignore" this threat, tempers boiled. At this point the stewards moved quickly to defuse the situation and then follow it through with a reassertion of complete control. To allay marchers' anger they promised a Democratic Assembly on Sunday May 17th. This was eventually called for 9.00 in the morning - while most people still either at breakfast or in their places of accommodation (it was a rest day). At the meeting they allowed only one resolution - to support the way in which the stewards were running the march. As if this wasn't bad enough, they then added two riders:

- 1) Anyone who voted against would be kicked off the march!
- 2) If a majority voted against they would call off the march!

With only half the marchers present, the stewards got their way and, at least until Northampton, they were able to run the march along their dictatorial lines. They even went so far as to kick off a delegation of western leg marchers who had come to meet the eastern march!

What were the Stalinists up to? Why did they employ these tactics against the march? Nationally, the CP has been the principle force behind making the march a Peoples March - that is, a march that was not centrally directed at winning support from and action by the working class, but was aimed at winning support from all classes in society.

remain peaceful and geared to electoral change. In Hyde Park Foot was quick to direct 100,000 protesters' attention away from thoughts of immediate action and towards another Labour Party protest demonstration in Cardiff. Addressing a rally outside County Hall in London, Benn talked of the march as a component of a "broad progressive coalition" whose aim was to persuade, protest and petition. Benn's ever well-measured speeches never posed the battle against unemployment in any other terms.

The Labour leaders, in concert with the trade union leaders, want to consign the Peoples March safely to the history books. Foot and Murray hope that their lame words of praise and sympathy can stop the march being a factor in the here and now in the building of working class direct action against unemployment.

The rumours that the TUC is planning an even bigger march from Scotland, and the calls from Foot to get rid of Thatcher should fool no-one. From their point of view the March has fulfilled its purpose. Their task is to set in motion a new scheme for dodging action while, at the same time, letting off a little steam. "Don't take action - wait for the next Labour government" is their battlecry. This may be easy to say from the comfort of leather chairs in Congress House or the House of Commons. But it is not so easy if you're living on £27.50 a week Supplementary or Unemployment Benefit.

The sympathy shown by workers for the plight of the unemployed needs to be linked with the militant spirit expressed by many of the rank and file Peoples Marchers, especially the younger marchers. We must not allow Foot, Benn, Murray, Pete Carter, Jack Dromey and others to dissipate that spirit or turn that sympathy into harmless emotion.

We must build on it - orient it to action. To do that, against the plans of the organisers, was the task of revolutionaries on the march. And it was precisely this perspective that WORKERS POWER supporters on both legs of the march argued throughout. As to what we think should happen after the march, we made this clear in a bulletin we gave out on the march, which is reprinted here...

ment. There aren't many unemployed company directors and vicars. And if there were they would not be prepared to march from Yorkshire to London.

In order to stop the workers, the youth in particular, from raising their independent voice against unemployment, something that would inevitably upset the march's supposed broad spectrum of supporters, the CP had to keep a tight grip on the march. A WORKERS POWER bulletin for the Eastern Leg that was given out in Chesterfield made this clear:

"They (the organisers) are doing all they can to stop anything happening that might 'alienate' supporters of the march. So when the stewards stop you chanting 'Tories Out' - the reason is simple. All the Church leaders, Lord Mayors, MPs and other 'dignitaries' might not like it. So we're told to keep the march 'non-political'."

Keep the Mayors, Bishops and celebrities in the limelight at the front of the processions, keep the unemployed workers gagged behind - that was the Stalinists' recipe for the Eastern Leg.

PRO-CAPITALIST STRATEGY

For the CP, the fight against unemployment is seen as part of a general struggle to curtail the power of "big business". It is not capitalism itself that has to be fought, but "anti-popular", non-patriotic multi-national corporations. To this end it is not the self-activity and independent action of the working class that will prove the decisive force.

An "anti-monopoly alliance" comprised of the trade union leaders, the middle classes, the churches and small capitalists, is called for. Hence the emphasis on "the people" - a cross-class, all-encompassing term. The Editor of the CP daily paper, "Morning Star" (which proclaimed itself to be "The Paper of the Peoples March" - despite the fact that Peoples Marchers were never asked whether they wanted it as their paper!) outlined his party's strategy for ending unemployment: "It calls for a programme of economic expansion carried out in such a way that it serves the interests of the people and not the accumulation of private profit for the rich big business combines" (Morning Star 30/5/81 - our emphasis). Hence what is needed is a "mass popular movement".

As the Peoples March shows, in actual practice this policy means subordinating the interests of the working class to the other sections of the broad alliance - including "progressive" Tories. And that subordination is carried through by any means necessary - such is the logic of Stalinism's policy of "the People's Front". ■



A militant, uncompromising demonstration of the unemployed, fighting to build active links with the struggles of the employed workers would positively hinder this class collaborationist scheme. What was needed was "respectability" and the representation of a spectrum of views and classes. Pete Carter spelt this out in an interview in the Young Communist League (youth section of the CPGB) paper "Challenge":

"People are beginning to see that unemployment is not just statistics but something which has a deep effect on the people concerned. The middle classes are also feeling the effect with students, professional people, executives and small business men being unable to find work. The march will unite these people behind a call on the government to make full employment its first priority".

These sentiments were echoed by a statement by the organisers in the "Daily Express" on June 1st: "We are proud that we managed to march and accommodate 500 people of different ethnic groups, different political philosophies and faiths and from a variety of social backgrounds for such a distance". (our emphasis).

But the hacks of the CP had a problem from the start. It was only workers who were prepared to march the miles to London. Not that this was surprising. Workers are the real victims of unemploy-

workers power

FOR AN UNEMPLOYED WORKERS UNION IN EVERY TOWN!
FOR A NATIONAL UNEMPLOYED WORKERS UNION!

THE END OF THE ROAD?

AFTER A MONTH'S marching, walking, talking and demonstrating it is vital that the struggle against unemployment doesn't end when the Peoples March does. Every marcher needs to start organising now for action back in the localities. Groups of marchers should, together with the trade union bodies that sponsored them or supported the march, call a meeting in their home towns to carry on the fight that the Peoples March has only begun.

If we don't do this then all the march will have achieved, apart from several hundred pairs of sore feet, will be cheap publicity for the trade union and Labour leaders who've occasionally graced the march with their presence. The TUC and its invisible leader Len Murray (who?) have said they support the march. On Sunday at the demo and rally in London the union big-wigs will praise the marchers and pat themselves on the back for having supported the march and fought unemployment. They will then go back to their desks and quietly forget the plight of the unemployed until their next television interview!

Or else they will do everything in their power to fight against unemployment into a "do nothing and wait for the next Labour Government" campaign. We must answer this by making clear that we won't wait on the dole until 1984 (and what if Labour lose the election?). We don't want the Sunday sympathy of the TUC. We want militant action by the employed and the unemployed to take on the Tories and their system of mass unemployment.

WHERE TO NOW?

Marchers from every city and town should get together before the march ends and decide to act as the spearhead for a fighting movement of the unemployed in their locality. Out of this a convenor must be appointed, and an organising meeting must be called back home. Call a meeting of the marchers and representatives of the sponsoring bodies. Union branches, stewards committees, strike and occupation committees, youth organisations etc, must all be invited to such a meeting. The tasks of such bodies should be to get the union movement to fight unemployment with all its strength and to organise the unemployed themselves. We must carry the message that unemployment can be fought to our three million fellow victims on the dole queue.

A movement of the Unemployed can be built, but it must be one that makes the unemployed masters in their own union. We needed democracy on this march to make it effective. We will need it when we build an unemployed workers union. We need elected committees and leaders, not petty bureaucracy of the officials (amply demonstrated on the Eastern Leg of the march). We must thrash out our own tactics, our own forms of organisation. A really effective union of unemployed workers must be dedicated to overthrowing the system that has thrown all of us on the dole. It must be pledged to fight that system, to overthrow capitalism and replace it with working class power - with an economy planned to meet human need not profit.

Such a movement can play a vital role in winning the whole working class movement away from the do-nothing leaders who have tea parties with Thatcher and Prior while the dole queues get longer. The lesson of the Peoples March is that if we want a real fight for jobs we must start it now. We must lead it ourselves and not wait for a Labour Government to act on our behalf or a TUC protest to change the Tories' minds! ■

MARCH

Just as the TUC leaders found a let out from organising action now by presenting the real answer as the fight for a new Labour government, so the Labour Party leaders, and Dromey and Barnett, were more than willing to set out to repair Labour's tarnished image at the expense of the footsore marchers. True, some "leaders" were too tarnished to fool the marchers. West Midlands Council leader and arch welfare-cutter "Swordedged" Wilkinson, Roy Hattersley & Denis Healey all received rough treatment at mass rallies. But the "Lefts", those who could make the promise that the next Labour government would be different to the last with even a hint of credibility - from Foot to Benn, from Kinnock to Heffer - were able to use the march platforms to present the fight for a Labour government as the principle means of fighting redundancies. The Labour leaders were of inestimable value to the trade union leaders in getting them out of a potentially tight spot, and keeping the Peoples March as a passive protest.

COLD COMFORT FROM "LEFTS"

The Labour 'Lefts' were quite prepared to let fly with the rhetoric. Heffer bellowed out from the platform at Hyde Park that this was a workers march, had won overwhelming support from workers, thus making a sideswipe at the CP's obliteration of the working class under the rubric of popular support and the "Peoples" march. But they would not commit themselves to calling for and supporting immediate industrial action to stop the sackings and destroy the Tory government, and neither do the mass of militant workers expect the Labour Party leaders to do that. Again the Trade Union leaders got the Labour 'Lefts' to cover for their silence.

After the sympathy they received from the leaders of the "Labour Movement", many Peoples Marchers will be feeling like celebrities after their month on the road. Tony Benn, Michael Foot and a host of other parliamentary personalities, all assured the marchers of their place in the history books. But such praise is double edged. Michael Foot and Tony Benn regard the Peoples March as an episode in their protest campaign against the Tories. They would like that campaign to grow big enough to pressure Thatcher to the polls early, but they want that campaign to

IRISH ELECTIONS: H-BLOCK CAMPAIGN MUST MOBILISE WORKERS ACTION

BY A MEMBER OF
THE IRISH WORKERS GROUP

AS WE GO to press, the 3.3 million population of the Irish Republic goes to the polls to choose between the "Green Tory" Haughey and the Fine Gael Coalition with Labour.

Overshadowed by the hunger strikes in Long Kesh and the uneasiness of the bourgeoisie about a possible overflow of violence into the South, the central issue in the election is the state of the economy. In Eire 11% are on the dole - a total of 130,000, of whom 30,000 are under 25 - inflation is running at 18% and Public Sector Borrowing has escalated to 22% of the GNP in this year alone.

Charlie Haughey replaced Jack Lynch as Fianna Fail party leader through a "palace revolution" in December 1979. Massive tax protests and industrial unrest, combined with the unpopularity of his over-eager Border collaboration with the British Army, brought Lynch massive losses in by-elections and in the EEC polls.

VERBAL REPUBLICANISM

These mid-term elections showed a massive swing towards the second party - the Christian Democratic Fine Gael - the party of the big farmer and the professional middle class. Historically the party of partition, its coalition with Labour was decisively rejected in 1977 after four years of jobbery, repression and unemployment.

Haughey has worked steadily to prepare the ground for the earliest possible election. He needed a mandate both to secure his own position against open rebels in his cabinet and to secure a 5 year licence for an assault on organised labour for which the bourgeoisie has been clamouring with agonised impatience.

Sensitively playing the Green Card of verbal republicanism as few others can, Haughey twice postponed the election until after Thatcher had murdered Bobby Sands and Frankie Hughes. But what may prove a far more costly postponement was Haughey's refusal to impose the degree of economic austerity so desperately needed by the bourgeoisie during the 18 months of election build up.

Haughey's manoeuvres to secure electoral victory have cost the Irish bourgeoisie dear. Lynch pumped borrowed money into the Irish economy during the 'mini-boom' of 1977-79, in order to fulfil a portion of his election pledges. Haughey has blocked with the Irish Trade Union bureaucracy to the extent of supporting a 16% wage increase for most workers spread out over 15 months. With inflation

running at 21% per annum such rises do not even protect real wages but they amount to more than the Irish bourgeoisie would wish to pay. To the anger of the Irish bosses Public Sector workers have secured additional claims on top of the 16% National Agreement.

Fianna Fail cannot pay for these rises through taxing the employers or big farmers. On the eve of the election it has even been prepared to fork out for food subsidies amounting to £30m so as to dampen the impact of rising prices. In order to get him through, in the short term, Haughey has resorted to borrowing from abroad. Foreign loans now total 7 billion Irish pounds, the interest on which has to be repaid out of the heavy tax burden shouldered by Irish workers.

Running hard to outflank Haughey as a better option for the bourgeoisie Fine Gael has made more explicit warnings of the need for austerity and for legal curbs on workers militancy. Taking a leaf from Fianna Fail's election methods in 1977—and from Thatcher and Reagan—Fine Gael is buying votes with the promise of income tax reform.

The initial cost of their promise of tax reform, particularly for VAT rises will doubtless encourage workers to demand compensation in wages. As a result Fine Gael is causing concern to significant sections of a bourgeoisie that are eager to secure and nail down immediate wage restraint. Fine Gael's election package enshrines much of the political naivety of its leader—"honest" Doctor Garret Fitzgerald. However when the chips are down for the bourgeoisie there is no doubt that they can completely rely on the party which once cradled the proto-fascist blue shirts!

COLLABORATIONIST DOCILITY

What Fine Gael does lack is the mass populist base of Fianna Fail. It is Fianna Fail which is best placed to play the Green Card, both as a safety valve against uncontrollable reaction to Thatcher's imperialist barbarity and, more importantly, as a cloak for the dagger of anti-working class austerity plans once Haughey is returned to power. Fine Gael needs the Labour Party to form a government with the collaborationist docility of the Labour Party guarantees that it will be a reliable bourgeois partner. But Labour, the party of an over-weening trade union bureaucracy is of less use to the bourgeoisie in capturing the militant sections of the workers movement (which oscillates between syndicalism and nationalism) than is the poisonous populist nationalism of Fianna Fail which has even explicitly called itself the party of labour.

Revolutionaries in Ireland must fight resolutely

to break workers from their illusions in both Fianna Fail and the coalition. The 9 H-Block prisoners being put up as candidates, and the 3 H-Block campaigners—who are candidates of the League for a Workers Republic—(LWR Irish supporters of the FI (IC) and People's Democracy (PD, Irish supporters of the United Secretariat))—offer a focus in the elections around which action can be mobilised.

That significant sections of workers in the South sympathise with the prisoners' demands is beyond doubt. Tragically however the H-Block campaign has set out to divert that support away from direct industrial action into passive election campaigning. They are demobilising the forces supporting the campaign for the sake of vote catching. After election day nothing will have been gained other than the publicity of the final counts.

H-Block march in Dublin - November 1980



Picture: Eamonn O'Dwyer (Report)

The H-Block campaign hopes for a repeat of its triumph in the election campaign on behalf of Bobby Sands. But it must be remembered that the Sands campaign was carried through as an alternative to mobilising the strikes and demonstrations that could have forced Thatcher to back down. In order to win the votes of the Catholic middle class and the backing of the Catholic church demonstrations and strikes were called off. While Sands won the vote no movement was built that could resist the British army and the RUC. This was savagely demonstrated by the Army and RUC as they set about the youth of the Catholic ghettos and as Sands was left to go to his death.

The IWG has fought consistently to place workers action—a General Strike—at the centre of the struggle for Political Status. It has opposed every effort to demobilise that campaign into humanitarian pacifist electioneering. But against the pro-partition Fine Gael and Labour Party and the phoney rhetoric of Fianna Fail we have called for workers to cast their first preference vote for all the H-Block campaign candidates.

The IWG offer of support in canvassing was refused outright by the H-Block committee and the LWR and rejected by the PD for what they called "tactical reasons". They all objected to our principled insistence on distributing our own material calling for strike action in support of Political Status as well as the candidate's own literature. What price the integrity of the "Trotskyists" of the LWR and PD who have defended this campaign from the start on the spurious claim that it is a genuine United Front with full freedom for its constituent parts to distribute their own propaganda.

POLITICAL STATUS NOW!

In the event of a neck and neck struggle between the Coalition and Fianna Fail it is possible that the prisoners votes may lose Fianna Fail the few crucial seats that will separate Government from Opposition. Indeed, but for the political sectarianism of Sinn Fein, which prevented Bernadette McAisley from standing and refused support to the IRSP prisoner candidate, the voting prospects of the campaign would have been much improved.

The acceptance in practice by Sinn Fein, the IRSP, PD and the LWR of the illusion that real battles can be waged against Haughey and Thatcher through the ballot box will only serve to set back the fight for POLITICAL STATUS further. In all the propaganda of the candidates there is not one single call to action—so much for the revolutionary pretensions of the USFI and FI(IC) groups. The elections have exposed most cruelly the soft underbelly of the centrist groups and the petty bourgeois illusions of the Sinn Fein despite its militant talk of abstention from the Dail. All of this can only work, tragically, to Thatcher's advantage.

In a leaflet distributed at factories in the three Dublin constituencies where H-Block candidates are standing the IWG criticised the H-Block campaign to date, argued for a General Strike to win POLITICAL STATUS NOW and finished with the following call to Irish workers.

"The IWG which for 6 years has fought for political status, calls for your No 1 vote for the H-Block prisoners and campaigners standing as candidates. We say give no preference to Fianna Fail, Fine Gael or Sinn Fein (Workers Party) which are open enemies of the prisoners. The Irish Labour Party is so-called party of the Trade Unions is an obstacle and is equally determined to sell out the prisoners. To all those workers, however, who look to this party as their political voice we express our solidarity by calling for 2nd preference for Labour Party candidates, but we say: Put this party to the test! Organise to force its branches and leaders to explicitly and unconditionally support the prisoners demands—but do not hold back or wait for these misleaders to act." ■

Labour and Ireland . . .

FROM FRONT PAGE

drawal. He thus perpetuates the myth that British troops are 'protecting' someone. In fact they harass, intimidate, torture and kill the militants of the oppressed nationalist population. They work full time to obliterate the minorities ability to defend itself. They confirm and defend the artificial sectarian statelet. They are the shield and bulwark of the Protestant para-military murder squads who have carried out mass pogroms, assassinations, house burnings etc for sixty years under the umbrella of the British army.

The threat of a bloodbath should the British army withdraw is an elaborate hoax. The Protestant black hundreds—like fascist bands—are not an independent force—they depend on state forces, the army and the RUC to back them up. The so-called constitutional guarantee (ie that Northern Ireland shall remain a part of the UK as long as a majority of its citizens or its parliament should wish it) is merely a pseudo-democratic fig-leaf for Britain's backing to the orange minority in Ireland.

Northern Ireland was created as an unreflexibly sectarian bastion of British rule and influence in the whole island. Connor Cruise O'Brien has raised the old dead-end solution of re-partition along the line of the river Bann and the Newry Canal. This would leave 40% of the population of Belfast trapped inside a state they did not wish to be in. Nor would the Protestants accept the 'loss' of the rest since it is the necessary agricultural hinterland of their state—indeed such a partition would make the 'protestant-State' totally unviable.

Benn suggests a UN-commission and UN

troops as a solution. But what is the UN? It is a council of the powerful imperialist countries, the stalinist bureaucracies and the weak third world ruling classes. The imperialist powers fund it and control it via the "Security Council".

There are no 'UN' troops as such. There are troops from member states sent in to achieve



BOBBY SANDS MP 1954-1981

or restore a balance, invariably the defence of the status quo to prevent the oppressed from overthrowing their oppressors. They can hamper the uprising or self defence of the oppressed (usually called 'terrorists' because they have to fight as irregular guerilla forces because they do not control a state) but they are impotent against the 'legitimate' State terror of oppressors. (viz the Lebanon today). Their role would be no different to that of British troops. The only consistently democratic 'solution' to the Northern Ireland 'problem' is immediate and unconditional withdrawal of all British troops. The Irish people as a whole—North and South, protestant and catholic are alone entitled to determine their state forms, and their relations to other states.

Britain has no rights or self appointed duties in the matter. Nor does such a 'duty' exist because a minority of the inhabitants of Ireland do not wish to be a part of the existing republic. We believe that only a secular workers republic can, by taking into the hands of the workers and small farmers all the resources of Ireland, obliterate sectarianism, bigotry. But British workers and socialists have no right to make their preferred goal a condition for fighting for the withdrawal of British troops, for the release of the political prisoners, the Provision IRA and IRSP prisoners of war from the H-Block concentration camps. We should support unconditionally and fight to get the Labour Party and the unions to support the granting of the hunger strikers demands. To Thatcher and Foot's insistence that these guerilla fighters are 'common criminals' we should

reply—80,000 votes testified that Bobby Sands was no criminal, 70,000 people on the street at his funeral testified that he was a respected freedom fighter.

This fight must be taken into the Labour Party wards and GMC's to the Labour Party Conference. Benn and the lefts who control the NEC should set aside a whole day for the Labour Conference to debate Ireland—a day after a decade of almost unbroken silence is nothing. Resolutions must be passed demanding an end to bi-partisanship and committing a Labour Government to withdraw the troops immediately and unconditionally. The PLP must be forced to denounce and vote against the PTA and all repressive measures for Ireland and to demand the granting of the hunger strikers demands. Only thus can we clean away the blood that the likes of Foot, Mason and Concannon have spattered on the banner of the British working class movement. ■



MITTERRAND'S ELECTION AS President ends a long period of stable rule (punctuated only by May - June 1968) for the French right. From May 1958 to May 1981, three presidents, DeGaulle, Pompidou and Giscard D'Estaing have dominated the Fifth Republic.

In the period after the first world war, the French bourgeoisie was unable to achieve a stable, authoritative political system. The Third Republic (1870 or 1875 to 1940) was inherently unstable. Between 1918 and 1946 there were forty four governments and twenty different prime ministers. The French bourgeoisie was riven with political factions who constantly struggled over the peasant voters of rural France. However only after defeat at the hands of Germany and with the major industrial regions of France under direct German control did the bourgeoisie resort to the senile bonapartism of Marshal Petain.

Petaïn's anti-collaborationist rival General Charles De Gaulle had no difference with Petaïn other than the latter's choice of Germany as the winning side in the Second World War. De Gaulle was a man of the far right. A participant in the Franco-Polish military mission in 1919 - 1920, sent to aid the holy war against the Russian revolution, he became a great admirer of the Polish bonaparte Pilsudski who crushed bourgeois democracy in Poland in order to pulverise the workers' organisations.

De Gaulle headed the government on Liberation but in early '46 resigned when he failed to get the Constituent Assembly to pass a plebiscitary bonapartist constitution - ie one which gave decisive executive power to a president. De Gaulle wanted to reduce the assembly to a talkshop with only limited legislative powers and to arm the presidency with the appointment and control of the government, with the power to dissolve or suspend the assembly, to appeal over its head via plebiscites and referenda (on questions dictated by the President) and with the power to rule by decree in emergencies (what constituted a 'national emergency' would of course be decided by the President).

These powers were refused him in 1946 but twelve years (and 23 governments!) later the revolt of the generals in Algeria and the fear of civil war stampeded the politicians of the Fourth Republic to vote him extraordinary powers which he used to establish the Fifth Republic on the basis he had wanted in 1946.

The constitution of the Fifth Republic confirms enormous powers on the President. With regard to the government he designated the prime minister and the other ministers and has to sign ordinances from the Cabinet. He nominates the heads of the army and the state bureaucracy. With regard to Parliament whilst he must promulgate all laws within 15 days of their adoption, he can ask parliament to reconsider "certain articles" of the law passed, can dissolve parliament once in a twelve month session.

WEAPON AGAINST PARLIAMENT

The President's main weapon against parliament is however the plebiscite or referendum. He can call them on 1. the organisation of government, 2. issues which are the subject of bills before parliament, 3. bills to authorise the ratification of treaties which "might affect the country's institutions". The president also has enormous powers over the judiciary. The Constitutional Council (a sort of 'Supreme Court') has its chairperson nominated by the President and three out of its nine members directly appointed. He also nominates all nine members of the High Council of the Magistrature. Added to this the "special powers" with which he is invested in case of 'national emergency' enable him to assume all the powers of the government and assemblies and the President alone is the judge of what constitutes a national emergency. De Gaulle used those powers from April to September 1961 during the military putsch in Algiers.

The National Assembly's powers are further checked by the Senate which is elected by indirect suffrage, those eligible to vote being 1. deputies to the National Assembly, 2. county councillors and 3. delegates of municipal councils - normally Mayors or deputy mayors, in all some 103,500 electors!

De Gaulle, Pompidou and Giscard rarely, if ever, had any problems with the Assembly since it had a Gaullist - right wing majority. It was a system designed for the Right to exclude the Left.

Mitterand will certainly want to introduce reforms to return some powers to the Assembly but he has no intention of demolishing the whole bonapartist system. He desires to keep it in order to bolster himself against the pressure from and demands of the working class. A

FOR AN SP-CP GOVERNMENT Down with the Fifth Republic!



De Gaulle

SP - CP government in the Assembly is, whilst the Fifth Republic constitution is in existence, in no sense sovereign. Mitterand can reduce it to complete impotence. A CP - SP majority in the assembly directly cannot impose a government on Mitterand. He has greater powers to impose one on them. Mitterand has given a strong indication of his presidential-bonapartist inclinations by declaring that his formal ties with the SP have been severed.

HUNDREDS BEING KILLED

Mitterand's record is not one that should inspire confidence in French workers. When the old french socialist party (SFIO - Section Francaise de l'Internationale Ouvriere) went into opposition in the years 1951 - 56, Mitterand served in a number of governments of the centre-right. He was minister of the colonies in 1950/51 (during the Indo-Chinese war), minister for Algeria and North Africa in 1952/53 where he presided over the bloody repression of the Moroccan trade unions, hundreds being killed. Later as minister of the Interior he was responsible for the dissolution of the Algerian Nationalist Party. In 1956, he was a leading figure and minister of Justice in the 'Republican Front' Government with Mollet, Mendes France and Chaban Delmas. This government had to its credit the reign of terror and indiscriminate torture etc in Algiers by General Massus 'paras', the kidnapping of Ben Bella and FLN leaders invited to a peace conference and the invasion of Egypt (Suez).

After De Gaulle sent the 'republican' wheeler-dealer politicians packing in '58, Mitterand tried for over ten years to stitch together a non-socialist coalition of these discredited forces. Since 1970 however he has seen the re-founded SP as the basis for a new 'rassemblement' (rallying, gathering together) of republican and socialist forces which can split the 'Left wing' of Gaullism off, above all reduce the CP to an impotent 10% of the vote and thus become the "natural party of government", replacing Gaullism definitively. To do this he has deliberately taken on a certain Gaullist colouration.

Mitterand hopes at the legislative assembly elections to reduce the communists still further as well as reducing Giscardians and Chirac Gaullists to a minority. He hopes to have enough 'left Gaullist' and radical deputies to make such a large majority that he can exclude the CP from the government and reduce them to grumbling supporters who cannot seriously affect the outcome of any important political issue. The constitution of course greatly assists Mitterand in this.

THE SOCIALIST PARTY

The French Socialist Party's credentials as a workers' party are some of the weakest in Europe. Its record as the post-war SFIO was so shameful as to bring it to the verge of extinction. In 1947/8 it presided (in coalition) over a massive direct assault on French work-



Mitterand

ers struggling for higher wages. Repression of the miners strike in 1948 organised by SFIO ministers involved tanks and troops on the streets, four miners killed, 2,000 imprisoned and 6,000 militants sacked.

In '58, Guy Mollet leader of the party in parliament opened the gates to De Gaulle and served in his first government. Thus the SFIO acted as midwife to the Fifth Republic. In the 60's, the SFIO shrank to a miserable rump of ageing municipal office holders and teachers. In the 1969 Presidential election, the party's candidate got only 5.1% (against the CP's 23.4%). Generally its share of the poll in the late 60's was about 12%. The SFIO declined from a party with 355,000 members in 1946, a party with a 44% worker membership (in 1951) to 70,000 in 1965/6 (of whom probably only two thirds actually existed). In 1970, re-founded as the Socialist Party, its worker membership was only 23%. As a mass workers' party (sociologically speaking) it had almost ceased to exist.

Mitterand was thus able to enter the party and remould it in his own image. Mitterand's strategy has been to put himself forward as the man who could rebuild the non-communist left into a mass electoral force, and co-opt the PCF into a left majority without falling under the dominance of the latter. Mitterand's whole career since gaining the leadership of the party in 1971, has been to supplant the PCF as the major party of the left, to weaken the CP electorally till it could no longer dictate terms and to imprison it within an electoral majority which gave Marchais and Co no real power. The last ten years have been a tremendous success story for this strategy.

BEATING THE CP

Firstly, Mitterand has rebuilt the PS as a mass party (1971, 60,869 members, 1978 200,000) but in terms of social composition, it is not primarily a party of industrial workers, who in 1973 constituted only 19% of its members. Even its workplace branches (Sections d'entreprise) had only a 21% industrial worker membership in 1976. The PS's influence on the working class is largely electoral. Nevertheless it is on this terrain that Mitterand set himself the target of beating the CP. As he said to the assembled social democrats of the Socialist International:

"Our fundamental object is to rebuild a great socialist party on the terrain occupied by the Communist Party itself and thus to show that of the five million communist voters, three million can be brought to vote socialist".

The period of the Common Programme signed by the PCF and the PS in 1972 and lasting until 1977 was an electoral disaster for the PCF. Mitterand and the PS marched from strength to strength. Marchais' party's fortunes stagnated. In vain did Marchais adopt the language of Eurocommunism, "socialism aux couleurs de la France" (Socialism in French [national] colours). In vain he deleted

the ancient heir-loom "the dictatorship of the proletariat" from the CP's programme. Voters preferred a real social democrat to a Stalinist imitation. The average vote of the CP remained stuck at 19 to 21% maximum whereas the PS/Left Radical block rose to 28 to 31%.

Nothing Marchais has done since then, the break with the common programme the anti-PS histrionics of '77 to '81, even the shameful playing of the racist card, has done anything but accelerate Mitterand's triumph and the CP's discomfiture. In May, Mitterand's goal seemed near to fulfilment - two million CP voters deserted the party which was reduced to 15.9% of the vote. In June he hopes to press on the offensive.

WHAT SHOULD REVOLUTIONARIES BE ARGUING IN FRANCE

In France there are two mass reformist workers' parties. There is no qualitative difference in their programmes which are both thoroughly reformist. Both the PS and the PCF are bourgeois workers' parties that defend capitalism and betray the historic class interests of the proletariat. Whilst the CP has a much more solidly proletarian class composition and more of its voters are workers, the difference between its list of reforms (Georges Marchais 131 propositions) and Mitterand's is quantitative not qualitative. On the basis of their political programme, there is thus no basis for preferring one to the other. Nor is Mitterand's claim to stand for unity any basis for preferring him to the splitter Marchais as many of the French so-called Trotskyist left have implied. Mitterand wants to exclude the CP from government and include representatives of the bourgeoisie.

Mitterand hopes that the elections to the National Assembly will, by creating a huge increase in the number of SP deputies, release him from dependence on the CP and allow him to govern with left-Gaullists and radicals. It is in the direct interests of French workers to prevent this manoeuvre. Obviously, if revolutionaries could stand candidates in the first round, on a revolutionary programme, they should do. Otherwise it is necessary to take a position of critical support for the candidates of the bourgeois workers parties.

WORKERS MOBILISING

We are in favour of putting the PS and the PCF to the test of government in front of the working class. Moreover we are in favour of workers mobilising themselves to force these politicians to carry out their promises wherever these have a progressive character, and go further.

Mitterand wants to exclude the PCF from government. We say to workers that this must be opposed. Vote CP in the first round and in the second for which ever is the best placed workers' party candidate! Where the PS candidate withdraws in favour of a Gaullist or radical we would argue for the CP candidate not to withdraw. Not one workers vote for a bourgeois candidate!

The larger the number of CP deputies, the more difficult it will be for Mitterand to succeed in his cross class anti-CP alliance. A clear majority of CP and SP deputies will make it possible to fight in the workers organisations for a SP-CP government. It will make it possible to mobilise demands on that government and on Mitterand. These demands should include:

- * No bourgeois ministers. For a CP/SP government.
- * Down with the Fifth Republic. For a Constituent Assembly. Abolish the Presidency, the Senate, the Prefecture, the undemocratic electoral laws.
- * A united front of worker's parties and unions, committees of action from the factories and offices to fight for workers demands and to put demands on the government - to mobilise a general strike against bourgeois resistance.
- * Nationalise all the banks, finance houses and industrial monopolies without compensation and under workers control.
- * Dissolve the CRS, and the whole apparatus of militarised police squads. For soldiers committees and full political and trade union rights in the army.

Through workers mobilisations and direct action the CP and the SP can be forced either to concede these demands or to stand exposed in the eyes of their supporters. In these struggles, a revolutionary vanguard party of the working class must be forged capable of posing the question of the direct seizure of power by the workers themselves. ■

workers power

ANSELL'S: MILITANTS OUTFLANKED BY UNION BUREAUCRATS



Picture: JOHN STURROCK (Network)

Brian Mathers - architect of the sell-out at Ansell's. An Ansell's worker makes his views known.

ANSELL'S WORKERS HAVE suffered defeat in their struggle to save 700 jobs at the Aston brewery in Birmingham. Allied Breweries have managed to re-open the Ansell's depots in the area, with 300 workers from the previous workforce of 1000.

The company has even felt strong enough to renege on their promised payment of "ex gratia" sums to the 700 in exchange for their jobs.

The battle at Ansell's was a crucial round in the fight against the employers' Tory-backed drive to break the strength of the trade unions. Ansell's was one of the best organised plants in the West Midlands. It had its own industrial trade union branch with its own elected stewards and branch officers. Militants in Ansell's and elsewhere must learn the lessons of this significant defeat.

The Ansell's workers were sabotaged by the full-time officials of the TGWU for the entire duration of the strike. The particular villains in this case were Brian Mathers (Regional Secretary) and Doug Fairburn (Divisional Official). Selling out jobs is nothing new to these characters. After the lay-off protest at Longbridge last November, Fairburn endorsed the sacking of six workers, including four T&G stewards by British Leyland management.

WORKERS PICKETS

Mathers and Fairburn deliberately set out to undermine the effectiveness of the Ansell's workers' pickets. Allied Breweries Romford and Burton were singled out for particular attention by the strike committee. But Mathers and Fairburn refused to make the Romford picket official because it was outside Region 5! When IGI sugar lorry drivers arrived at Allied's Burton brewery, they phoned Fairburn

for instructions on seeing the Ansell's picket line. Fairburn told them them to go through the line!

Having knifed the pickets in the back, having demoralised the more backward elements in the workforce by strengthening management, Mathers moved in with his coup de grace. He rushed out ballot forms to the membership, using Ansell's management's "Addressograph" machine.

The ballot form explained the "hopelessness" of the strikers' position, and asked them to vote on the latest offer - it amounted to an ultimatum - accept the closure of the brewery or jeopardise 300 jobs in two depots, and the promise of ex gratia payments (which have subsequently been withdrawn). The result was a defeat for the Ansell's workers and a victory for the employers and the T&G bureaucracy.

PRIVILEGED POSITION

It is not enough simply to draw the indisputable lesson from this dispute that trade union officials always betray. In periods of recession the trade union leaders will always try to negotiate "defeats", so as to defend their own privileged position. The problem for militants is to learn from disputes such as this, precisely how the trade union bureaucrats can be prevented from sabotaging and eventually betraying workers in struggle. In most major disputes - and Ansell's was no exception - an active minority of workers find themselves at loggerheads with the officials over tactics to make the strike effective.

In such disputes the militants often come to see through the words of the officials to their real role as betrayers. The problem for these militants, however, is to organise and keep the members with them so that the fight against the employers is resolute and stays firm, and so that the officials cannot undermine

the strike, demoralise the members and then isolate the active militant minority.

In order to resist the grip of the officials, militants must of necessity work to ensure the maximum degree of democratic control compatible with taking certain decisions free from management and police surveillance. Throughout the dispute, WORKERS POWER bulletins called for regular mass meetings - to keep the members informed, involved and active. We did this so as not to allow the backward elements to drift away from the strike, in order to confront all the lies and manoeuvres of management and the trade union officials with a democratically united workforce. Only regular mass meetings could have stopped the drift towards passivity and non-involvement on the part of many Ansell's workers which Mathers was able to play on when he made his ballot bid over the heads of the branch leadership.

But the Ansell's branch leadership did not organise regular democratically organised mass meetings. Before Mathers moved in for the kill, they were only organised on approximately a monthly basis. Too late did the branch leadership attempt to close ranks and organise mass meetings after Mathers' death-blow.

Militants can never hope to avoid the problem of treacherous officials by ignoring them, hoping that they will not sabotage and betray. So as to break the trust that rank and file members have in the union officials, the workforce must be organised to force the officials to act, and to march independently of them the moment they move to betray. This means drawing in the new layers of militants who are thrown up in any dispute into a democratic strike committee accountable to mass meetings. It means taking the fight into the union, at all levels, to force the officials to fight.

POLITICALLY PREPARED

At Ansell's the strike committee was dissolved into the old-established branch committee, early in the dispute. No attempt was made to organise a national delegate rank and file meeting of Allied workers to fight back against the Allied management, and foil Fairburn and Mathers. The militants who could see through Mathers were therefore not ready to stop him when his sell-out came. The treacherous officials cannot be by-passed by militant picket tactics alone. The members must be prepared politically and organisationally for the officials inevitable treachery.

This means that militants have to set out to lead the members and win them to their political ideas. If they do not, then the officials are able to play on, to activate, the reactionary and backward ideas that large sections of the workforce possess. This means the regular production of bulletins, the fight to lead at mass meetings, to challenge the class collaborationist politics of the Mathers of this world.

If militants "keep politics out" of the dispute, they can rest assured that the press, the bosses and the officials won't. The Ansell's dispute showed this clearly with the TGWU officials and local press red-baiting the militants. There is no way out

of a political fight in such disputes - except to leave Mathers and his kind to rule the roost.

WORKERS POWER produced a regular strike bulletin throughout the duration of the dispute. We consistently raised warnings as to the role of the officials, explained why they would betray and advanced a strategy to win the dispute.

In the first round of the struggle against sackings, we argued that the Branch Committee was wrong not to occupy the plant. We argued against concentrating pickets on the distribution of beer to local pubs, and for a drive to foil Allied by stopping supplies from Romford and Burton.

From the start we raised the warnings as to the role Fairburn and Mathers would play. WORKERS POWER Strike Bulletin (WPSB) 1 stated: "The TGWU should call an official strike of all Allied Brewery workers. The union certainly has the necessary power and finance. But Ansell's workers cannot rely on the TGWU officials to do this".

SECOND BULLETIN

Our second bulletin argued:

"An immediate stepping-up of picketing is needed, and Mathers must be forced to turn his words into deeds and arrange the blacking of raw materials (CO₂ etc) to the Allied Beer Division. However the workforce cannot rely on the officials, the flying pickets must be used to do the job, with or without official backing. But in itself picketing is inadequate to force management to back down... The first step towards this (shutting the whole of Allied Breweries altogether) is the holding of a conference of shop stewards and the rank and file at Burton Romford, Warwick etc must be convinced of the necessity of shutting down Allied, which means an all-out strike".

When the Peoples March reached the West Midlands, we mobilised support, on both Legs, for the Ansell's workers, and fought to use the march to halt the tide of demoralisation in the ranks of the Ansell's workforce.

Throughout the dispute, while never minimising the difficulties that faced militants in winning support for the strategy we advanced, we argued a clear political alternative to the T&G officials and the Branch leadership.

The Socialist Workers Party (SWP) was active around the dispute. But its record is one of simply tailing the strike and its leadership. It was not until mid-May that the SWP produced their first bulletin (three months after the start of the dispute), which warned of the treachery of Mathers after the ballot and its result had been announced. Even though the SWP were in charge of the Peoples March delegation to Ansell's, they refused to go into the crucial mass meeting that ratified the sell-out - and use that leverage to give new heart to sections of workers - claiming that it was "injurious at this delicate time".

The stark contrast between our intervention and that of the SWP reflects the sharp political differences that exist between us. Their method is to tail the struggles of the working class expecting the struggle itself to both pose and solve the political answers for militants. We, on

UNEMPLOYED..

FROM FRONT PAGE

- * Centres to be run by democratic committees of representatives from workers organisations, but with a guaranteed majority for the unemployed themselves.
- * That the centres be centres for the organisation of action against unemployment.

The TUC will resist such demands. They will attempt to crush any militant independent unemployed organisations. Tactics need to be adopted to fight them. The unemployed must picket and, if need be, occupy the offices of the bureaucrats to win their demands. Crucially, though, they must link up with rank and file employed workers in the struggle against the bureaucracy. Only if these centres are taken out of the hands of the bureaucrats will they be of any use to the unemployed.

In organising the unemployed, it is vital that the thousands of young workers who are on the Youth Opportunities Programme (YOP) become involved in the struggle against unemployment. Over

440,000 young workers are doing YOP jobs for a paltry £23.50 a week. On these jobs the youth are fined, have no safety rights and no employment protection.

The MSC, the body the TUC wants to help run its centres, is responsible for overseeing this slave labour. But youth on the YOPs are fighting back. Strikes on YOP jobs in Scotland took place in April and May. Organisation is developing. We must link these youth with the trade unions by fighting for:

- * Real jobs not slave labour YOP schemes.
- * Unionisation of the YOPs.
- * Equal pay for equal work.
- * Full employment and safety rights for YOPs workers.

This perspective for the fight against unemployment is a perspective based on action - direct workers action to resist the bosses' job-cutting offensive. It is only on the basis of such action that the plans of Thatcher and the union bureaucrats will be defeated.

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