

Workers power

MONTHLY NEWSPAPER OF THE WORKERS POWER GROUP

INSIDE: ISRAEL
IRELAND RCP
WORKERS DEFENCE

Iran: Fight The Counter-Revolution

Monarchy: not just a costly relic

The turbulent course of the Iranian Revolution has, over the past few months, taken yet another dramatic and violent turn. Since the Shah's fall the factions of the ruling class in Iran have been unable to resolve the struggle for power. The absence of a revolutionary Communist party has meant that the working class has been paralysed—*tied to one or other faction* of the ruling class—unable to resolve the question of power in its own interests. The open clash between the clergy dominated Islamic Republican Party (IRP) and Bani Sadr, the President, is an attempt, by the bourgeois factions that back them, to resolve the political dualism that has characterised Iranian politics for two and a half years. If this struggle results in either the undivided power of the IRP and its successful establishment of an Islamic dictatorship, or a military coup, then the triumph of counter-revolution in Iran will be complete. But this is not yet the case.



formation capable of ruling—as the inglorious fall of Bakhtiar revealed. To prevent the prospect of a proletarian revolution the bourgeoisie ceded power to the clergy. Having led the struggle against the Shah they were also the best placed to contain it. But the Mullah caste itself is not a homogenous formation. The likes of Beheshti, with their direct links with merchant capital and imperialism, were of a different ilk to the radical wing of the clergy which rested on the anti-imperialist mass movement itself. The conflict between these wings of the clergy was subdued by the threat of a potential bonapartism external to themselves. Bani Sadr with his plans for a hasty rapprochement with imperialism, in alliance with the army and the remnants of the modern bourgeoisie, presented just such a threat. Protected by the over-riding bonapartism of Khomeini the IRP conspired to bring down Bani Sadr.

SHORAS DEFEND GAINS

These splits within the ruling class resulted in an unstable and doomed political compromise between the Islamic fundamentalists, temporarily united in the IRP, led by Beheshti (now deceased), and the non-party coalition of bourgeois nationalists standing in the tradition of Mussadeq, led by Abolhassan Bani Sadr. Since his election over a year ago Bani Sadr had attempted to resolve Iran's chronic economic difficulties by carrying out a programme of industrial modernisation. Two things were necessary for the success of his programme. The Iranian masses had secured real material gains through the revolution. In nearly all of the factories they managed to raise wages (by 80% since 1979) through the imposition of a profit-sharing law. The working week was reduced from 44 to 40 hours.

to work with Rajai, the IRP Prime Minister. It was Bani Sadr who argued for an appeasement policy towards US imperialism—"the Great Satan"—during the hostage crisis. His repression did not succeed in eliminating the gains of the Iranian revolution and his anti-IRP stance made him a target for the mullahs.

BANI SADR DEMAGOGY

Crucial in his downfall was his failure to create a significant social base, or solid core of support in the army. As commander-in-chief of the armed forces he rebuilt the Shah's army which had been heavily purged after the revolution. Since the war with Iraq started he virtually abandoned Tehran for tours of duty at the front and concentrated on the cultivation of support amongst the weakened officer caste. Here he tried to curry favour with the generals by attacking the military incompetence of the clergy. He took the army up to a strength of 300,000 (it was 400,000 under the Shah). However the generals, particularly the new Khomeini-appointed commander-in-chief Valliollah Fallahi, were not willing to risk a coup headed by someone with a track record of indecisiveness and weakness, and one which would have brought them into bloody conflict with the masses, arousal against imperialism. The officers seem prepared for the moment to bide time, waiting for further internal disintegration before making the move they are undoubtedly plotting (and being exhorted to execute by the imperialists).

As early as Spring 1980 Bani Sadr espoused and supported the attacks on the Universities which aimed at physically wiping out the Mojahedin—E—Khalq (Crusaders of the People) and the Fedayeen, two of the major armed leftist groups in Iran. As head of the armed forces he authorised the bombardment of insurgent Kurds at Sandaj. He ruthlessly suppressed even liberal opposition newspapers. Crucially he attempted to wipe out the Shoras and reintroduce unfettered managerial control in the factories. At the same time, however, he earned the suspicion of the IRP by trying to squeeze them out of the government, refusing

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ISLAMIC DICTATORSHIP

When it came to the showdown, Bani Sadr, like the Emperor, had no clothes. Ayatollah Beheshti moved swiftly. A three-man commission was set up to "reconcile" Bani Sadr with the clergy. The commission blamed him and he, in turn attacked the commission. A propaganda war against him was waged and Beheshti secured Khomeini's support in removing the President's powers. When Bani Sadr invited resistance to the "coup" against him, after the closing down of his newspaper, the cries for his impeachment grew. Khomeini assented, giving Beheshti a decisive victory—one, however, that he did not live long to enjoy.

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The last decade has seen a remarkable increase of activity from the Windsor Dynasty. Princess Anne's Wedding (1973), Silver Jubilee (1977) Queen Mother's 80th Birthday (1980) and this year's extravaganza all mark a renewed marketing drive for the Court clique. It is of course no accident that these years have been years of crisis, of mounting class struggle and of vicious ruling class onslaughts on the gains workers made in the 50s and 60s.

Only a minority of working class people will be directly corralled into this orgy of servility. The propaganda—the inability to buy anything that is not wrapped up in, embossed or emblazoned by the revolting pair—gives the air of unanimity to the celebrations. Much will be made of the streets of East London festooned with red-white and blue with working class Londoners, cheery and ever-so-loyal, having a knees up in honour of Charlie Boy and Lady Di. But underneath the deafening din of the media millions of people will be revolted at the stark contrast between this lavish public expenditure and the squalid reality of Thatcher's Britain.

RITUAL EXCUSES

Even such criticisms of the Royals as are voiced in the labour movement are always made on a superficial and trivial level. It is claimed they are "too extravagant" or surround themselves with "too many hangers-on", or that they should "mix with the people". But their continued existence is defended by these critics on the grounds that they are "good for tourism", "cheaper than a president", a focus for "national unity", stand "above politics" and endless other ritual excuses.

The monarchy's connections with the ruling class are not incidental but integral. They are millionaires with a massive stake in capitalism. The 'loyalty' they are a focus for is a loyalty to class society, to capitalism. The 'family' they are supposed to epitomise is the bourgeois family with its subordination and enslavement of women. The Church the monarch heads, the 'christian values' they are supposed to embody are those of the sanctified order of "The rich man in his castle, the poor man at his gate/God made them high or low/And ordered their estate". In sum the monarchy is an expression of everything that is hypocritical, exploitative and submissive in capitalist society.

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CLERGY IN CONFLICT

The Iranian revolution was a national anti-imperialist revolution. It drew wide layers of the population from a variety of classes into a struggle against US imperialism's chosen puppet in the Gulf—the Shah. Despite the reactionary Islamic leadership that was carefully grafted on to this movement by the exiled followers of the Ayatollah Ruollah Khomeini, the movement itself was unmistakably anti-imperialist. The vastness of the mobilisations and the aspirations of the masses (both material and democratic—expressed in the formation of Shoras, the carrying through of land seizures etc) prevented Khomeini from immediately imposing a clerical dictatorship in Iran. Indeed Khomeini was forced to play a bonapartist role in an attempt to reconcile the sharply counterposed class interests that the revolution had brought to the fore. The ruling class, with the Shah deposed, were split on how best to rule Iran in the interests of preserving capitalism and preventing the working class from filling the breach with its own class rule.

The capitalist class in Iran is largely merchant or financial. The Shah and his court were, in fact, the backbone of the imperialist dominated industrial sector of the economy within Iran. With the Shah gone there was no stable bourgeois

Who needs the RCP?

There is a fatal logic which operates amongst British left Groups when they become tired of the restrictions that being a small group imposes on them. Either they dissolve themselves into the 'Left' of the Labour Party where they can imagine themselves to be a burgeoning mass force and the next in line for leadership or they declare themselves to be THE Party. The Militant and Workers' Action represent the former tendency while the WRP and SWP the latter.

The Revolutionary Communist Tendency - a group far smaller than the WRP or SWP, and with infinitely less base in the working class, are now the latest group to declare themselves the party. After years of declaring that the working class had no vanguard they have now discovered that they are it after all. There is no use in seeking an explanation for this mainly in terms of the delusions of grandeur that haunt their leadership, nor in the mood of religious exaltation that a diet of vigorous but abstract propaganda induces in its devotees. The declaration of the party was the inevitable and logical outcome of the whole political development of the RCT.

The RCT originated out of a split in the Revolutionary Communist Group in 1976 declaring its adherence to the fundamental political positions developed by what was to become the RCG before and after its expulsion from the International Socialist (now SWP) in 1974. Indeed in the political method the RCP still bears the stamp of its origins in the International Socialists - its chronic sectarianism, its rejection of the method of communist work developed in the transitional programme and its consequent vacillation between ultraleftism and opportunism.

The RCP proudly proclaims that the major difference between it and the rest of what it likes to call the 'radical' left is its fight for "revolutionary independence" from reformism. Thus we find in "The Next Step" (TNS) No.14,

"For the RCT activity makes no sense unless it expresses class independence. That's why so much of the RCT's activity takes place independently of the official labour movement"

The practical sectarian results of this justification for remaining supposedly "principled" but outside the organisations of the working class can be most clearly seen in the RCP's attitude towards the United Front and the Labour Party.

In a major article in TNS no.13 Frank Richards outlines the RCP's approach to the United Front. Richards correctly points out that the tactic of the united front was developed by the Comintern because the reformists still held the allegiance of the majority of the working class, an allegiance that the communists could only break through united action, in struggle, with reformist workers in order to reveal the bankruptcy of their leaders in practice.

Patently false

While agreeing in principle with this method, Richards then proceeds to reject it on the grounds that it is 'inappropriate' for today's circumstances, "This tactic is irrelevant to situations where revolutionaries cannot lead the struggle of the masses." (The United Front, TNS 13)

It is irrelevant, we are told, because unlike the 1920 1920's there is no "vanguard". "The tactic of the united front is inappropriate today if for no other reason than the fact that the revolutionary wing of the united front does not exist" (Richards op.cit.) The question then is reduced to one of size - where, we are asked, do revolutionaries embrace one fourth or one third of the working class as they did in the early '20's?

It is patently false to suggest that the Comintern only saw the united front tactic as being of use in such circumstances (which unfortunately were rare even for the Comintern). The British Communist Party pursued a highly successful united front tactic in the Minority Movement in the early twenties with a membership that had only reached 5000 in 1925 (see L.J. Macfarlane - The British Communist Party, Appendix D). The situation was no different in many other countries. In the case of the colonies and semi-colonies of the East the Comintern was telling handfuls of communists to pursue the tactic in relation to "national revolutionary movements". Richards tries to bring Trotsky in on his side but, even in the period of the 1930's, when the International Communist League was directing tiny groups of Trotskyists in the methods and tactics aimed at building revolutionary communist parties anew, Trotsky wrote, "In any case, under discussion now is not the immediate proclamation of new parties and of an independent international but of preparing for them ... in relation to reformist and centrist labour organisations (including the Stalinists) it [the I.C.L.-WP] is guided by the general principles of the united front policy." (Writings 1932-3)

Was Trotsky then breaking with the method of the Comintern in directing the use of the united front tactic - in relation to the French Socialist Party for instance in 1934? We would answer no. It is



in fact the RCP which rejects this method. It is only by developing the idea that the Comintern applied the united front in entirely different circumstances i.e. where there were mass parties, that Richards is able to claim continuity with the Leninist method.

There is nothing new in the conclusions Frank Richards dresses up as discoveries. The same verdict on the united front has been delivered in the sectarian stables often before through the mouths of Gerry Healy and Duncan Hallas for example. The root of the RCP's rejection of the united front lies in their fundamentally idealist approach to building the vanguard party.

It is only by intervening in the organisation of the working class, fighting with and alongside reformist workers in action that it is possible to win militants to communism. Instead the RCP proudly proclaim how much of their work takes place "outside", "independent of" the organisations of the class. Far from seeing the necessity to intervene in what Trotsky described as the yet 'imperfect and unfinished' struggles of the working class, the RCP constantly stresses its task as one of asserting the "working class point of view", raising at all times "anti-capitalist ideas", arguing the "proletarian position". The struggle is placed firmly on the ideological terrain divorced from the material struggles of the working class.

This is justified on the basis that there are certain struggles which more clearly raise "class questions" - i.e. are more favourable than others for determining the "working class point of view". So we are told for instance that, "Wage militancy is the class struggle in its simplest form, it is quite consistent with reformism. As long as the class struggle stays on the level of wages and conditions it is not yet anti-capitalist in character." (TNS No.1)

Indeed, given that the RCP, following its SWP mentors, has abandoned the only method that allows revolutionaries to intervene in the daily struggles of the class in a communist fashion - "To find the bridge between the present demands and the socialist programme for revolution" (The Transitional Programme) - it is little wonder that they either retreat from "imperfect" workers struggles or opportunistically tail them.

Class struggle is the acid test

Thus from "Our Tasks and Methods" (Revolutionary Communists Reprints No.1) onwards the prime target in this "battle for ideas" becomes challenging (or more clearly - devouring) "chauvanism" - "We knew it (the working class - WP) did need a lot of advice (sic) about the debilitating effects of nationalist politics on its struggles. We therefore focussed on Irish Freedom and black rights - two issues on which the absence of an independent working class outlook has had disastrous effects". (TNS No.9) Concrete results of this method could be seen on the "Peoples March" - while the RCT denounced its popular frontist nature from outside, our comrades on the march fought alongside other marchers against the CP's strategy in action on the march. While the RCT "demanded" the marchers take a stand on Ireland from outside, our comrades won their sections of the march to supporting political status from inside. The follow up is predictable; and RCP led "workers march on Ireland" which will involve none but themselves and supporters and is run in true SWP party building stunt lines, justified no doubt as providing a "revolutionary pole of attraction".

The RCP's much vaunted "independence" does not have the character they imagine it to have.

Political, programmatic independence of the party from the bourgeoisie and from bourgeois trends in the labour movement must never be confused with separation from the class in struggle. The RCP, like much of the British left, had a 'bad' social composition; i.e. it is dominated by people from a petit-bourgeois background, by white collar workers and students. To say this is not to indulge in vulgar workerism. If they were all miners, dockers or car workers it wouldn't assure the correctness or the proletarian character of their politics. But given a correct revolutionary programme, the living experience of the class struggle is the acid test, the proof in life of its correctness. The RCT(P), standing classically in the sectarian tradition, however make a virtue out of their separation from the class.

Sectarianism always has specific defining features. Deliberate abstentions from the material struggles of the working class is blamed on the working class' inability to recognise the sectarians as the vanguard they have appointed themselves as. As Trotsky put it succinctly when summarising the Marxist definition of sectarianism, "The sectarian looks upon the life of society as a great school, with himself as a teacher there. In his opinion the working class should put aside its less important matters, and assemble in solid rank around his rostrum. Then the task could be solved". (Sectarianism, Centristism and the FI, Writings 1935-6)

What's the point . . .

The RCP's approach to the Labour Party is predictable. They reject the united front approach of fighting alongside workers in and outside the Labour Party who have illusions in Benn and attempting to break those illusions in struggle, and in its place put "intransigent" denunciations of Labourism combined with an attempt to provide a "revolutionary alternative".

"The reason why independent revolutionary activity is so important is because no significant section of the working class will break with reformism unless they see an alternative in the here and now (Frank Richards - The United Front TNS No.13)

Yet the actual activity of the RCT during the local election campaign gives striking confirmation of what Trotsky called "a law of political botany" - that sectarianism is only "a bud from which can always bloom the full flower of opportunism." Having rejected the united front the RCT then proceeded to stand candidates under the banner of "East London Workers Against Racism" - a political bloc of RCT and non RCT individuals standing for council. And what was the revolutionary programme of ELWAR? An example - "What's the point of promising jobs for all, decent housing or cheap transport when the money isn't there Everybody knows there's a crisis. Profits are down and three million people on the dole". (TNS No.12) What conclusions the voters in East London were meant to draw from this is unclear - tighten your belts, profits are down, the money isn't there? We've heard that one before. At no point is the alternative outlined, make the bosses pay, work or full pay, nationalisation under workers' control of companies declaring redundancies with no compensation, for a massive programme of socially useful public works under trade union control etc. The RCT platforms themselves are no better, rarely rising above the level of reformist demands - cheaper busfares, more house building, better benefits, train-

ing facilities for youth. These in themselves are supportable demands but separated from the demands and forms of struggle that give a real workers answer to the capitalist crisis and raise at every step the organisation of the working class for power - they remain reformist solutions acceptable, at least verbally, to the labour lefts. What is quite striking is that none of these "intransigent" revolutionary platforms even makes it clear that the candidates stand for the overthrow of capitalism; this is an election campaign where it is crucial for revolutionaries to put forward a clear political alternative to reformism - where a communist programme is counterposed to a reformist one.

This reformist practice was accompanied by all the normal RCT bally hoo designed to convince themselves that they really represented an "alternative pole" to the Labour Party - "We've got a chance to put revolutionary communism on the map!" "the day of the marxist municipal council isn't so far off..." (TNS 12) "Labour under pressure..." "Now we need to go forward to build a real alternative to the Labour Party..." (TNS 13). What the RCT "long suspected" that "many working class people have had enough of the Labour Party", that "disgust with Labour's failure to oppose the Tories is widespread and deeply felt" (TNS 12) certainly wasn't reflected in their derisory election results!

Again it is necessary, given the RCP's diet of illusions and breastbeating to invent layers of workers who are being won over to the "independent revolutionary alternative".

Crippling practice

The RCP's opportunism does not end with its electoral antics however. It is precisely in the industrial struggle - which for the RCP is "not yet anti-capitalist in character" - that the RCP is disarmed and ends up tailing economic militancy.

Seeing the class struggle in terms only of a struggle at the level of ideas the RCP concentrates on exposing the officials and 'explaining' that they share the same ideas as the capitalists. The sectarian necessarily has to reject the method - developed by the Comintern and continued by Trotsky - of advancing a strategy of demands that relate to the immediate demands of workers, offering methods of struggle which strengthen the self-organisation of the workers and offer an alternative to the capitalists' demands for sacrifices to "save the company". It is only this method of advancing a system of transitional demands that enables communists to break from the crippling Social Democratic practice of advancing a minimum reformist programme for the here and now whilst advancing abstract propaganda for the desirability of socialism unconnected to the everyday struggles themselves.

The RCP has no alternative to this social-democratic method. It delivers its lectures against capitalist ideas whilst tailing the immediate struggles of the working class. It is even proud of the fact. The Next Step brazenly declared "We know that the British working class did not need our advice about how to organise or about what tactics to employ in strikes for higher wages and better conditions" (TRS 9)

Big Brother

The RCP contents itself with tailing economic militancy in the good old IS/SWP tradition. Both the SWP and the RCP start from the same position - their common rejection of the Transitional Programme and, with it, the method of Bolshevism and the Comintern. Trotsky once said of the Bordigists and certain sectarians in the International Communist League who opposed the entry policy into the SFIO that "By means of propagandistic literature if it is good, one can educate the first cadres, but one cannot rally the proletarian vanguard which lives neither in a circle nor in a school room but in class society, in a factory, in the organisations of the masses, a vanguard to whom one must know how to speak in the language of its experiences. The best prepared propagandist cadres must inevitably disintegrate if they do not find daily contact with the masses" (The Present Situation in the Labour Movement and the Tasks of the Bolshevik Leninists - Documents of the F.I.)

This is equally true of the RCP today. By rejecting the united front, denouncing the "radical left" for calling for votes for Labour, appearing to pose as an "intransigent" revolutionary alternative to reformism it might well have transitory success amongst sections of students justifiably repelled by the chronic rightward drift and adaption to reformism of the centrist left in Britain today. But the RCP offers no revolutionary alternative to these currents only a warmed over version of the sectarian posturing and opportunist practice of its hugely more successful, bigger, brother - the SWP ■



Whilst in "normal times" the Royal Family has a primarily ideological function it has a further function that is more brutally material. It is a reserve force for the real power which underlies the parliamentary 'democratic' facade of the State.

The British ruling class in crisis will inevitably look to the monarchy as its first resort in establishing an authoritarian government against the working class. All the machinery is in place for them to do this. Charles' training with the various armed forces, his 'experience of government' sitting in at Cabinet meetings (under a Labour government!), the monarch's receipt of all state papers, and position as head of the armed forces, all mean that when the ruling class wishes to raise itself above parliamentary government the monarchy provides it with the 'time-honoured', 'traditional', 'legal' means to do so.

The dismissal of the Australian Labour Party Government of Gough Whitlam by the Queen's Representative (the Governor General) even in a relatively stable period, and with very conservative Labour leaders, indicates what this institution can and will be used for.

The continued existence of the monarchy, the House of Lords and the whole paraphernalia of Feudal left-overs is a measure of the weakness of the working class movement and its leadership over the last hundred years.

This weakness is expressed not only in the leaders from Ramsay MacDonald to Michael Foot who have kissed the royal fingers with such pleasure. It is also expressed by fire-eating militants like Arthur Scargill's welcoming of Prince Charles to the Yorkshire Pits. Charles' impression of 'King Arthur' was entirely favourable. He was dubbed a "good chap". The would-be President of the Socialist Republic of South Yorkshire was willing to bow and scrape like all the rest. Under leaders like this "socialist republics" will remain a badge-makers bad joke in Yorkshire or anywhere else.

OFF WITH THEIR HEADS?

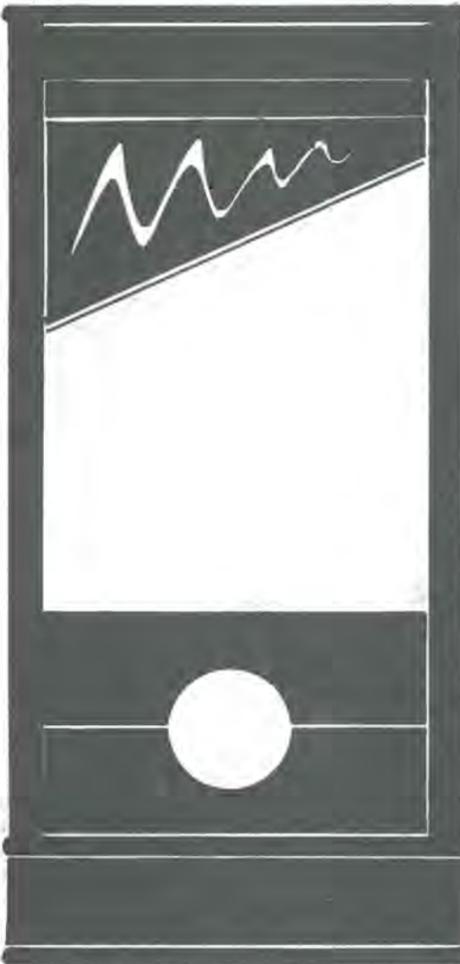
Tony Benn stigmatises the House of Lords as an obstacle to the realisation of the Labour Programme. He evokes in his speeches the Peasants Revolt, the Levellers, the Chartists. Yet the Peasants of 1381 cut off the Archbishop of Canterbury's head but were defeated by their illusions in the treacherous boy-king Richard II. The Levellers were the most radical wing of the revolution which topped Charles I. The Chartists best leaders were Republicans through and through. Compared with the monarchy the House of Lords is a minor obstacle. Indeed it can only be seen as the major obstruction to "socialist measures" from the leather benches of the House of Commons. Trotsky in the 1920s observed:

"The royal power is weak because the instrument of bourgeois rule is the bourgeois parliament and because the bourgeoisie does not need any special activity outside parliament. But in case of need, the bourgeoisie will make use of the royal power with great success as a concentration of all non-parliamentary, i.e. real forces armed against the working class".

The slavish submissiveness of the Labour and trade union leaders to royalty is an indication of their conservatism, their fundamental resignation to the continuation of capitalism. Again Trotsky had the measure of these men and women, in the 1920s and nothing has changed. Of the 'lefts' as well as the Right Wing he remarked: "They consider that they are called upon by destiny to rebuild from the bottom up the old social system, and yet they are completely prostrated on encountering the most insignificant details. How can they dare threaten bourgeois property, when they do not even dare refuse the Prince of Wales pocket money?"

A good question today as then. Despite all the cuts, despite three million living on the pitiful dole the Labour MPs have not uttered a word of protest against the third Royal Jamboree in four years. Revolutionaries should take the opportunity of the obscene spectacle to draw attention to the real role of the monarchy, to raise against the republican banner of the English revolution of the Seventeenth Century, of the Chartists.

Socialism in Britain is inseparable from the creation of a Workers Council republic built on the rubble of capitalism and the monarchy. As the ruling class prepare to turn London once again into a game reserve for feudal relics our efforts must be redoubled to add the names of Charles and Diana to a distinguished, but as yet unfinished list; Charles and Henrietta-Maria, Louis and Marie Antoinette, Nicholas and Alexandra ■



H-Block vote blow to bourgeoisie

The results of the Irish elections represent a significant blow by sections of class-conscious Irish workers against their exploiters and oppressors. For the Southern Irish ruling class has suffered a severe, if temporary, blow to their hopes of forming the kind of stable pro-capitalist regime so desperately needed by them to launch a major attack on workers and their living standards. Neither bourgeois option - Coalition or Fianna Fail - was given a clear majority. Crucial in this was the electoral success of the H-Block candidates.

It was a shattering blow to the Southern bourgeois collaborators with British Imperialism to see 9 H-Block prisoner candidates take an average 10.1% of the first preference votes in the areas where they ran. It has forced the new prime minister Garret Fitzgerald to declare that a 'solution' to H-Block is his first priority. Yet up to only a month ago Fitzgerald was the prime enemy of the H-Block struggle, collecting names of councillors who supported the prisoners and claiming that the mass shutdowns in Sligo, Waterford, Drogheda and Dundalk and the massive works stoppages elsewhere over Bobby Sands' murder were the results of 'intimidation'. With two H-Block TDs (members of the Dail) and one of them (Kieran Doherty serving 22 years for arms possession) dying in the H-Blocks, Fitzgerald has to worry not only about the focus this will give to the H-Block struggle in the South but he also has reason to fear that the resulting by-election under PR might easily hand a seat to his rival bourgeois Fianna Fail Party, one of two vital seats that separate his Coalition of 80 from the Fianna Fail 78 seats.

PASSIVE VOTE CATCHING

The H-Block vote was all the more remarkable in winning seats for two abstentionist prisoner candidates and in its high level when we consider that in each constituency the H-Block activists had to compete with an average of 4 candidates of the self-styled "republican" Fianna Fail Party and against bourgeois election machines financed at a level never before seen in Ireland. If the political sectarianism of the Provisionals had not opposed non-abstentionists and Bernadette Mc Aliskey from standing, if they had not held back their activists from canvassing for IRSP (Irish Republican Socialist Party) prisoner candidates and if the Sinn Fein-dominated National H-Block Committee had fought the election in all of the 41 constituencies, a powerful focus could have been given to the mobilisation of the clearly proven mass sympathy that exists for the prisoners.

Tragically the H-Block Committee not only squandered these chances in passive vote-catching, a policy which demobilised industrial and street action, but in the 3-week period of the parliamentary stalemate it screwed the lid even tighter on its activists, made verbal pleas to "all parties" and high-lighted the diplomatic "initiatives" of the Bishops in seeking a compromise. The results so far of those initiatives is Atkins' arrogant and cynical statement when he spoke of scope for "development" in Ulsters' prison regimes, (June 30) have nevertheless been resolutely rejected by the prisoners. As their relatives reminded the media, similar empty words had not been in short supply when Atkins conned the prisoners at Christmas, leading to the murder of 4 hunger strikers. The National H-Block/Armagh Committee held only one march of 1500 in Dublin during the whole governmental crisis - on the day the Coalition was installed. At the same time it highhandedly rejected the plan for a national conference of the campaign's trade union groups and workers supporters.

AT A PRICE

The Irish Workers Group fought in trade union committees before the Election for the relaunching of the strategy of industrial action *independently* of the National committee which had liquidated the fight to mobilise workers at the centre of the campaign. We warned that the upsurge of feeling around the hunger strike deaths, far from bringing a new turn to organised working class action, would strengthen the National Committee's hopes of building a pan-Catholic Nationalist Front as against a workers-based Anti-Imperialist United Front. The "Trotskyists" centrists of the Peoples Democracy (US FI), League for a Workers' Republic (FI-IC) and Socialist Workers Movement (SWP-GB), *all* opposed the *independent* relaunching of the fight for workers action. The PD and LWR election candidates who stood on the H-Block platform (polling exceptionally well at 3.6% and 3.3%) were indistinguishable in their election methods from the vote-catching and de-mobilising campaigns of the National Committee.

The high H-Block vote, combined with Haughey's Fianna Fail now being in opposition, further strengthened the dangerous strategy of building the pacifist humanitarian Nationalist Front tied to the openly capitalist nationalist parties. Haughey's Party is now free to associate itself more openly with sympathy for the prisoners. Indeed the Sinn Fein and PD leaders of the National Committee had already won the campaign leadership publicly and explicitly reserve

places for Fianna Fail in its leadership *at the price of* abandoning the fight for workers' action and the goal of General Strike at the Campaign Conference on the Sunday after Sands' murder.

It was precisely the vote of important sections of the *working class* that was most crucial in the electoral success of the prisoners. It was in Louth where Paddy Agnew, serving 16 years in Long Kesh, topped the poll with 18.3% of the vote, that the most solid workers' action in the South had been seen on the H-Block issue, with local general strikes led by shop stewards largely independent of the H-Block National Committee. Patterns of transfers with other labour movement candidates and the strong urban worker vote in Waterford, Cork, Dublin and in the towns of Sligo and Tralee confirm a phenomenon of enormous importance to revolutionary socialists - that new anti-imperialist layers of workers and youth are emerging in the South after 60 years of tragic liquidation of the proletarian anti-imperialist tradition of Connolly and Larkin.

These developments serve only to underline the familiar odious spectacle of Connolly's once proud Labour Party joining hands again with the exploiter to aid the enemy class in their hour of need against the exploited and oppressed. The election set back to the Irish Labour Party - at the very moment of a burgeoning and youthful working-class - reduced it to the level of its nadir in 1957 in the peak of emigration and stagnation. It took only 9.9% of the vote *despite* holding the monopoly of affiliation by the trade unions which organise the overwhelming mass of workers. Where Labour competed directly with H-Block candidates the prisoners got 8.4% against Labour's 8% average; for, the *essence* of 60 years of Labourite reformism in a partitioned neo-colony has been its pro-imperialist defence of the institution of Partition and its open support of the bourgeoisie and its imperialist masters in trying to crush the anti-imperialist struggle. But not even the obvious fact that more and more workers had abandoned the Labour Party and voted H-Block, nor the automatic certainty that another period in the clutched Coalition would destroy that Party's machine completely, could abate the naked greed for power and privilege at any price in the Labour Party leadership under Michael O'Leary.

While the recognition of the disastrous impact of Labour's policies on its working class support was registered in the strong opposition to coalition stemming largely from the trade union delegates and delegates from cities such as Dublin and Cork where the Labour Party had suffered dramatically from its slipping working class support, this did not stop the parliamentary cretinist "opposition" around Party Chairman Higgins and the militant tendency continuing to place their loyalty to the party and its policies *whatever* the decision of the June 28th Party Conference.

LABOUR PARTY BANKRUPT

Fitzgerald's Fine Gael/Labour Coalition programme has all the surface gloss of the 1960 aspiration of Fine Gael's liberal "Just Society" wing on *token* issues of equality, family law reform, environment, youth representation, income tax equity, overseas aid etc. (divorce is ruled out!). Under his arch right-wing predecessor even this shallow liberalism was crushed, but Fitzgerald revived it in Opposition to make the most remarkable gains in adding 20 *new* deputies to his Party in a Dail expanded by 19 new seats. Behind the liberal rhetoric of the Coalition programme lies a strategy that makes price rises and wage cuts the solution to inflation and the bosses' crisis. The "Just Society" liberals will find that having captured the Fine Gael machine a decade too late they must now do the bidding of imperialist capitalism involving the freezing of public sector wages, savagely restraining industrial wages, outlawing unofficial strikes, de-nationalising State industry. Nothing short of preparing an all-out offensive on the wage worker and the unions can answer, for this neo-colonial bourgeoisie, the profound crisis that it faces, a crisis Fitzgerald himself is already beginning to explicitly state in its starkest terms as he makes daily revelations of "how much worse than he expected" are the actual finances of the State. If Fianna Fail's projected £500million budget deficit for 1981 was a scandal to the bourgeoisie in the pre-election period, then revealing on July 3rd that 91% of the deficit is already spent in 6 months allows Fitzgerald to create the conditions in which his docile Labour Party bedfellows will not dare oppose the massive price rises that are already hitting the headlines in public services and basic goods.

The Labour Party stands increasingly condemned as bankrupt in the eyes of workers and the role it is about to play for the Irish bourgeoisie will further discredit it and hasten its division and demise. New anti-imperialist forces of labour are looking for an all-Ireland leadership in a period of developing anti-imperialist and anti-capitalist struggle. Fighting to build that leadership is a task to which the methods and perspectives of international revolutionary Trotskyism are alone adequate ■

BY A MEMBER OF
THE IRISH WORKERS GROUP

IN 1972, THE POLICE SUFFERED A HUMILIATING defeat at Saltley in Birmingham. Inadequately trained and numerically overwhelmed, they were forced to retreat in the face of a mass picket of thousands of Birmingham workers striking in solidarity with the miners. From that moment the Chiefs of Police, with the full support of both Labour and Tory Governments have acted dramatically to increase the ability of the police to intervene on picket lines and to control and disperse mass pickets and demonstrations.

The experience of key disputes in the last period shows that workers in struggle now face a fully trained, para-military police force at the service of the employers. In Scotland, Scott-Lithgow workers, who occupied the offices of Bestobell, were surrounded by police and escorted one by one to a waiting coach. At Plansees in Rotherham occupying workers were faced with the choice of either obeying a court order to leave or facing up to police action to remove them. At Ansell's in Birmingham police acted decisively to enforce the new laws against effective picketing. This experience shows that it is now of decisive importance for the workers' movement to match that force with the same degree of organisation, training and commitment, in order to be in a position to defend their strikes and occupations against police attack. The alternative is to let workers' struggles be intimidated and broken up by organised uniformed strikebreakers.

The miners' strike of 1972, which the miners won as a result of resourceful use of the flying picket combined with the support of mass pickets, forced a serious rethink in the inner circles of the ruling class as to how best to organise their army and police to deal with mounting industrial militancy. In the aftermath of the strike, 'The Times' reported a Brigadier on the General Staff at UK Land Headquarters as saying 'The whole period of the miners' strike made us realise that the present size of the police force is far too small. It is based on the fundamental philosophy that we are a law-abiding country, but things have now got to the state where there are not enough resources to deal with the increasing numbers who are not prepared to respect the law' [23.5.1972]

The outcome of this humiliating experience for the ruling class at the hands of organised workers was a complete overhaul of all contingency arrangements for the intervention of police and troops in demonstrations and pickets. In 1973 it was announced that a permanent National Security Committee had been established whose direct task was to co-ordinate the activities of the police, the army and the civil service - that body now passes under the title of Civil Contingencies Committee sitting in permanent session in the Cabinet Office. Under the aegis of this new co-ordination, the police have been trained and reorganised to deal with crowd control and other forms of what passes in their language as 'civil disorder'.

The 1972 annual report of 'Her Majesty's Inspectors of Constabulary' lamented the wounds suffered by the police in the miners' strike. But by 1974 the report was proudly stating a sharp increase in the number of crowd control courses being arranged within the police force. The sharpest expression of their new preparations was the dramatic increase in the numbers and public appearances of the Special Patrol Groups (SPG) during the 1970s.

The first Special Patrol Group was established in London as long ago as 1965. But it was during 1973 and 1974 that the SPG was expanded and organised on an explicitly para-military basis. During 1973/4, 24 of the 52 police forces in Britain created SPG units. Each SPG has full arms training and regular, scientific crowd control training and practice. Maintained in a state of permanent readiness through 'command and control' police computer systems, the SPG has proved a vital addition to the armoury of the British ruling class.

ARMY GUIDANCE

From 1972 the London SPG was trained in crowd control technique culled from the experience of the British army of occupation in Northern Ireland. The 'snatch squads', the 'wedges' that have become a permanent feature on demonstrations and on picket lines were refined and developed during this period under Army guidance. In 1973 two unarmed young Pakistanis were shot by the SPG in India House. In 1974 the SPG were sent in to a demonstration in Red Lion Square against the National Front. Kevin Gately met his death as a result of the SPG's ferocious onslaught. In 1977 mass pickets at Grunwicks were held at bay and dispersed by SPG squads. In Southall in 1979 Blair Peach was murdered after the town was invaded by the SPG.

At present there are at least 12,000 SPG police trained in fire-arm use and the most ruthless techniques of crowd control. In the aftermath of Southall where the organised thuggery of the SPG and the private weaponry of its members caused minor protests from the labour movement, the police have imposed a 4 year limit on membership of the SPG. But the result will be that even more police will receive a training in picket dispersing and skull-cracking as graduates of the SPG training.

Behind the SPG stands an organised auxiliary network itself a product of streamlining and training throughout the 1970s. As immediate back-up to the SPG, 'Police Support Units' (PSUs) have been established and officially recorded since 1974. By 1979, 28 Police Chief Constables reported maintaining operational PSUs while a further 14 declared they had made contingencies for training in crowd control and public order. PSUs are fully trained in crowd control and riot shield use as support for the SPG. State Research calculate that there were 11,000 riot-trained police within the PSUs by the end of the 1970s. The extent of riot control training

was revealed by a report from the 1978 London Police Commissioner who admitted that 7,000 of his 22,000 force had received riot training already.

The Chief Constables' reports have become increasingly frank and explicit concerning the role of the police in controlling industrial disputes and countering political disorder. The Norfolk Chief Constable reported in 1979 'Violence as demonstrated by disorder of both industrial and political origin has increased to such a degree that police officers are being subjected to forms of training for situations beyond what is regarded as their traditional role' and the Suffolk report of the same year stated that 'Against a background of social unrest, the enforcement of the law of picketing and the control of demonstrations designed to promote political demands have become an increasingly invidious task for the police'. [Both quoted in State Research 'Policing the Eighties']

The training of the squads is not simply the result of police college classrooms and simulated exercises. The National Front demonstration in Leicester in 1979, for example, was used as a massive training exercise by the PSUs. 20 forces sent riot trained PSUs to Leicester for that day. Gloucester sent both its SPG and its PSU to get a taste of action and Greater Manchester sent 600 police in a 42 vehicle army. That demonstration was particularly used to practice the use of police dogs which were set on the anti-fascist demonstrators without warning.

It was during the steel strike that the PSUs were put to their most extensive use. During the strike, particularly in order to counter the use of pickets to close private steel concerns, South Yorkshire police were backed up with PSU support from Manchester, West and North Yorkshire, Humberside, Lincolnshire, Nottingham and Derbyshire. The picket line now inevitably faces the organised and experienced violence of the police picket-busting squads. When Prior supervised the passage of the Employment Act to limit the size of the picket line and to strictly limit the places where picketing can take place he did so in the full knowledge that the trained army thugs were already trained and geared up to implement that law.

THE SPECIAL BRANCH

Alongside the organised training of crack anti-picket squads, the Police have also increased the numbers and role of the Special Branch in the last decade. The number of officially registered Special Branch police quadrupled during the 1970s to 1600. Every police force now has its own operative Special Branch. Most significant however has been the re-writing of the terms of its operation that was carried through by Merlyn Rees, Labour's Home Secretary in 1978. Himself fully screened as 100% reliable by the police and the army, Rees extended the definition of those 'subversives' that the Special Branch are officially licensed to shadow and undermine.

Until 1978 subversives were those who 'would contemplate the overthrow of the government by unlawful means.' But for Rees, the category was extended to include those involved in activities 'which threaten the safety or well-being of the State, and are intended to undermine or overthrow parliamentary democracy by political, industrial or violent means.' Rees and the Police Chiefs served notice that the Special Branch was licensed to intervene in industrial disputes, to track and inform on industrial militants as an undercover auxiliary to the SPG and PSUs.

The decisive militarisation of the police in the face of the industrial militancy of the early 1970s was undertaken as an alternative to the establishment of a 'Third Force' - along the lines of the CRS in France - to stand between the police and the army. But co-ordination between the Police and the Army chiefs has itself been strengthened throughout the 1970s in preparation for the intervention of the army in strikes and battles against the police, should the latter's training prove insufficient. Not only do the army and police chiefs sit together on the Civil Contingencies Committee, in 1974 the police and the army carried out their celebrated joint exercise in occupying Heathrow Airport. In the winter of 1977/78, 20,000 troops were used to break the strike of 32,000 firemen. The army was prepared to intervene at Brixton should the police have so requested.

The legislative framework exists to allow any Government to rapidly deploy troops in industrial disputes. The Defence of the Realm Act of 1914



In the face of police

FOR WORKERS SELF-DEFENCE

Mounted police attack demonstrating workers during the General Strike. Picture: Museum of Labour History



gave the Government power for 7 years to use troops in civil disorders. It was renewed in the face of widespread industrial militancy in 1920 in the form of the Emergency Powers Act. Since 1920, troops have been used under the Emergency Powers Act 12 times - each time to break industrial disputes! Under the guise of the 'prolonged bad weather of last winter' Tory Home Secretary Henry Brooke further extended the Government's power to use troops in the 1964 Emergency Powers Act. It was this act that was used to break the Glasgow firemen's strike of 1973 and the dustmen's strike of 1976 at the hands of a Labour Government.

There is nothing new or 'unBritish' about the new SPG and PSU units. As long ago as 1855 Marx observed the relish of the British police as they lay into a demonstration of London workers protesting a bill to close all shops on Sunday. The demonstration was ambushed by police stationed in improvised blockhouses on the Serpentine.

'At once the constabulary rushed from ambush, whipped their truncheons out of their pockets, began to beat up people's heads until the blood ran profusely, yanked individuals here and there out of the vast multitude (a total of 104 were thus arrested) and dragged them to the improvised blockhouses.' (Marx and Engels on Britain, p.48)

Again in 1866, Marx witnessed an attack on London workers protesting about the banning of meetings in Hyde Park. On this occasion workers did break park railings and fight the police. But Marx lamented the poor organisation of the London workers in the face of police attack.

'If the railings - and it was tough and go - had been used offensively and defensively against the police and about 20 of the latter had been kicked out the military would have had to 'intervene' instead of only parading. And then there would have been some fun. One thing is certain, these thick-headed John Bull's, whose brainpans seem to have been

specially manufactured for the constables' bludge will never get anywhere without a really bloody counter with the ruling powers.' (ibid, p.451, let Marx to Engels)

Every successive wave of industrial militancy in the 1880s, during the mighty battles before and after World War One, during the mobilisation of the unemployed in the 1930s - workers have been subject to brutal cudgelings by police soldiers alike.

Acutely aware of what is at stake for the ruling class has acted with ruthless foresight to ensure that its fighting detachments are trained and confident to break up pickets and demonstrations. Their police force will license to saturate Brixton with squads of clothes police in the notorious operation '81' that eventually forced the working class of Brixton - and Black Brixton youth in p



Pictures: 1, 2, 3, and 5, John Sturrock (Report); 4, Carlos Augusto (IFL); Below, Workers Power.



attacks . . .



to the nature and purpose of the police force and those illusions cripple the working class, and can continue to do so in the face of police attack. It is one thing to organise against fascist attacks on workers' meetings and the black community. In particular circumstances even the Labour and Social Democratic leaders can organise forms of defence in these circumstances. In 1934, for example, the French Stalinist Party organised something akin to a self-defence apparatus in the face of mounting fascist violence against working class organisations. So too did the Social Democrats in Germany and Austria.

RELYING ON THE POLICE

But even in the face of such attacks the Trade Union and Labour leaders invariably preach reliance on the police as the crucial means of securing defence against fascist thugs. That reliance -aped by the Socialist Workers Party leaders in the Anti-Nazi League - invariably and inevitably enables the fascists to continue to organise behind the lines of police protection while the anti-fascists are brutally herded in the opposite direction or, as has been the case more recently, legally prevented from marching at all.

But in the face of direct attacks from the police themselves, the illusions that abound as to the neutrality and, increasingly, the invincibility, of the police have an even more devastating effect. It remains the task of militants who want to protect occupations and picket lines to win the argument against those workers who see the police as a neutral force and to advance tactics that will allow workers to repel police violence in an organised and disciplined manner.

The picket line is essentially an instrument of discipline created by the most active and conscious workers against the employing class itself and against those backward sections of the workforce who can be used by the employers against the militant led majority of the workforce. The fact that those backward workers tend to be in a minority in disputes means that the sheer size of the picket line was normally adequate to repel scabs in the key disputes of the early 70's. It was precisely this fact that prompted the employing class to secure legal curbs on picket size through Prior's Employment Act and strengthen its police force in industrial disputes.

The sheer size of the mass picket - at Saitley for example - was able to guarantee victory over scab workers relatively peacefully, such was the balance of forces it created in favour of workers in struggle. It is the decision of the employing class to reverse that balance of forces to their advantage in disputes that required the use of a new scale of violence on the picket line. At Grunwicks it was the police who initiated violence against the disorganised pickets. In order to break the organised resistance of the Ansell's workers in Birmingham, it was the police who initiated direct physical intimidation against the pickets. Birmingham police, freshly trained in crowd control, acted as escorts for scab beer and left at least one Ansell's worker on crutches after one drive through a poorly defended picket line. It is in the face of this organised violence - prepared for over the last decade - that militants

must prepare their own defence. That means that militants themselves must be prepared for police attacks and must prepare the majority of the workforce by explaining at mass meetings and in bulletins, using the evidence of this history of the SPG and the PSUs, that the police are not a neutral force aimed at maintaining peace and order. They are trained thugs, at the service of the employing class, ready to apply their legal monopoly on violence to break the organisations that workers have created to defend their jobs and their livelihoods.

But successful defence against the SPG needs more than careful and patient propaganda on the part of militants. Workers must be persuaded not only of the necessity but also of the possibility of resisting police attack. This means that the call for 'Workers Defence' must be posed aggressively with concrete plans for organising defence in the face of attack. In any dispute there are invariably workers who are fitter, better trained in self-defence arts than others. They will usually be those who are younger or who have received some form of military training in the past. It is these workers who should be deputised to become the core of the **WORKERS DEFENCE SQUAD**. Where possible formed in advance of disputes, their task must be to undergo disciplined drilling and training in preparation for police attack. Of necessity the defence squad must have its own disciplined command structure to ensure order and cohesion in its ranks on the picket lines and in defence of occupations. In that way the defence squad can ensure that it is more than a disorganised mass picket. The defence squad must have its own plan of defence, its own contingency arrangements in face of the inevitable determined onslaught by the police.

TRAINING AND DISCIPLINE

Just as the SPG are selected from the fittest elements in the police force as a whole and ferried from dispute to dispute so the *defence squad* must actively seek the disciplined involvement of working class activists from throughout its immediate locality. As well as organising collections, blacking and demonstrations of solidarity, all working class organisations supporting a given dispute should select the most able and fittest of their number to actively participate in the workers defence squad, to train with them and share their discipline. In this way, out of involvement in defending particular struggles the nucleus of permanent functioning workers defence squads can be formed in every area.

The capitalists have acted with vigour and decisiveness to refine their fighting organisations in the face of industrial militancy and economic recession. They have prepared their elite squads and police command structures to saturate and occupy whole towns and in order to break strikes and occupations. The flying picket and mass picket - the tried and tested weapons of the early 1970's - are no longer adequate to face that challenge. The task facing militants is to prepare our own detachments organised for defence as an integral and indispensable element in the battle to repel

the offensive of the Tories and the employing class.

Throughout the momentous class battles of the 1930's, Trotsky consistently argued for the formation of workers militias as an urgent task facing the working class. In the face of the Nazis in Germany, the fascists in Spain and France and picket busting squads in the USA, Trotsky tirelessly argued for the formation of workers militia in order to defend the organisations of the working class from police and fascist attack. The consistent fight of the Trotskyists in the 30's pitted them against the Stalinists and Social Democrats of the Popular Front period and their paralysing illusions in the nature and role of the police force.

Even though Trotsky was fully aware that "the slogan of self-defence units at one time will meet with a sympathetic response, and another will sound like a voice calling in the wilderness, and then again, after a while will acquire new popularity" (Writings 39/40, p10) it remained a consistent feature of the agitation and propaganda of the Fourth International movement.

For Trotsky, no less than for us today, the workers defence squad was an indispensable prerequisite not only of adequate defence against attacks on workers organisations but of the struggle for power by the working class. The workers defence guard - the workers' militia - is the nucleus of a new armed power that can destroy the armed squads of the employing class and lay the basis for a new social order where the working class holds power not through the means of a standing army, set against and isolated from the mass of working people, but through a workers militia organising the masses themselves to police their own society, destroy the last vestiges of the power of the old exploiters on the road to the socialist reconstruction of society. It is as a means of defense in the immediate period and as a means of preparing the working class for the struggle for power that revolutionary communists fight for the formation of workers' defense squads, as Trotsky expressed it in his Transitional Programme:

"Strike pickets are the basic nuclei of the proletarian army. This is our point of departure. In connection with every strike and street demonstration, it is imperative to propagate the necessity of creating workers' groups for self-defence. It is necessary to write this slogan into the programme of the revolutionary wing of the trade unions. It is imperative wherever possible, beginning with the youth groups, to organise groups for self-defence, to drill and acquaint them with the use of arms . . ."

"Only with the help of such systematic, persistent, indefatigable, courageous agitational and organisational work, always on the basis of the experience of the masses themselves, is it possible to root out from their consciousness the traditions of submissiveness and passivity; to train detachments of heroic fighters capable of setting an example to all toilers; to inflict a series of tactical defeats upon the armed thugs of counter-revolution; to compromise fascism in the eyes of petty bourgeois and pave the road for the conquest of power by the proletariat."

BY TED HUNTER

lar - to either accept daily harassment and humiliation or organise to attempt to drive the police out of Brixton.

The bloody experience of Grunwicks where the anti-union employer George Ward was able to shelter in his 'Fort Grunwick' behind the SPG and where disorganised mass picketing was powerless in the face of the SPG's training, underlines just how vital the question of Workers' Defence against Police attack has become to struggles for jobs, for union rights and against victimisation.

On the surface there is nothing exceptional or strange about proposing that workers must undertake the elementary task of organising their own physical defence. Few workers lie down and accept physical beatings if they have the means and training to defend themselves. In the face of mounting racist violence, the youth of Coventry have organised their own rudimentary defence organisation. In the face of police harassment the youth of South London organised to fight back against the police. But in general, massive illusions exist amongst the mass of workers as

Workers' Defence in the General Strike

The Council of Action or General Strike Committee was formed by means of having a central strike committee under a convener, and each sub-convener had a department to look after. There was a subcommittee that was in charge of transport permits, and this was under the control of the N.U.R. delegate to the trades council, a lad by the name of Harry Ewing.

There was also the question of defence and organisation of pickets. We set up for the first time a youth committee as part of the General Strike organisation, and from this youth committee there was a real backbone developed of the picketing, of the hard routine work. The embryo Young Communist League leaders also developed from this youth committee.

There was built up a communications group and the East Fife Motor Cycle Club in Leven approached us and offered us their services as couriers and dispatch riders. This augmented the push-bikes and one or two cars that were made available to us.

The police were under Inspector Clark, who was notorious in our area for his brutality, and he had under him Sergeant Park, who was equally of this type. Clark was continually pestering the strike committee. On another occasion, later on, when we had a mass march to a pit, Clark threatened to take action against us for illegal drilling on the king's highway. Almost every conceivable avenue that he could think of he was always threatening to use against the strikers, and particularly against the strike leaders.

On one occasion I happened to be speaking at a meeting in Buckhaven along with the N.U.R. branch secretary, Sam Happle. A runner came down from Station Road, one of the main road junctions, to say that there had been an attempt to stop a beer lorry from getting through and the police had carried out a baton charge and three of our picket were arrested. When Sam Happle and I proceeded to the scene, men, women and children were running towards the area in hundreds, grasping whatever weapons they could get their hands on - some with fireside pokers, some with sticks, some with pickshafts, stones, bottles,

We reprint here, an account of the formation and organisation of a workers' defence force in Scotland during the General Strike. It is published by Polygon Books Buccleuch Place, Edinburgh EA8 9LW under the title "Militant Miners—Recollections of John McArthur and Letters, 1924-6 of David Proudfoot." The editor is Ian MacDougal and it has a Forward by Mick McGahey. It vividly portrays how workers defence squads repelled police attacks and rendered the constabulary inoperative, thereby maintaining the morale of the strikers.

There was a building site adjoining and the police that were left were getting stoned and were running for their lives. One policeman cleared a six-foot wall round the slaughterhouse non-stop. He would have been suitable for the Olympics.

There was an immediate demand that we assault the police cells in order to get the three lads out. This raised an issue that was new for us but which we felt we would have to cope with. So it was arranged that we would have a meeting immediately at the big strike centre in the Co-operative Hall.

The hall was packed to suffocation. Our meeting was taken charge of by Proudfoot, who was convener of the Methil Central Strike Committee. He said 'Well, we've now got to meet force with organised resistance. The picketing must be carried out, the strike must go on. We're in this strike for the purpose of winning it. We're not going to be diverted by police baton charges. That is a feature we'll just have to face and overcome'.

So we agreed to get some form of organisation. We in the strike leadership started off by saying 'All right, every man look at his neighbour sitting beside him. If you can't volunteer or vouch for him let him be questioned to prove he is a genuine striker.'

Then we set about setting up a properly disciplined organisation. We asked everybody who had any army or navy experience to move to one side of the hall. Then we asked if anybody had been an officer. We did not run to the extent of having an officer. But we had two sergeant-majors: Walter White, who subsequently became active in the United Mineworkers of Scotland, and Will McFadyean. So these sergeant-majors were made corps commanders. Everyone who had been an N.C.O. in the army was given charge of ten privates, and each private was given charge of ten men who had had no army experience.

These ex-servicemen had complete control of this Workers' Defence Corps. There had been a lot of the youth committee and others in a loosely formed picket or Defence Corps before the baton charge, but its ranks swelled to about 750 or 800 after the batoning.

We said 'Well, you can arrange now the main points where picketing has to be done and decide how many men you require in order to make picketing continuous, with men held in reserve.' We organised cyclists who could act as couriers, and particularly valued were young lads who had motor-cycles.

At that stage the most fierce discussion took place: what were we going to do to get the three men out who had been arrested? There were immediate demands that we should march up to the police buildings and forcibly rescue these men. I am not sure what would have been the outcome of that discussion but for the intervention of the father of Barney McGrory, one of the lads who had been arrested. The family were Irish Catholics and were active militants in the labour movement. His father was old Mick McGrory. He got up to say 'Look, we're in a strike which is equivalent to a battle for our lives and our livelihood and all that we hold dear. You can't have a battle, unfortunately, without casualties. But if the battle is to continue then you must accept the casualties and carry on. My son happens to be one of the first casualties. I am very, very, sorry that that is so. But he along with me would wish that we don't do anything that would prevent us from carrying out the strike. So we carry out the strike and they'll bear the consequences of having been arrested.'

That had a tremendous effect on the meeting and I think it was mainly responsible for getting our policy accepted at that big meeting of men. So each man went home, had a meal, and reported to the strike headquarters. I remember going

back down to the headquarters when the first company were going to resume the picketing. As they came up with the sergeant-major in front, he saw me coming along and he shouts 'Eyes left! You could see the arms swinging. The arm was rigid because they were concealing pokers, hammers, and what have you.'

The important thing is they went back to the scene where the baton charge took place. By that time there had been busloads of police drawn in from every area. But the picket took up its post and I remember watching them working. There were three roads converging on to the corner where the baton charge had taken place. The non-commissioned officer in charge of the picket put twenty men on each road, twenty men stopping the main traffic, with push-bikes running back and forward in advance, so that they could get timeous notice of any vehicle that was proceeding in that direction. And then they had something like fifty men standing by in reserve in case they should be needed. In spite of the fact that there was a big contingent of police the stopped every vehicle that came along and continued this activity. It was a marvellous display of organised, disciplined activity. They did the work without looking at the police. Everybody knew, including the police, that if anything untoward happened they would have a real struggle on their hands; and while there might have been some casualties amongst the strikers there would equally have been a number amongst the police.

I have heard it said that in some areas there was collaboration between the workers' pickets and the police in order to keep order. There was no such arrangement in the Methil-Buckhaven area. There the pickets went on duty armed with whatever they could secure: pickshafts, pokers, railway distance pieces, and anything that would be useful in a dust-up. They all also were under instructions to wear their pit boots. They also would be handy in a dust-up. A number of them even used the hard hat they had in the pit at the time, but this was not common. From the time that the Defence Corps became an organised body, there was no more police interference with the pickets.

... FIGHT THE COUNTER-REVOLUTION

Beheshti's long-term objectives were not dissimilar to Bani Sadr's. The difference was that Beheshti was determined to ensure that the vast mullah caste was the agency that both carried them through and benefitted from them. The IRP is in fact a severely faction-ridden organisation itself. Its leaders (Beheshti, Rafsanjani, Khomeini and Rajai) are based on the merchant bourgeoisie and petty-bourgeoisie of the bazaari. But for the exercise of its control the IRP rests on the vast lumpenproletariat—bribing it with dole and dignifying it with religious praise and arms. But their interests are far from compatible. The merchant bourgeoisie needs stability and industry for its trade. In the long term an economic peace with imperialism was desirable. Beheshti knew this and was, unobtrusively, working to draw all the threads of power into his hands to ensure the repression of all opponents to the Islamic Republic, lay the basis for a dictatorship and keep open the links with imperialism that he had cultivated while in exile in Hamburg. It is no accident that the western world has greeted his death with dismay. "The Exemplary Apparatchik" as Le Monde called him, was someone who the State Department valued as a useful future friend (Le Monde 30th June 1981). This course would have provoked a new conflict within the IRP with the "radical" wing, the wing based on the Pasdaran and Hezbollahis—Khalkali and the now deceased Hojatoleslam Mahammad Montazeri. Thus, the achievement of undivided power by the IRP could only be the prelude to new conflicts. When Khomeini, the final court of appeal for these warring factions dies, these conflicts will sharpen and explode.

EXECUTIONS OF THE LEFT

The real victims of the present power struggle are neither Bani Sadr nor the IRP leaders killed in the blowing up of their headquarters. The whole struggle has involved from the outset the strengthening of Islamic dictatorship against the workingclass, the nationalities and the poor peasants. Khomeini himself set the tone when he issued a warning to Bani Sadr in early June: "Everyone should know that when I feel danger toward the Islamic Republic and Islam I will not sit back and advise, I'll cut everybody's hands off." (Newsweek June 15th).

This was a clear declaration by Khomeini that he was siding with his fellow Ayatollahs in the IRP. It was also an incitement to the Pasdaran and Hezbollahis to take matters into their own hands as far as "opponents" were concerned.

Throughout June the followers of the Imam's line acted with deadly efficiency. The left Islamic Mojahedin-e-Khalq, having thrown in its lot with Bani Sadr, became the prime target. The houses of its leaders were attacked. A doctor, his wife and their 8 year old daughter were summarily executed because they gave medical assistance to Mojahedin militants injured in the demonstrations of June 20th. On the Monday after the demonstration behind the grim walls of the Evin prison—a former SAVAK torture HQ—15 leftists including Saeed Sultanpour a leader of the Fedayeen Minority (who opposed the IRP) were killed. Since the bombing of the IRP HQ the Imam has blamed the Mojahedin (claiming they were in league with the CIA) and more executions followed. On Wednesday July 1st 50 Mojahedin guerillas were arrested. The following day 7 other leftists including 2 members of the Peykary (Communist Struggle—a Marxist group) were executed. In all some 200 leftists were shot in two weeks and as the hunt for those responsible for the bomb blast continues, more will follow. At the same time the mullahs have attempted to use the pretext of the present crisis to further crack down on the working class and the nationalities. To "normalise" the situation they are trying to pass the law of qasas (retribution) — a green light for a Pasdaran terror campaign. Opposition newspapers, including the Tudeh paper Mardom (the pro-Moscow CP paper which slavishly supports Khomeini and the IRP) have all been closed. The government has been trying to pass a law revoking the profit-sharing laws that have protected workers wages and putting the working week back up to 44 hours. There have been attempts to clamp down on the Shoras and PM Rajai has declared that strikes are the work of outside agitators and should be crushed. (Middle East July 81). During the last two weeks of June



Bandaged MPs wounded in the Tehran bomb blast take part in a Majlis debate.

attacks on the Kurds, until recently less frequent due to the Iran/Iraq war, have resumed with a vengeance. Three divisions of regular troops and thousands of Islamic guards have gone into battle against the Kurds near Mahabad. The goal of this all-out offensive against the remaining gains of the Iranian Revolution is the establishment of an Islamic dictatorship. The task of Iranian revolutionaries is to resist it with all their might, but on a basis of mobilising the working class independently of all sections of the bourgeoisie—Bani Sadr and the IRP.

Bani Sadr's appeal to democracy in his "Message of the President" is entirely a sham. It is a demagogic appeal. He is desperate for support and will use any subterfuge to get it. Only his failure to initiate his own military coup has caused him to rail against the Islamic coup. The anti-imperialism of the IRP and Khomeini plays a similar role. It unites a disparate population behind Islam, diverting their attention away from the chronic economic and social crisis in Iran. It is a means of stifling opposition, as PM Rajai made clear in

Beheshti/A Mazarin amongst the Mullahs



a recent interview when asked why he wouldn't tolerate the anti-imperialist Fedayeen (minority):

"Differences of ideology are permissible, but what is not permissible is to misguide others. . . We cannot permit anti-revolutionary movements and there cannot be any freedom for ideological propaganda by a minority section of the society." (Middle East July 81).

The fact that the IRP leaders were considering legalising the Tudeh, Fedayeen Majority (pro IRP) and even the "Trotskyists", and creating an anti-imperialist front, just before they were blown to bits, does not contradict Rajai at all. These parties would be tolerated only if they were muted and uncritically loyal to Khomeini and the IRP. This quite probably represented a move by the Montazeri faction to strengthen itself for the coming battles.

For the working class, therefore, there is no choice between the ruling class factions in the present struggle. The Islamic politics of the leftist Mojahedin blind them to this decisive truth. They have taken Bani Sadr's pseudo-democratism as good coin. When the IRP closed down the liberal daily paper Mizan, and other papers on June 7th, and 10,000 Pasdars marched against Bani Sadr the Mojahedin immediately declared the need to "safeguard all freedoms and fundamental rights resulting from the great revolution of our people as well as of the necessity to support the president who is faced with such conspiracies" (Translated by Moslem Students Society-British Unit).

After Bani Sadr's dismissal, first from control of the armed forces and then from the presidency, it was the Mojahedin who organised the opposition. It was they who led the 20th June demonstration against the president's dismissal, that resulted in 25 deaths. Their actions are heroic. Their defence of democratic rights is to be solidarised with. But their support for Bani Sadr is fatal. He is a sworn enemy of the revolution's gains. He has murdered Mojahedin fighters. He would do so again. Democracy, for Bani Sadr's followers as well, must be defended. But the only sure way to do this is by refusing to give this failed Bonaparte any political support whatsoever.

Equally dangerous for the working class is the disgraceful unity with Islamic reaction that the Tudeh, Fedayeen (majority) and the HKE, the so-called Trotskyists of the USEC, have declared, in the name of anti-im-

perialism. While we recognise the need to defend Iran against imperialist aggression, an aggression still being carried out by Iraq, we do so on a basis that entails no political support whatsoever for any section of the Islamic reaction. In their April newspaper, Kargar, the HKE reported proudly the efforts of their Young Socialists at uniting with the forces of Islam:

"The YS put forward a program for building student resistance units in the high schools and for uniting these units with others, like the resistance units in the mosques, the Jihad for Reconstruction and the Pasdaran Corps." (Intercontinental Press June 29th).

The article went on to attack the Mojahedin and Fedayeen for sectarianism for refusing to unite with the Islamic Student organisations—who only last year tried to butcher the Fedayeen during the closing of the universities. Such craven adaptation to the forces of reaction within Iran demonstrates the bankruptcy of the HKE and their international backers within the USEC, the SWP(US). By siding with one wing of the counter-revolution they are, in effect, paving the way for a bloody defeat for the Iranian masses.

DEFEND DEMOCRATIC RIGHTS

The Iranian Revolution is reaching a critical stage. Neither the ousting of Bani Sadr, the blowing up of Beheshti and other IRP leaders nor the executions and terror against the Mojahedin, mark the end of this revolutionary drama. But time is running out. An inflation rate of 27%, a quarter of the population unemployed, a drain on foreign currency reserves and oil revenues caused by the war, and the failure to increase industrial output (industry is working at half-capacity) are all contributing to the sharpening crisis within Iran. An independent course of action, an independent party and programme, are desperately needed by the Iranian masses. The heroism of the Mojahedin, the Fedayeen (minority), the Kurds and others, will be tragically wasted unless this is achieved. These forces must struggle to build a united front of workers and peasants organisations to defend all democratic rights, the rights of the nationalities, the right to strike and to form shoras. Workers, militias must be built to defend



democracy against the black hundred gangs of Hezbollahis. The Shoras established by poor peasants must be defended. The election to the presidency and 46 deputies in the Majlis should be boycotted.

DOWN WITH THE ISLAMIC REPUBLIC—abolish the presidency and presidential council.

FOR A SINGLE SOVEREIGN CONSTITUENT ASSEMBLY—elected by universal suffrage with no religious bans or proscriptions.

The power struggle in Iran can only be resolved in the interests of the masses—the workers, poor peasants, the women and the nationalities, the unemployed—by the workers themselves exercising power. Only their own organisations with full political power, can solve the political and economic crisis within Iran in the interests of the workers and peasants. The revolution can only be made permanent and imperialism defeated once and for all through the establishment of a workers state in Iran■

FRANCE

THE JUNE 21st ELECTIONS to the French Parliament have given the Socialist Party its firmest grip on office in the history of the Third, Fourth and Fifth Republics. Of a total of 488 seats, the PS gained a comfortable overall majority with 268 seats. Whatever excuses Mitterand may develop for renegeing on his promises to the French workers, he has no formal electoral alibi.

His record between being elected President and the parliamentary victory was modest enough. He promised to create 50 000 jobs in the public sector, to raise the minimum wage by 10%, a 20% pension increase and a 25% increase in family allowances, cheaper credit for small businesses and incentives to industry to hire 650 000 young people. These measures were of course electoral cosmetics and they worked. Since the election opinion polls show Mitterand and Mauroy (his prime minister) as having the approval of 60% of the population.

Mitterand is trying to make sure that he appears to stand for different and contradictory things. For the bosses and the conservative petit-bourgeois, he will be a "strong president" in the tradition of DeGaulle, whose actions and policies he constantly likes to quote. He is the 'tamer of the Communists', the Atlanticist (pro-American). For the ageing 'children of '68', he has brought into his entourage Regis Debray, ex-theorist of Guevarism and declared an "amnesty" for political prisoners.

On the other hand, workers in the face of a capitalist crisis and unemployment standing at nearly two million, undoubtedly have sincere hopes in

Mitterand's promises to expand the economy, create jobs, nationalise a number of large enterprises, the banks etc. There are already signs that it is the working class and the middle class left who are deceived, not the French bosses.

An already declared "16% limit" on nationalisations means that the small and medium sized industries which proliferate around the eleven big industrial groups up for nationalisation will be left untouched. As Jacques Delors, Finance and Economics Minister, states, "There will be no creeping nationalisation of the economy", (Le Matin, 29/6/81). The nationalisation desired by PS leaders aims at creating state-backed and controlled multinationals which will be better equipped to dominate the world markets.

Mitterand, in the elections talked much of the need for change. He has promised increased democratisation. But it is now clear that no major structural changes in the undemocratic Fifth Republic are on the agenda. In his first interview, given to Le Monde (July 2nd), Mitterand sharply pointed out that, "The French elected a president, then parliamentary deputies. This wasn't a referendum on the organisation of civil power". He goes on to emphasise that within the existing laws there is plenty that can and will be done. He promises to "exercise to the full the powers that the Constitution grants me. Neither more nor less."

Just in case French capitalists have not understood the tame game the PS is playing, the presence of three openly bourgeois politicians in the government is intended to show them that the PS is not about to enact any fundamental change in French society. Two of these bourgeois politicians are members of the tiny bourgeois sect: Mouvement Radical de Gauche (MRG), whose 14 seats in the Assembly were given to them by the PS. This sect could not exist without the active support of the

PS. And the PS certainly did not need its help to carry out its programme.

In private, PS members will claim that it is a protection against attacks from the right. In truth, the real reason for working with "left" Gaullists - and other assorted bourgeois parties is to provide the PS leaders with protection from the working class and an excuse for not satisfying workers' demands.

The victory of Mitterand was not only a serious defeat for the parties of the Right who have a monopoly of power for over twenty years. Mitterand and the PS's landslide carried away half the French CP's deputies. The presidential election of 1969 saw the PCF receive four times more votes than the socialist candidate.

In the 1978 legislative elections, the PCF received 6 451 151 votes - a total of 22.6% of the poll. The 1981 elections see the PCF fall to a total of 4 065 540 votes - only 16.2% of the poll. The PCF leaders have only been able to offer the lamest excuses for their electoral debacle. The PCF has called for a "full debate" in the Party's ranks and have fixed the Congress . . . for next year!

The Central committee also cut short any ideas of Marchais being sacked. It decided not to replace the position on the Party's secretariat, left vacant by Charles Fiterman on becoming a Government minister. This move is designed to keep Lajoinie, a possible successor to Marchais, in place. No change in the Party's leadership is therefore likely before next year's Congress.

Since Mitterand's victory on May 10th, the PCF leaders are 100% behind Mitterand, trying to cash in on the huge increase in PS popularity and membership and afraid of the damage their sectarian image has done them. Their 131 proposals have been completely shelved (see WP No 22) and they have been forced to sign an agreement with the PS which involves a complete abandonment of their stated positions on Poland, Afghanistan, Palestine, the SS20 missiles, the EEC and, more immediately important for French workers, on nationalisations and social reforms.

The PCF has agreed that nationalisations should take place on the basis of Mitterand's election campaign proposals, i.e. the PCF has "forgotten" its calls for the nationalisation of many major concerns - Peugeot, the Empain group, Hachette, Matra, etc. The same loss of memory applies to social reforms, with the PCF signing an agreement which states that reforms "will take place in stages, at a rhythm of transformation which will take into account the crisis situation . . .". The health of the "economy", i.e. capitalist profits, is invoked as a reason for moving slowly. The PCF, alongside the PS, has accepted that the working class must pay for the capitalist crisis in the name of "governmental solidarity".

This turn-round by the PCF has its mirror image in the form of the new change of line of the CGT trade union. This union, the largest in France

with 1.2 million members, is controlled by the PCF. Its leaders, Seguy and Krasucki, both PCF central Committee members, have made it clear that while they consider the PCF/PS agreement fruitful, they intend to ensure trade union independence. But independence had a strange meaning for Krasucki. It certainly does not mean independent action against the bosses.

No leadership is put forward by the CGT against the capitalists' attacks. There are no plans for mass mobilisation. This is particularly shown over the central issue of the 35-hour week. Negotiations have dragged on for months with the bosses organisations, the CNPF, recently telling the Government and the unions that the 35-hour week is not realistic. The bosses are not prepared to budge an inch. The CGT's reaction? Negotiate as the bosses wish sector by sector, which can only result in the weaker sections of the working class being picked off.

With such a bottomless appetite for class collaboration the French workers must not wait for their leaders before taking action to defend their jobs and living standards. They can expect successes only out of direct action which will bring them up against the bosses and the PS/PCF/MRG/Left Gaullist government. Mitterand's "honeymoon", his "state of grace" with the working class must be as short as working class militants can make it. If it isn't then French workers can expect an experience similar to the Labour Government of 1974-79. Mitterand's position as president, the existence of open capitalist politicians in the government, the de facto 'social contract' between the union leaders and the government make this a certainty unless workers mobilise independently to force their demands on their so-called representatives.

In the build-up to these elections the trade union bureaucracies did their best to brake working class action for fear of losing middle-class votes for the reformist parties. This tactic, combined with the demoralising use of a series of one-day stoppages to let off steam, has left workers defenceless and demobilised in the face of capitalist attacks on jobs and living standards.

The extent to which the bureaucrats have held back from a fight is shown by the recently published strike figures for 1980. Compared with 1979, the number of days on strike fell by 52.4% in 1980, while the number of workers on strike fell by 49.8%. Total number of days lost through strikes fell from 3.2 million in 1979 to 1.5 million in 1980.

Disgusted by the lack of militant leadership from union bureaucrats and weakened by capitalist repression, workers are leaving the unions. The CGT, for example, has seen its membership fall from 2.5 to 1.2 million over the past two years.

The rot must be stopped! Only militant action around a fighting programme which answers the immediate needs of workers and raises the question of class power can rally workers back to the unions.

ISRAEL

The Israeli parliament, the Knesset, emerged from the June elections without either of the major parties having a clear majority or the weight necessary to put together an effective coalition. The fragile coalition led by Begin's Likud party which emerged out of the 1977 elections crumbled under the weight of Israel's internal crisis. The Begin administration's policies encouraged an inflation rate of 130%, eliminated food subsidies, and allowed real incomes to fall by 9.2%. The proposed 10% cut in defence expenditure precipitated a Cabinet crisis with the resignation of Defence Minister Weitzman and the threatened departure of the Democratic Opposition from the coalition.

Faced with the possibility of electoral annihilation Begin indulged in the most cynical and demagogic of election campaigns. Confident of US imperialism's financial support the coalition cut indirect taxes on consumer goods and index-linked virtually all incomes to match inflation, provoking a spending-spree. The result is an Israeli budget £1,000 million overspent. In large measure these gimmicks were an attempt to preserve the Likud's hold over its base - the Oriental Jews.

Recognising that the Likud could not compete with Labour for the support of the European Ashkenazi Jews, Begin has based himself on the most oppressed strata (outside of the Arabs) of Israeli society - the oriental Jews. The Labour Party held power for 29 years from the establishment of Israel as a state in 1948. During the whole of that time the European Jews, the base of the

Labour Party, held all the reins of economic and political power. The African and Asian Jews did not come to Israel until after 1951. They could not play a leading part in a state already established and dominated by European Zionists. The oriental Jews formed the rural and urban working class. As rural settlements and development towns were set up to 'fill up' Palestine, oriental Jews were herded into them, leading to slum conditions and high unemployment. By the mid-60s two thirds of unskilled workers were oriental Jews. Riveted to the Zionist ideology of a 'promised land' for all Jews, their burning resentment against the Ashkenazi Jews was channelled into a hatred of Arabs and a desire to drag themselves into the higher classes. By the time of the general election, the oriental Jews represented 45% of the electorate to the Europeans 40%. Most of them voted for Begin because he had temporarily vanquished the high prices and low wages of their everyday lives and shown his intransigency to the Arab world.

The bombing of Palestinian camps, Muslim villages, and most recently, the destruction of the Iraqi nuclear plant, successfully undercut the appeal of the most extreme nationalist parties such as the National Religious Party (NRP) and the Agudat Yisrael (AY).

The 'success' of Begin's campaign has produced a paradox. Likud looks set to hold 49 seats, only

one more than Peres Labour Party. The major extreme religious opposition parties (NRP & AY) have seen their seats cut back, but given the narrowness of the Likud majority, any reformed coalition with these parties is likely to be extremely brittle and heavily dependent on Begin being prepared to make continuing concessions to the ultra-Zionists. This may threaten the peaceful completion of the Camp David agreement with Egypt (to withdraw from occupied Sinai) Begin's ability to begin that deal was his main value to the US. His inability to complete it may turn him into an obstacle of the White House's schemes. In addition, any new coalition will have to deal with the consequence of Begin's give away pre-election budget-inflation projected to rocket over 300% and a continued rise in unemployment. For these reasons it is unlikely that the coalition will last long.

US imperialism's attitude to the new coalition will depend on how their overall plan for the Balkanisation of the whole Middle East proceeds in the next period. Balkanisation seeks to establish security and stability for US strategic interests - primarily oil production in the Gulf - through constantly promoting divisions within and between the Middle East states. The US sponsors a series of agent states prepared to follow the policy directives of the White House. Yet Balkanisation also has another side. US imperialism cannot afford to allow any one of its agents to become either so pivotal that its demise creates an enormous vacuum and massive instability, nor so strong that it can have the potential for following an independent path and even act against the interests of US imperialism.

Since the Shah's downfall in 1978 and its replacement by a hostile regime, the US has tried to fill the vacuum by creating a series of checks and balances. Begin and the Israeli state have been crucial for this project. The Zionist state, as the \$ 2.2 billion aid given to it in 1980 shows, is a strategic pillar for the US. Begin's government has followed a policy which, while displaying verbal intransigence towards the Palestinians and the PLO has been instrumental in stitching together the Camp David agreement with Egypt, thus compromising the Egyptian ruling class in the eyes of the Arab world and stifling the most threatening Arab opposition to the Israeli state. By skilfully using Begin to draw in Egypt towards the US, the White House sows disunity among the Arab nations and helps prevent the formation of a solid anti-Zionist, anti-imperialist bloc.

However, Egypt is not the Arab ace in the pack of the Middle East. It is too far from the Gulf to be an effective policeman of that region

nor do its own natural resources make it of primary importance in the area.

That is why the USA has tried to construct an alliance with Iraq and Saudi Arabia as the best bet for a replacement for the Shah in the Muslim world. Iraq, having significantly loosened its former ties with the USSR, has been eager to demonstrate its credentials to US imperialism by attacking Iran.

In its own way the Israeli attack on Iraq's nuclear reactor also helped the US to solidify their rapprochement with Iraq. While Washington almost certainly knew of Israel's plans to bomb the nuclear installation and were pleased to see a potential Arab military strongman prevented from gaining a nuclear capacity, the US used the affair to cuff the ears of Begin and increase the US standing in the eyes of Iraq. In the UN, Iraqi Foreign Minister Saadoun Hammami and the US Ambassador Jeane Kirkpatrick jointly drew up a resolution condemning the Israeli attack. Yet at the same time Kirkpatrick reaffirmed the White House's commitment to Israel, thus demonstrating the immense diplomatic gymnastics entailed in Balkanisation. The US conflict with Israel is tactical - subordinate to its strategic commitment to the Israeli state. The weakness of the Iraqi response to the Israeli attack underlines the fact that the stalemate war with Iran has only served to increase its dependency on the USA.

Any new coalition that emerges out of the Knesset elections will continue to be, in the last analysis, dependent on US imperialism. Its fate is tied up with the foreign policy interests of Washington. Chronic instability will still be the major feature of Israeli political life. Nevertheless Begin may well be given a mandate to continue trying to reconcile the irreconcilable. He will have to deal with the Sinai withdrawal, the intransigence of the Palestinians fighting for their homeland; the possible collapse of the economy and the evergrowing threat from the fanatical Zionist settlers insatiable desire for more Arab land; and ultimately the possibility of war with an Arab neighbour. If the Palestinians could overcome the restrictions imposed on them by their leadership to build support from the Arab and Palestinian working class for a determined fight for Palestinian self determination and the overthrow of the Zionist State, the contradictions imposed by the Balkanisation of the Middle East could be exploited to build a secular workers state of Palestine.

workers power

ALL OUT STRIKE TO STOP THATCHER

THE THATCHER GOVERNMENT was elected in May 1979 with a boss mandate to spearhead an attack on the public sector industries and services. Dramatic cut-backs in govern spending, a drastic reduction in the size of the public sector workforce and, crucially, the decimation of trade union organisation in the public sector were all integral part of the Tory strategy for streamlining the ailing British economy.

Two years on and the Tories have had success in taking on and defeating public sector workers in nationalised industries (British Steel, British Leyland, British Rail for example). But the decimation of jobs in the steel, rail and car industries have not revitalised private capital.

While the nationalised industries have borne the brunt of the Tory offensive over the last two years, the Tory axemen, i.e. the treasury, have not ignored the public services. Their preferred method of execution for the moment in this sphere is to cut spending by cutting pay. With the manual workers in the service sector they were successful in forcing through wage cuts— 7% increases while prices were rising at double that amount. This weakness is a legacy of the 'Winter of Discontent' in 1979.

Then the union leaders, by refusing to mount an all-out strike against low pay, demoralised and divided public sector workers, who had shown in the early days of the strike an enthusiasm to take action.

Only in the last few months has confidence begun to be restored. The victory of the miners and the continuing growth of public sector trade unions at a time when unions like the AUEW and TGWU are losing members, gave heart to a major section of the public sector workforce — the Civil Servants.

'Wasteful' spending in the civil service has long been a bugbear for the Tories. Not wanting to upset the minority managerial ranks of the Civil Service the Tories first adopted a 'gentlemanly' approach. They appointed top level Whitehall Mandarins and Sir Derek Raynor from Marks and Spencers, to re-comend the areas where the axe could fall.

However, the government has wised-up — even top civil servants were not prepared to make cuts that could, in the long term affect their own departments and spheres of interest.

Sir Derek went back to Saint Michael and the Tories prepared for a battle over pay. A defeat for the civil servants is particularly important for the Tories. Firstly, the level of pay in the civil service sets the going rate for other public sector workers. But secondly, and more importantly, the Tories are setting out to demoralise the union membership through defeat, as a preparation for enormous cut-backs in jobs. Since May 1979, there have been approximately 37 000 jobs losses.

Thatcher's determination to inflict a defeat on the civil service unions, shown by her over riding of Soames who wanted to compromise on 8% flows from the Tories plans to reduce the numbers of civil servants by another 65 000. A defeat for the unions in the present campaign would mean this, and more, could be achieved very quickly and with little resistance. This is exactly what happened in the aftermath of the steel strike sell-out in April 1980.

The Civil Service campaign began on March 9th but its roots are in the appalling wage-levels of most civil servants. Over two-thirds of them earn less than the national average wage. Last October, the Government unilaterally tore up the agreement with the Civil Service unions whereby pay levels in the Civil Service were determined by a pay review body, and imposed a 7% pay limit. The unions responded with a demand for 15% but the Tories intransigence set the scene for a long drawn-out struggle.

There are nine civil service unions and the pressure for national and united action forced the official leadership into centralising the running of the strike into a joint Council of Civil Service Unions (COCSU). At the start of the dispute, this step did represent a limited advance, allowing for increased unity in action but only if the strength of the union involved was utilised.

The civil servants have significant

PUBLIC SECTOR UNITY

Selective strikes not the way



Photo: TESSA HOWLAND (IPU)

power — more so than normal service sectors, such as health workers. They are capable of disrupting the defence plans of the state, of crippling the financial machinery of the government, and of blocking foreign trade. By the end of July some £8.7 billion in uncollected taxes will be one result of the dispute.

Throughout the long dispute, the rank and file in the unions, particularly in the CPSA, have shown a willingness to launch an all-out strike against the Tories for an indefinite period. On April 1st and again on April 15th, there were massive walk-outs in response to threatened use of scabs. At the May conference of the CPSA, there was an instruction to the union officials to shut down the airports and the docks.

And in a June ballot of the CPSA, the biggest of the nine unions involved, the call for action was loud and clear. Of the substantial majority who called for continuing strike action, two thirds wanted all-out indefinite strike action.

This determination of the rank and file has been matched by sections of the ambulance crews, who have also moved into national action (for the first time) in response to a 7½% pay offer over 15 months. Militancy has been very high in some areas. In London, Scotland, Derbyshire and Northern-Ireland crews have ignored their leaders calls for emergency cover and recognised, the need to launch effective action. However, in certain areas, notably Manchester, support for the ambulance crew dispute has been patchy.

The sporadic nature of the ambulance crews' action and the danger increasing demoralisation among the civil servants as the dispute drags on is linked directly to the bankruptcy of the tactics adopted by the official union leaderships in the COCSU and NUPE and COHSE.

From the very start of the Civil servants dispute, Kate Losinska, the right-wing president of the CPSA, revealed that the unions would be prepared to settle for about 9%. The COHSE leaders of the ambulance crews are even opposed to the present series of 24-hour stoppages and counterpose, a 'united campaign' over next years claim!

But above all else the union officials in the public sector dispute are determined to carry on with the disastrous policy of 'selective' action. This is a recipe for demoralisation and eventual defeat. Indeed, this is what the right-wing count upon. The strike fund so far has cost the COCSU members £6 million.

This is the cost of paying members involved in action 85% of their normal wages though contributions from members. After four or five months of dispute, the members begin to feel that there is no way they can make up the financial loss already suffered and fail to see the sense in continuing. Moreover, the effects on the government are irritating rather than devastating.

They can hold out during the short lived period of action without too much discomfort. The selective action thus has the effect of wearing down the members militancy rather than the Government — an effect not unwelcome to Losinska and Co. The longer the action continues without bringing any results, the less willing workers will be to participate.

Thatcher resolute and already smells blood. Plans are well advanced to draft in military replacements for striking air traffic controllers, if the dispute continues into the peak holiday period. The Tories also feel strong enough to make public their threats not to back-date their 7% offer to the settlement date of April 1st, and not to give the 7% at all to any civil servant who refuses to give a no-strike pledge for the future.

There is a desperate need for a sharp break with these disastrous tactics if the threats are to be countered.

Public sector unity cannot be maintained and furthered by the COCSU. This centralised 'leadership' has become a brake upon the strikes' progress. When the CPSA membership voted for all-out action the CPSA leadership blocked it. They conceded to calls for restraint from the more conservative and hierarchical unions in COCSU — in the name of "unity". This is convenient for the the leaders of the CPSA who can shift blame on to the other unions after the dispute is lost. This is exactly what Fisher and NUPE did after being complicit in the sabotage of the 1979 public sector strikes.

The civil servants claim can be won but it requires urgent rank and file initiative. The running of the strike has to be taken out of the hands of the bureaucrats and controlled by democratically elected and recallable strike committees, based in the localities and welded into an alternative national leadership. Such a leadership has already been seen in embryo. In South Yorkshire, the CPSA in the DHSS, have been to the fore in pushing the strike along. Within the ambulance crew dispute also, the Scottish crews have

decided to run the dispute themselves.

The CPSA rank and file already have a mandate for all-out strike action. They must come out everywhere immediately and picket the other unions involved to put the case for joining them. For an All-Out Strike! At the same time, solidarity action must be sought at two levels. First, the civil servants and ambulance crews must draw the whole of the public sector — industrial and service sections — behind them in a common fight against public sector pay restraint and cuts — many nurses for example are rejecting the latest pay offer. The plans for strike action against cuts by the gas workers must be brought forward and co-ordinated with the workers currently on strike — smash the 7% — Stop all Cuts!

Secondly, the civil servants, through effective picketing at the docks and airports to prevent strike breaking can begin to link up with private sector workers. Support for strikes and forging such public/private sector unity are the key tasks in the fight against the plans of Thatcher and in securing a victory of the civil servants and ambulance crews.

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