

Workers Power

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WORKERS, BLACKS, YOUTH: PREPARE FOR NEW POLICE OFFENSIVE

THE LOCAL AND national yellow press is in paroxysms over a claimed crime wave. The Metropolitan Police has issued figures to 'prove' that black muggers are running wild in the streets of London. The Daily Mail, taking up the racist chorus screamed "Violence double that by Whites, Yard reveal Black Crime." The Police Federation, taking advantage of two police deaths in early March, is calling for the re-introduction of hanging, in half page adverts in the dailies. London Police Commissioner McNee, has told critics to "get off the backs of the police." James Anderton, Chief Constable of Greater Manchester, is clamouring for the abolition of the partially elected police committees and denounces the presence "in our midst" of "an enemy more dangerous and insidious and ruthless than any since the second world war." Whitelaw, keen to prove his law and order credentials to braying Tories promising the police a new law giving them the right to search without a warrant on "reasonable suspicion" (effectively the return of 'SUS' abolished a year ago).

What we are witnessing is not a crime-wave but a counter-attack by the Police on the series of liberal promises forced out of the government in the aftermath of last summers rioting. In essence it is an attack on Scarman's report of 25th November 1981.

Scarman's job was to repair the damage done to the police image as a result of the most intensive street warfare between youth and the police this century. Hence his stress on the importance of police winning the "consent and support of the community." Scarman's endorsement of Devon and Cornwall's chief constable John Alderson's "community policing" was met by most police chiefs with scarcely concealed grinding of the teeth. They had little objection to the idea of more policing of the community, by integrating social and welfare services into the information gathering which has reached 1984 proportions, as a result of computerisation. However, they did not want any criticism or restrictions put on "hard methods".

The Metropolitan police has 26,000 officers, 7,000 of whom are trained in riot control. All urban forces now have their special patrol groups (SPG) or

police support units. Most now have instant response units (ten constables plus a sergeant) motorized and highly mobile for effective crack down. Last years riots saw the issuing of a wide range of repression technology. The police are determined to use it. Thus as early as February 26th the Metropolitan Police assistant commissioner accused Scarman's Report of hampering the fight against crime.

Other side-effects of Scarman were moves for an independent complaints investigation procedure and moves by some Labour councils and by Police Committees to demand the democratic accountability of the police. Whitelaw was forced to promise some changes in the complaints procedure and the Police Federation's abandonment of their opposition probably indicates that some window dressing deal has been worked out behind the scenes. Democratic accountability is another matter.

A series of duels have been fought out over the last year between police committees (two thirds elected) and the key "hard" police chiefs. Margaret Simney, the eminently respectable chairperson of the Merseyside Committee has faced a venomous response from Chief Constable Kenneth Oxford—the butcher of Toxteth. In Manchester, Anderton frothed at the mouth when asked to account for the spending of £100,749 and the deployment of 600 police to help the Lawrence Scott bosses smash a sit-in and later pickets by the sacked work force. Elected representatives were referred to as "creepy and dangerous minorities" with "a long term political strategy to destroy the proven structures of the police and turn them into the exclusive agency of a one party state."

The police chiefs hope, by whipping up hysteria about law and order, to continue the construction of a powerful paramilitary force unhampered by the formal constraints of local or national democracy. In this they have a lot of supporters. The judges like Lord Denning hold the view that a Chief Constable "is not a servant of anyone save the law itself." The Tories, whose only hope of re-election is a 'Law and Order' crusade and who have the virtual affiliation of the Police Federation through MP Eldon Griffiths, will make no moves to exercise control over the police.

But what about the Labour Party? As founders of the SPG they are not in a strong position to criticise. Ex-Home Secretary Merlyn Rees summed up his attitude by recommending a speech of William Whitelaw to a conference on policing he was unable to attend. Whilst Ken

Livingstone was condemning London's new police chief Kenneth Newman, who it is reported is "fascinated by the weaponry police use to subdue the population", Merlyn Rees was on local radio praising him to the skies as a quite, thoughtful, and liberal man.

Ken Livingstone calls for a "democratically accountable police force" a position echoed by 'Militant' in the Labour Party and by the Communist Party of Great Britain (who devote several pages of 'Marxism Today' to an interview with 'soft cop' John Alderson). The 'left reformist' strategy on policing is, in essence, democratic control and community policing. Whilst the labour movement should vigorously oppose all efforts to strengthen and arm the police and release it from its present weak 'democratic' restraints (police committees etc) we should support measures taken by councils or a future Labour Government to exercise accountability or to attempt some form of control; we cannot disguise or hush up the fact that the left reformists strategy is fundamentally a reactionary utopia. Its aim—democratic control of policing—is a utopia in a capitalist society.

The police will never submit to a working class (democratic) majority controlling their actions. The law and the police who enforce it, exist to defend private property in the means of production. They defend the political rule of the capitalist class. This can be seen on a day to day basis at Lawrence Scotts, Ansell's, Staffa and many other strikes that the police have attacked in the class struggle. Reformists like Benn and Co try to claim that these incidents are distortions or perversions of pure democracy. Rubbish. Bosses have the right in law to close their factories, to sell off the machinery, to throw workers on to the street as at Lawrence Scotts. What law establishes the right to a job? There is none. "The Right to Work" under capitalism where the bosses control all hiring and firing is really only the right to scab. It is only ever invoked by the bosses when they are trying to break strikes. Trade Union 'rights' are simply 'immunities' from prosecution that the ruling class has been forced to concede to avoid further and more radical claims on their system. Workers 'rights'—the right to a job, to decent housing, health and welfare and education are not defended by law at all. They are revokable concessions. The Tory Government is at present seeking to revoke as much as it can of the concessions wrung from it in the 50s and 60s.



Police thugs armed to the teeth during the Toxteth riots, July 1981. Amongst the implements displayed are: an image intensifier for night vision (left); shotgun for firing CS gas canisters (right); and CS gas gun (lower right). The labour movement can expect an increase in police use of such weaponry in the future.

Working class rights could only have the force of law in a workers state where the forces of order were based on and bound up with the organised working class. People's courts, a workers militia, and above all legislative and executive power in the hands of workers councils would establish these rights beyond question. They would create conditions where all could work and where production was planned for need, not for profit. They would thus reduce crime and policing to minimal levels.

Crime is caused by inequality, by vast disparities between wealth and poverty, by the effects of misery, unemployment, rotten living conditions for people and the cruel distortion of their relations with each other. It is the isolated, fragmented, unconscious and therefore self-defeating response of the most deprived and oppressed to the conditions of class society. The working class attitude to crime certainly has nothing in common with the anarchists' glorification of the lumpen proletariat. The hopelessly criminalised elements, the thugs and gangsters are potentially the mass base for fascism and reaction, not the vanguard of an assault on capitalism.

But neither should workers share the middle class view of crime and what to do about it in either its soft cop (Alderson) or hard cop (Anderton) version. The former with its smiling prying 'local bobbies' visiting our kids schools, staffing their youth clubs, hanging around our estates, gathering information from social workers, teachers etc is just a machine for creating narks and informers. They prepare the way for the hard cop, the special branch and the SPG.

We will never forget that where there is a strike, an occupation, a picket line, a demonstration or a protest by workers or the oppressed there the police act as agents of our class enemies. The force that we need to build up to defend our mass action pickets, disciplined defence groups, will be the basis for their replacement. But this replacement, like the replacement of capitalism will not be a matter of measures in Parliament, it will be a struggle of classes, workers against their exploiters in the shops, offices, factories and streets. It will not be a struggle for the spoils of office, or for limited control over the existing police, army, judges and so on. Rather it will be a struggle to remove this whole repressive machinery and replace it with the direct political power of the working class itself. ■

Picture: John Sturrock (Network)

GLC: can't fight, won't fight!

THE CHEAP FARES scheme for London Transport, the central plank of the Labour-controlled GLC's election programme, has joined a growing scrapheap of broken manifesto promises. On March 21st London's bus and tube fares doubled.

The cheap fares policy itself was hardly a drastic attack on the privilege and property of the ruling class. Heavily subsidised public transport systems are normal in most of Europe's capital cities. As David Wetzel, chairperson of the GLC's transport committee commented: "The fares policy is not unjustifiably socialist, just good common sense. Even with the fares policy only 46% of LT's money would come from the GLC subsidy." Further, the GLC raised the money to subsidise the fare reductions by a supplementary rate demand—a measure which hit directly at the pockets not only businesses but of the London working class, which the GLC claims to represent.

Even so the 'Fares Fare' policy was a partial check on falling working class living standards in London, particularly for the 33,000 unemployed. In the six months that the cheap fares were in operation, services were extended, passengers increased by 11% on the buses and 7% on the trains, and LT took on 600 new staff. With the defeat of the GLC's fares policy all this will be reversed. The increased fares will be followed by cuts in services, redundancies and the closure of some tube stations.

The responsibility for this defeat lies not only with the bewigged class enemies but also with Livingstone, Wise and rest of the GLC 'lefts'. Not only did they fail to defend the cheap fares in the council chamber, they also failed to take a lead in calling for the fares fight to be taken out of the confines of County Hall and on to the battle field of working class action.

The GLC's £200,000 publicity campaign to keep fares 'fair', and the much publicised "Can't Pay, Won't Pay" stunts of the Labour councillors are little more than camouflage for the Labour lefts surrender to ruling class legality.

From the start, Livingstone's warnings of dire retribution against the 'vermin in ermine' concealed a perspective which limited the defence of cheap fares to changing the law through legal means. As late as February, only a month before the fares rocketed, Wetzel was confidently urging people to "change the law through parliament". He advised people to write to their MPs and to "really criticise the judges". At the same time Livingstone was scurrying back and forth from County Hall to Whitehall. His aim being to ask the hardnosed Tory, Howell, to rush through legislation. Livingstone was clearly pinning his hopes on this declaring: "Legislation to keep London's cheap fares could be passed through Parliament in 48 hours in the week before the increases are due." (Standard 8th March 82).

Yet the chances of getting this through a Parliament stuffed full of gloating Tories was a pipe-dream, a highly dangerous pipe-dream. By keeping alive false hopes in this futile endeavour Livingstone was in reality deflecting attention from the need to build for strike action amongst Transport workers as the only sure means of defeating the Lords ruling. Indeed his stand is precisely that *only* legal change can bring down fares again:

"The only way of overturning the Law Lords and the Council's own decision is to force a vote in Parliament to change the law back to what it was before Denning decided to overturn the result of an election which had gone against the Tories." (Livingstone in the March London Labour Briefing, Our emphasis).

The lefts did vote against the fare rises. But before we heap thanksgiving upon them, we should remember that, by allowing a free vote, they did ensure, in advance, that they would be a minority. Furthermore when it came to a vote on the GLC's entire budget it was a different story altogether. If the left had blocked the budget, Livingstone argued, Heseltine would have appointed a receiver to run the GLC and to implement the cuts even more thoroughly. Livingstone was correct to realise that any serious fight to defend cheap fares would involve a head on confrontation



Ken Livingstone and Dave Wetzel -clowns in the fares fight farce

with the Tories and their laws. But, having rejected carrying through such a confrontation backed by working class action, the logic of the GLC leader's position has led them, despite their good intentions, to carry out the policies of the Tories and SDP. The entire Labour Group on the GLC voted for the budget, which eventually cut the LT subsidy.

When Livingstone, Wetzel, Wise and co did raise the question of industrial action they always confined it to an auxiliary role. It was not central. It was secondary to negotiations, persuasion and pleading to Tories. When London's transport workers called a one day strike on March 10th Livingstone, was quoted in The Standard as saying: "A one day strike will have no impact at all. It will be a gesture. . . It would be much more imaginative if LT workers refuse to collect the new increased fares after March 21st." Of course The Standard in their usual lying fashion misrepresented this to mean that Livingstone was denouncing the strike. He wasn't. But he was not able to contradict the substance of the quotes which showed him to be less than enthusiastic about the strike. Yet here was one of London's biggest sections of workers (bus and tube) taking their first coordinated strike action for fifty years on March 10th. Built upon and extended, given a clear lead, it could have provided a springboard for action that would have wiped the smiles off the Tory Law Lords and reversed the fares ruling.

Left winger Valerie Wise, giving voice to the petit bourgeois attitudes held by many of the 'new' left Labourites, castigated the unions in a recent interview with Socialist Challenge:

"...you'd havethought already they'd have worked out what they're doing, but they haven't... they're

the people to defend those jobs. We can give them support, we can act in solidarity. We can organise as individuals, collections for workers and so on, but they've got to defend their jobs." Against the cuts made by Valerie Wise and her cohorts! The impudence of this middle class reformist, smarting from what she herself described as "being smashed" (March Briefing) knows no bounds. She is blaming workers for her own catastrophic misleadership.

As opposed to direct action by the organised workers movement, some GLC lefts have originated the 'imaginative' tactic of refusing to pay the increased bus and tube fares. The "Can't Pay, Won't Pay" campaign aptly, takes its name from a farce by anarchist playwright Dario Fo. To be sure, this involves direct, illegal action, but it is doomed to fail. By its very nature "Can't Pay, Won't Pay" is a fragmented and individual tactic. It lays both passengers and transport workers open to individual victimisation. It can never be more than a token protest against an already conceded defeat. As such it merely serves the purpose of restoring some of the GLC left's credibility. Just like their heroic minority vote against the fare increases it is a futile gesture, a substitute for effective action.

On the first day of the Can't Pay campaign Dave Wetzel, a leading clown in this farce, was faced with the option of paying his fare, or getting off the bus. A true democrat, Wetzel put it to the vote and the passengers voted him off the bus. Perhaps Wetzel should have been more considerate of the wishes of the many working class Londoners who voted in favour of a cheap fares scheme only to find the left Labour leaders of the GLC more concerned with staying in office than defending their living standards. ■

by Paul Mason

Editorial

AS THE MAY local elections approach, the Labour Party goes into them with its reputation as a local bulwark against the Tory Government's cuts severely tarnished. The truth is that the Labour councils have not been prepared to wage a fight against the central government based on no cuts, no rate or rent increases, and industrial action to fight for these demands.

In Lambeth, Lothian, Sheffield and the GLC the preferred option of the Labour councillors, especially the lefts, has been to raise rates—i.e. to make indirect cuts by penalising workers incomes for the maintenance of essential services. The policy has not even succeeded on its own terms. Heseltine's ever increasing control over rate rises has meant that this road for reforms has been rapidly blocked off.

Of course the best laid plans of mice and men go astray. In the case of Lothian and Lambeth not only did the plan go badly astray but the planners proved to be mice rather than men (and women). Both councils carried through extensive cuts as well as rate rises. At the same time the inability of the 'lefts' to wage a serious fight for their own programme was revealed by the GLC's ignominious collapse.

The Labour left shows no signs of learning from these defeats. In the Labour Herald a discussion article by Bryan Symons, a candidate in London, expressed the thinking of many of the lefts: "I see no option if we are elected in May except to attempt to put our programme into effect with subsequent rate rises." (12th February 82). This is a recipe for further defeats and demoralisation.

The Tories have chosen to use every weapon at their disposal to attack local government, and its already limited services to the working class. The Labour councils have met this onslaught in a dithering, cowardly fashion—a search for possible loopholes rather than a campaign of defiant action.

In the May elections we recommend workers to vote Labour. Their claims and pretensions to represent working class interests must be put to the test of office. We must not let them hide behind fine words from the opposition benches. But in calling for a Labour vote we nevertheless predict that the Labour councils will prove *unable* to mount a defence of working class interests. Only if the working class through its fighting organisations—unions, stewards committees, Trades Councils etc—can meet the Tory attacks, be they mediated by Labour or Tory councils, with industrial action, can the present trend of defeat be reversed. As we said last September after the collapse of Lothian:

"The Anti-Cuts movement must be rebuilt from the rank and file upwards and this time the lesson must be learned. . . Put not your trust in Labour Councillors." (Workers Power September 1981). ■

South Yorks 'Socialist Republic': heading for a fall

"SHEFFIELD, ENGLAND'S FOURTH largest city, has been labour controlled for all but two of the last 50 years; it has a long tradition of excellent local authority services and boasts that it is the SOCIALIST REPUBLIC OF SOUTH YORKSHIRE. It is in this context that the city's Labour Party and the Labour group of councillors face the Tory onslaught on the city's industry, services and quality of life." This piece of red-flag waving, from Council leader David Blunkett in last October's 'New Socialist', was concurrent with the opening shots in Bromely's judicial war with Livingstone's GLC.

The court drama of GLC v Tories has served to deflect public attention from the affairs of the Republic. At first glance, its reputation, as outlined by Blunkett, emerges at the end of the 1981/82 financial year as it was at the start. Yet if we dismiss the rhetoric and consider the facts, a different picture emerges. Revealed is a further 12 months of low profile cuts and highly visible rate rises—both of which help to explain the radical reputation and its essential hollowness.

The present Labour Council, elected in May 1980 on a pledge to continue its policy of no cuts and no redundancies has consistently pursued a policy of "trimming and saving". The evidence shows that this has amounted to cuts, redundancies and loss of services. As early as January 1980 the Council announced its £10½ million "Save It" package (out of a total budget of £323 million) a sample of which included "savings" of £375,000 at the Polytechnic, "trimming" £48,000 off the special education budget and the extension of the cafeteria system in secondary schools to save on staff costs.

Apart from its cheap bus fares the other article of faith of the Republic was its undying commitment to not sell council houses. In 1979/80 it was the issue chosen by the Council leaders and local Labour bureaucrats on which defense of the Republic was to stand or fall. Promises of 'jail before sale' were extracted without pressure from local AUEW and CONFED stalwart leader George Caborn at a 2,000 strong rally in October 1979. The left Councillors nodded their assent. Such promises, however, were soon forgotten and 'realism' won out. It was 'recognised', not for the first (or last) time, that "the people" weren't ready to fight. So the Council abandoned its previous pledges. Since selling the first Council house in May 81 the Council has pledged itself to process sales at a rate of 100 per week.

The shallow 'anti cuts' strategy of the Council has not been financed by daring assaults on the wealth of Sheffield's capitalists. Instead the Council has imposed reductions on working class living standards through massive rate rises. A 22% increase for 1982/83 follows one of 37.7% in 1981 and 48% in 1980. All of these rises mean that a smaller proportion of shrinking real wages can be spent by workers on food, clothing and fuel.

The Council is in fact buying time for itself. It is mediating the Tory cuts, not standing firm against them. This strategy allows the Council to comfort itself with the knowledge that if there was a Tory Council the attacks would be more rapid, more extensive and more direct upon the working class. The propaganda war with its electorate to sell this strategy is the only one the Labour Group really wages with any determination. 'No Cuts' means most services are to be saved by higher rates; 'No redundancies' becomes no overall numerical reduction in the Council's workforce. In other words, one can 'freeze' three social worker jobs at a cost of £30,000, hire three dinner ladies at £9,000 a year, and thus save one's socialist image and £21,000! In short, it is workers who are really paying for Blunkett's bought time.

Should anyone be under the illusion that the increase in the bus fares subsidy next year from £57 million to £69 million is an act of revolutionary audacity in the face of the House of Lords decision, a closer examination of the last few months events is called for. The Council prepared a budget (and were ready to implement it) which entailed a massive 1270% fare rise over the next five years, 25% cut in services and hundreds of compulsory redundancies. Leader of the South Yorkshire Council, Roy Thwaites, explained his legal cretinism in these terms: "We cannot go to court to defend our policy because if we lose we are likely to be individually surcharged." Thwaites here merely takes his cue from Labour leader Gerald Kaufmann MP who warned: "Whilst we do not expect Labour Councillors to embark on any course of action which is clearly contrary to the law, we urge them to take all possible steps within the law to resist the Tory government." (New Statesman 15th January 82).

The 'left' Labour Councillors, on the other hand, were all fire and brimstone—at least when it came to preaching to the converted. At a February 11th 'Labour Herald' meeting, Blunkett called for defiance of the law since it "is being used to make sure Tory politics are legal and socialist policies are illegal."

However, the Thwaites of this world outnumber the Blunketts, a fact that has repeatedly tamed left

Councillors into becoming loyal 'pressure groups' within Labour Councils. Blunkett's own behaviour clearly illustrates this. He is willing to go no further than a vain attempt to cajole Labour colleagues into taking action. As he remarked at the February meeting—"If we can't persuade our colleagues what hope have we got?" The truth is that the 'left' Councillors place unity with the right wing law-abiding axe above appeals directly to rank and file trade unionists for strike action to make the law back down where it threatens services. Such a policy acts as a block to real action to fight the cuts. Eschewing a confrontationalist perspective and hoping for better times, the Council are united around a double-decker bus crusade to Thatcher, with yet another petition. As Blunkett himself put it: "We do not look for confrontation and we certainly do not seek prolonged and damaging clashes with central government." (Labour Herald, February 12th 82). Unfortunately for Blunkett and co. that is exactly what the Tories are after.

At the last minute cheap fares were prevented from going the way of Council houses. The High Court ruled that the anti-GLC judgement on fares *did not* apply to metropolitan counties. A cautious Thwaites celebrated: "The Labour Group yesterday afternoon considered further legal advice which indicated that if we continued with our transport policy and cheap fares, we would not be illegal at this moment in time. Whether we would in the future remains to be seen." (Doncaster Evening Post. Our emphasis.)

So far South Yorkshire has tottered while Lambeth, Lothian and the GLC have all collapsed. But the future holds greater restrictions on the ability of Councils to raise rates—Heseltine's Local Government Finance (No 2) Bill will see to that. Under such circumstances with their favoured option closed to them a collapse in South Yorkshire is highly probable. Blunkett obviously recognised this when he said: "Services can be maintained at least for the present by increasing rates, the only other alternative is insolvency." But insolvency, handing over to the Tories or their commissioners is anathema to the Labour municipal careerists who staff the town halls. They are terrified of taking the struggle against the law beyond the boundaries of the Council chamber or the harmless protest demonstration. As with the other failed attempts at 'socialism in one borough' therefore, the option the Council will undoubtedly choose when the crunch comes is one of savage reductions in jobs and services. Against this *we* say there is an alternative based on working class needs and working class struggle—industrial action *now* to peg rates and maintain jobs and services. ■

by Sue Todd

LABOUR BANKRUPT, WHILE HAUGHEY COURTS BANKRUPTCY

We print below an analysis of the recent election in the South of Ireland. The article is adapted from the editorial of the forthcoming edition of Class Struggle (No.9), journal of the Irish Workers Group the fraternal organisation of Workers Power in Ireland. That editorial contains a much fuller analysis of the election and deals with the Republican and Socialist groups' positions which, for reasons of space, we have had to leave out.

THE FEBRUARY GENERAL election in the South of Ireland has sharply exposed the intense crisis facing the Southern bourgeoisie. It did nothing to resolve it.

The result, another hung Dail (parliament), has served to warn the Irish bourgeoisie, and its financial overlords, including those in Wall Street and the City of London, that the two-party parliamentary system of hoodwink has worn precariously thin.

What the elections have not done, however, despite the many claims, is to provide any alternative political voice speaking for the real needs of the exploited and oppressed.

The Southern electorate, predominantly working class, returned neither Fitzgerald of the more conservative Fine Gael (who were governing in coalition with the Labour Party) nor Haughey of the bourgeois, but more populist, Fianna Fail, with an overall majority. This was so despite FF's calculated adaptation of its propaganda to "the needs of the workers", "equity", etc. This rhetoric, along with promises to "put jobs first", to levy the finance houses and to keep major enterprises in production, failed to secure a clear victory for Haughey.

This is all the more surprising when the alternative was the explicit savagery of the Fine Gael rival programme (based on the last government's anti-working class austerity budget), fully supported by the Parliamentary Labour clique under Michael O'Leary. FF failed to get a majority in spite of an improvement in their first preference vote of 2% (up to 47%), due to the recovery of a full half of the vote that went to H-Block candidates in the last election.

IRISH ELECTION RESULTS

PARTY	Number of seats
Fianna Fail	81
Fine Gael	63
Labour	15
Sinn Fein the Workers' Party	3
Independents	4

Haughey's own position as leader of FF is just as precarious as his premiership in the country. He came to the head of the party in November 1979, draped in the green cloak of nationalism. At the time the Irish bourgeoisie, requiring a reversal to the trend of industrial unrest, deficit budgeting and public sector wage increases, saw Haughey as the best means of putting the knife into the working class under that cloak of populist and nationalist rhetoric.

However, his sham nationalism did not endear him to the sections of FF. His enemies within the party are particularly resentful of the way in which Haughey's stance has armed the Opposition parties with lethal arrows in an effective and bellicose personal offensive against him, which has damaged the electoral standing of the party. His insecurity within the Party and Dail was such that despite over two years to run and a 20-seat majority he began to prepare an early General Election to get a personal mandate and more ground for his own faction. It took him 18 months to get a grip on government and synchronise support from both workers and farmers, the latter's EEC price rises being delayed till late spring. The attempt to buy and hold popular support escalated the public debt for day to day spending and alienated sections of capital including the banking and financial sector.

The post-election political gang-war between Haughey's faction and the rest of the FF party may for the time being have confirmed him as leader and head of Government. But it expresses the deep contradictions that dog the ruling class in general and which in particular dog its attempt to maintain the system of a bourgeois government and a bourgeois opposition to decimate working class political independence.

Threatened from within by opponents such as O'Malley with a true-blue pedigree on "law and order" and who has a record of the most open hostility to workers militancy, Haughey depending on a precarious parliamentary alliance is also vulnerable to Fine Gael's charges of fiscal deception. Under these pressures, any resolution of the factionalism in Fianna Fail can only be in the direction of outflanking Fine Gael with proofs to the bourgeoisie and imperialism of FF's greater reliability to wage the class offensive on all fronts.

This is as true on the national question as it is on the economic front. The reality of the Southern bourgeoisie's common interest with Britain, expressed in Haughey's 1980 talks with Thatcher, set new limits on FF anti-Partitionist rhetoric. In June 81 Haughey

was unable to deflect popular anger over Thatcher's murder of the hunger strikers in which he was seen to be implicated. Not only did the H-Block vote lose him that election, however, but the nemesis of his pre-election fiscal opportunism undermined him in the seven months of the resulting hung Dail. While the bourgeoisie would prefer a stable single-party government to relying on the coalition of Fine Gael with a Labour Party that cannot deliver up either the workers or their votes, the ruling class have come to have grave doubts about FF under Haughey. Hence the massive rallying of urban middle class support to the Fine Gael banner of budgetary "responsibility".

Haughey's immediate declaration on assuming power that National Unity was his government's primary concern, when all around him the oracles of bourgeois opinion are pointing to economic catastrophe, is now, more than ever, a desperate effort to use every last ounce of FF populism to silence the growing protests and create breathing space to engineer a new General Election and a stable bourgeois majority.

The Irish Labour Party, despite having the affiliation of most of Ireland's trade unions is in no way an independent voice for labour in the Dail. On the contrary it is the assiduous lap dog of the firecely anti-working class Fine Gael. In return for a sniff of governmental power it has long opted for coalition with this party at the expense of representing the interests and aspirations of workers. The result of this has been a steady demise in working class support for the party.

It is true that Labour returned with 15 seats. But its loss of 1% of the vote must be added to the 3% lost in June 81. Its present standing at 9% of the popular vote compares with previous heights of around 20%. But even that 9% owes much to the rallying power of the Coalition's appeal to middle class and petty bourgeois "responsibility". Fine Gael even mentioned some Labour candidates by name for support in its literature in Dublin where Labour did consistently better in the middle class areas where Fine Gael's vote was also improved. Added to this is the important fact of the provincial nature of the core of Labour's support.

Labour's rural conservatism was used by the bureaucracy to extinguish the urban working class radicalism partially drawn into the Party in the sixties, but which was allowed limited expression only through local area branches and never through delegates of the affiliated union rank and file, from whom the Party was kept separate and unaccountable. Of its gains in the cities Labour retained little other than the liberal intellectuals, environmentalists, and civil-libertarians who, when they couldn't win seats by popular vote, were put in the oxygen-tent of the Senate. Thus of its 15 seats, Labour won seven in large rural constituencies with small towns that rely on agriculture scattered industry and tourism. Those 7 were won with an average share of the first preference vote or over 20% in stark contrast to the vote that won the 8 city seats. The 5 Dublin Labour seats were won on an average less than 15% of the vote (despite the middle class Coalition support) and the 3 in Cork and Galway on an average less than 13%. Labour's vote elsewhere was disastrous and especially reflected the organisational collapse of the party since 1977.

This demise has caused anxiety in sections of the party, particularly inside the trade union bureaucracy. In June 1981 there was a (feeble) move by some elements within the bureaucracy to oppose the coalitionism of the party leadership. The key trade union bureaucrats who opposed Labour's entry into Coalition were John Carroll of the Irish Transport and General Workers Union and Paddy Cardiff of the Federated Workers Union of Ireland representing over 200,000 workers. It was clear that Cardiff was not opposing Coalition but perhaps trying to disassociate himself from, if not prevent, the further crumbling of Labour's organisation that would result, for he argued that Labour should nevertheless support a minority Fine Gael government!

Carroll's formally more correct position masked his union's preference for Fianna Fail over Coalition. He became a member of the Labour Parliamentary Party by taking a seat in the Senate. His record of acquiescence in Coalition is thus clear. He wavered during the second election that O'Leary's Coalitionist course in defiance of the Party ruling council would call into question trade union affiliation. But when after the election the Parliamentary Party categorically rejected an alliance with the five 'Left TDs' (3 SFWP TDs and two 'left' independents, Kemmy and Gregory) in the Dail which had to be part of any strategy of political independence from FF and FG, nothing was heard of his dissent.

Michael D. Higgins is believed to be the leading anti-Coalitionist within the Party. But his stand was

not one of principle either. He obeyed party discipline to vote the Coalition into office after June 81. Obedience to party discipline also ensured his support for two savage Coalition budgets. Being Party Chairman he was in a key position to wreck O'Leary's acceptance of a joint budget based election platform with Fine Gael in defiance of the Party council, but he diplomatically argued there was no fundamental conflict and retrospectively claimed that his and O'Leary's avoidance of public conflict showed their "political maturity".

Inevitably he did not challenge O'Leary's confirmation behind the back of the Party members as parliamentary leader after the election! Yet in the new Dail he is pinioned as the man who wrecked the chance of a new Coalition by his campaign and his casting vote in the Party council the day before the new Dail. The truth is that, when the chances of securing a Coalition majority were seen to be extremely slim, and that even if achieved it could only last the briefest time, he was able to get a single vote majority NOT for a politically independent Labour opposition but only for 'independently' supporting without joining a minority Fine Gael government! Labour AND its lefts are congenitally incapable, of their own accord, of breaking from political support for the capitalist parties. Only the demands of workers mobilised in struggle can guarantee the smashing of the coalitionism. The so called lefts cannot be trusted to lead that struggle.

Fundamentally the trade union bureaucrats and their left echo inside the Labour Party use the party to usurp the mantle of James Connolly. However, where he fought to unite the Irish working class in the struggle for a Workers Republic and against imperialism, his usurpers do the exact opposite. Following the imperialist partition of the island the union leaders, mindful of their role as brokers between labour and capital, defined the labour movement politically within an acceptance of the two artificially separated Irish states. Connolly's murder by the British Cabinet (then including British Labour leader Arthur Henderson) prior to the consolidation of a revolutionary vanguard inside the working class, allowed the bureaucrats to get away with this tragic betrayal. However, unable to explicitly repudiate the tradition for which Connolly's heroism had earned undying prestige among workers they adopted his name and memory as a rhetorical mask for a stunted Southern Labour Party which rejected Connolly's perspective of the Workers Republic. They went on to insulate it organisationally from rank and file trade union demands and struggle.

Thus the Irish working class movement already embodies the experience of a failed search for a political leadership in the form of a Party of Labour. The ILP functions politically for the bureaucracy as their proof of belonging to Connolly's tradition and as their 'answer' to any demand for political action which might filter through the tightly controlled and remote official organs of the unions. The delegate to union conference who asks for some accounting for the Union's political affiliation will at best be directed to express her or his interest by joining, outside of the union, a constituency branch of the Party. Of the



Charlie Haughey - left holding the Irish baby after the election.

political levy funds, care is taken that as little as possible be said by officials. They are worried that openness on this point would lead members to ask if there is any reason at all for continuing to pay the levy!

In their brokerage with the bourgeoisie the union bureaucrats have little need of Labour. When compelled to divert workers militancy (e.g. the tax mobilisations) into the illusory road of parliamentary reform, they have bargained directly for a 'National Understanding', on social and economic goals, with whatever was the governing bourgeois party. The elements of the bureaucracy who argued against the June 81 Coalition of Labour with Fine Gael could scarcely hide their preference for economic dealing with Fianna Fail. Neither could this hide their concern that Labour should not be so obvious in its lust for the spoils of office that it would sacrifice the last residue of its limited support only to destroy the bureaucracy's political camouflage and the marginal privileges of standing for public office which is part of the career of the trade union official.

Yet the Labour Party, however stunted is the "official" party of the major unions in the South and stands as an obstacle to the fight for revolutionary socialist politics in the organised trade union movement. The fight to make the bureaucracy accountable for Labour's treachery, the fight to bring the union affiliations under rank and file democratic control, the fight to impose rank and file demands in struggle on Labour, the fight to force it out of the Coalition—all continue to be important tactics for revolutionaries. They are not in any way based on the illusion of reforming the Labour Party but are rather directed at revolutionary communist (Trotskyist) alternative throughout the whole of Ireland. ■

Women's Fightback - a feminist enclave?

by Sue Thomas

AT THE 'WOMENS Fightback' conference held on Saturday March 27th, over 300 women heard speakers from struggles such as Plesseys, Rulcan and St. Mary's Hospital Paddington. Their common theme was the way union bureaucrats had sabotaged their struggles.

But the whole format of the conference prevented it deciding on clear policies to give a lead to women trade unionists in struggle. Virtually the whole time was spent in workshops - and in the afternoon plenary session, only a short time was given to floor speakers and no resolutions were allowed. The morning workshop on the NHS had, in fact, produced, on the instigation of a Workers Power supporter delegated from her NUPE branch, a clear resolution on the key issues facing health workers at present, including strike action on the present pay claim and building Joint Shop Stewards Committees. However, along with resolutions from other workshops, this has been consigned to publication in Fightback at some unspecified future date.

The organisers of Women's Fightback - mostly supporters of Socialist Organiser - deliberately chose a structure similar to that of past feminist conferences. Workshops, women only and no resolutions, all in the name of confidence building, actually served to ensure that neither delegates or observers left the conference committed to any serious action proposals. What was clear was that Socialist Organiser's leading spokeswoman at the conference, Rachel Lever, saw the conference as a means of launching her feminist perspective of taking the ideas of the women's movement (which ones? which section of the movement?) into the Labour movement.

For her, the main problems facing women in the

trade unions are male privilege and the fact that the unions are 'grossly patriarchal institutions.'

Posed in this completely one-sided manner, this view ignores the fact that union bureaucrats stamp on all rank and file struggles that might get out of their control. The National Union of Tailoring and Garment Workers executive withdrew their backing for the Lee Jeans occupation - just as the AUEW leadership refused support to Lawrence Scott. Certainly the bureaucrats play on and cultivate backwardness in the membership on the women's question, as they do on racial oppression.

Rachel Lever's weapons in the fight against patriarchy in the unions are positive discrimination and building 'autonomous enclaves'. But the fight for positive discrimination - necessary to overcome years of prejudice and ensure that women's voices are heard in the unions must be linked to the perspective of transforming the unions, otherwise all that it means is substituting female bureaucrats for male ones. But on this vital point Rachel Lever is silent. And as the WP leaflet to the conference stated, fighting women's caucuses are often necessary as a springboard to action and to winning male workers to the struggle for women's jobs and interests. But no woman militant worth her salt wants to get stuck in an enclave. Women's caucuses are necessary means of struggle but they are not ends in themselves.

Working class women are being attacked on all fronts by the ruling class. But there is resistance - women have fought determined struggles in a number of factories - Plessey's being the most recent notable example. In these struggles the enemies of women have been the bosses and the bureaucrats, not men in general. Despite the denunciations of the union leaders at the conference, Rachel Lever and her supporters in SO have chosen to forget this basic truth. In so doing, they are building Fightback into an obstacle to a working class women's movement - not a bridge towards one. ■

Nicaragua at the crossroads

Weber takes the Me

IN PART ONE of this review of Henri Weber's "Nicaragua: The Sandinist Revolution", we pointed out Weber's fatal error of analysing the FSLN as a 'Revolutionary Workers' and Peasants' Government' which was both 'thoroughly hostile to the bourgeoisie' and proceeding to the 'transition to socialism'. (W.P. No 30). We showed how it was only possible to adopt such a position on a Government openly committed to defending a 'mixed (capitalist) economy' by abandoning the ABC of Marxism. Weber revises the Marxist theory of the state - for him the key question becomes who controls the state machine. For marxists however, the real criteria for determining the class nature of a state is what property forms it defends. He abandons the fight for the Dictatorship of the Proletariat, the only state form which can complete the revolutionary transformation from capitalism into communism.

While it is clear from his book that Weber differs from the majority of the USFI on the characterisation of the regime (the Mandeliste faction of the USFI has so far resisted declaring it a Workers and Peasants Government) they are in complete accord on their assessment of the nature of the FSLN leadership and the direction in which they think it is taking Nicaragua. For example, the USFI declares "The FSLN leadership, which up to now has proved that it is conscious of the necessity of preventing by all means the reconstruction of a bourgeois state is objectively following the road of the construction of the dictatorship of the proletariat, of a workers' state - whatever might be the rather unclear theoretical formulas which it uses to express this real process" (Editorial 'International Marxist Review' Number 1, p.4)

Once again the USFI follows its well-worn path of accommodating to petit-bourgeois forces which it believes will carry out the tasks of the proletariat and its organised vanguard - the Revolutionary Party. Once again, faced with a petty-bourgeois movement with 'revolutionary' credentials, the USFI folds up the Trotskyist programme and the Leninist vanguard party and stows them away for the duration. After all if Tito, Mao, Ho Chi Minh and Castro could all create workers' states, despite their 'unclear theoretical formulas' thanks to the strength of the 'objective process' 'world revolution' etc, then the Sandinistas can as well. Indeed they have a head start by not being Stalinists. Untimely criticism, let alone building a separate party, could only hinder history's advance. Of course such a process may come to grief, such as befell Ben Bella in Algeria. But then the good 'Trotskyists' will rummage in their books and theses and explain, post festum, what went wrong.

In practice this means tying the working class to Stalinism or 'left' bonapartist regimes. Thus in Nicaragua, as in those previous cases, even talk of building a revolutionary Trotskyist party becomes an embarrassment, to be denounced as 'sectarianism' in relation to the FSLN.

In Weber's book of course, one finds no mention of a revolutionary party because he believes the Nicaraguan masses already have one in the shape of the FSLN. Neither does he see any real need to fight for Soviets. Whilst he has little time for genuine organs of workers' power, he is very worried about what he terms 'socialist democracy'. Here Weber becomes most critical of the FSLN regime. Again his positions echo those of Mandel. Mandel's attempts to reconcile the Dictatorship of the Proletariat with the politics of the Eurocommunists and Social Democracy led him, in his 'Theses on Social Democracy' to fundamentally revise the Bolshevik conception of Soviet Democracy. In these theses Soviet Power is emptied of its class character, its role as an organ of struggle and rule by one class, the proletariat, over another, the bourgeoisie. It is lauded rather for its form, its direct democracy. 'Democratic freedoms' in the abstract become the key characteristics of 'socialist democracy', which must guarantee freedom of debate for all parties including bourgeois parties - 'unless they take up arms!'



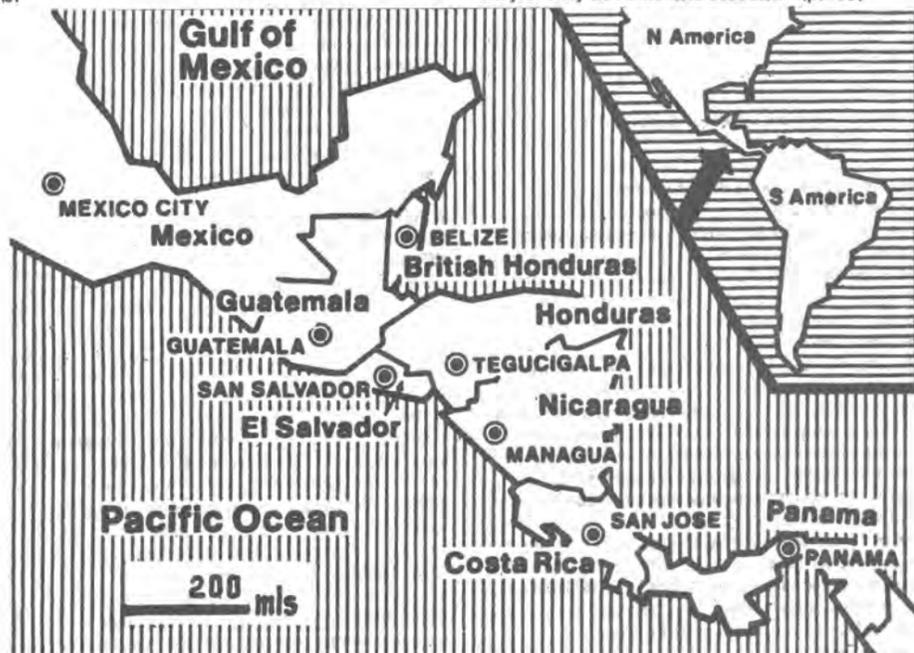
Absurd Pentagon spy-plane photo allegedly showing "Soviet-style" this, and "Soviet-style" that. The US imperialists are forced to rely on such nonsense precisely because there is no Soviet funding of the Nicaraguan army.

It is from this standpoint, a standpoint much closer to that of Kautsky than Lenin, that the few criticisms made by Weber of the regime arise. Weber's concerns lie not with the failure of the regime to expropriate the bourgeoisie, nor even with its attacks on independent workers' organisations, but with its failure to uphold 'pluralism' in Nicaragua. However in his search for 'Socialist Democracy' Weber does reveal the real developments inside Nicaragua, the nature of 'popular power' and the attitudes of the FSLN leadership to workers' organisations and workers' power.

On the Sandinista Defence Committees (CDS), which the CDCs, the bodies which organised the armed revolts against Somoza in the cities, have now become, Weber has this to say: "Those who imagine that the pyramid of Sandinista Defence Committees is, like the legendary pyramid of soviets, the organisational expression of direct power in Nicaragua (the true form of proletarian democracy at last) are once again mistaking their desires for reality."

The CDS's do assume functions of local mobilisation, vigilance and administration, and as such they are useful auxiliary bodies for the regime. But in no way are they themselves centres or sources of power. It is not within these committees that broad national options are debated and decided; not within them that the rulers are chosen." Weber p.113)

Weber then goes on to examine the other bodies which the FSLN call organs of 'direct democracy', the Council of State, municipal juntas, the assemblies of 'cabildos abiertos' (discussion assemblies) the economic reactivation assemblies (ARE's). The Council of State is made up of appointed delegates of parties and mass organisations - 'the party and other leaderships are themselves not elected by the rank and file but co-opted from above' (Weber p.113). The 135 municipal juntas are appointed not elected - "There is no more sign of municipal elections in Nicaragua than there is of legislative elections - even though citizens are sometimes called upon to acclaim the choice of leaders..." (p.114) The local 'discussion meetings', with ministers from the Council of State, Weber makes this clear, exercise no control over the leaders "...the assemblies exercise no actual power. The discussions do not result in binding votes and the election of delegates to ensure they are carried out. At most there is an expression of wishes, which the leaders may or may not take into account." (p.115)



The ARE's and the 'permanent production committees' or 'factory committees' are similarly non-elected and have a minority of rank and file representatives.

What Weber describes here is the 'popular power' much loved by 'left' bonapartists the world over from Colonel Muammar Gaddafi's 'Jamahiriyah' to Fidel Castro's stalinist 'people's power'.

It is a charade designed to disguise a bonapartist dictatorship from the workers and peasants. In Gaddafi's case it is a capitalist bonapartism. In Castro's it is a Stalinist one - ie. although Cuba has post-capitalist property relations and is a workers' state, the proletariat is totally excluded from political power by a usurping bureaucracy. Castro, like all Stalinists, hides the bureaucracy's parasitic rule in constitutional forms stolen from bourgeois or petit-bourgeois politics. If the Russians and East Europeans disguise their dictatorship with parliaments, universal suffrage and name them 'democracies of the whole people' or 'Peoples Democracies' then Castro borrows from Third World Populism his organs of 'peoples power'. These bodies remain plebiscitary at best - ie. to approve of the proposals of the leaders. Their normal function is to discuss petty details and criticise the lower echelons of the bureaucracy for not carrying out the leaders wise decisions.

These empty forms have nothing in common with the organs of the direct and full, political, dictatorship of the proletariat, which involves the masses, both proletarian and peasant, in the direct control of the workers' state, through democratic soviets. For revolutionaries the key task in Nicaragua would be to expose such sham democracy and fight to build real factory committees and trade unions, with democratically elected delegates responsible to the rank and file. Only such bodies, together with town and city wide soviets, could defend the working class against the employers and the FSLN's protection of the employers' interests. Only armed workers and peasants militias under the control of workers and peasants soviets, could really defend Nicaragua against imperialist counter-revolution and its agents inside the country.

But Henri Weber is not a communist revolutionary, he is a centrist and therefore while he correctly points out that this form of government is 'a paternalist, bureaucratic form of Govt.' he goes on to declare 'Only demagogues or idealists can blame the FSLN for restricting political democracy in the phase of national reconstruction and consolidation of the new regime.' (p.117)

Of course the leadership of the FSLN does not wish to extend 'political democracy' - not to the bourgeois parties through a legislative assembly and certainly not to the workers and peasants through genuine organs of workers power. The FSLN's attitude to elections comes through clearly in Weber's book, he quotes an article in Barricada, the FSLN's daily paper giving the following definition of democracy "Democracy is a Government in the service of the toiling class... Now that we have indicated the essential element of democracy (namely legislation or government by the people), there is the question of its formal, non-essential elements. We shall merely point out one of these: e. on' (p.111)

When Weber sets out to criticise this point of view, he does so not from the position of a Leninist arguing the need for soviet democracy but from the Mandeliste ideal of 'socialist democracy'. Thus we find Weber declaring: 'One of the original features of the Sandinist Revolution, and one definitely worth preserving is the existence of genuine pluralism: of political parties, including bourgeois parties, so long as they respect revolutionary legality and do not resort to armed subversion of the press and other media.' (p.130)

This touching liberal belief in the democratic credentials of the Nicaraguan bourgeoisie (what bourgeoisie ever respected revolutionary legality!) would be disastrous for the Nicaraguan masses. The Nicaraguan bourgeoisie has hitherto refrained from taking up arms because the FSLN defend its 80% of the means of production. Weber even goes so far as to claim the FSLN for periodically closing down the bourgeoisie daily 'La Prensa'.

We must remember that Weber is referring to a regime which he believes to be a 'Revolutionary Workers and Peasants Government'. The idea that such a government in the middle of a life and death struggle with imperialism (and if it was really such an anti-capitalist government in struggle with its own bourgeoisie as well) should shrink from taking all necessary measures to suppress the bourgeoisie, including depriving them of all political rights, is a travesty of Marxism. Is it little wonder that on page 130 Weber attacks Lenin's definition of the Dictatorship of the Proletariat as 'rule based directly on force and unrestricted by any law which Lenin used in a polemic with an opponent using similar arguments to Weber - Kautsky?

Weber is left appealing to the FSLN to be 'a bit more democratic and suggesting ever so tentatively that perhaps soviet democracy might prove a good idea in the future: 'A council democracy could progressively and no doubt slowly, take shape out of factory, ward and neighbourhood committees - provided these committees really have the capacity, even without strict regulation, to influence decisions and to appoint, control, and recall leaders.' (Weber p.132, our emphasis.)

In case this seems like going a bit far, Weber quickly adds: 'Socialists, then, will not criticise the Sandinist political system in the name of an ideal model of democracy outlined by the founders of Marxism, which can only be applied in toto. For such a model - a state of workers councils beginning to wither away not yet exist anywhere except as a mobilising vision of the future. In any case, the prevailing conditions in Nicaragua, both structural and conjunctural, make such a model seem especially unrealistic.' (p.133).

Here we see the USFI's junking of the whole heritage of Lenin and Trotsky - of the healthy revolutionary periods of the Comintern and the Fourth International. Soviets are neither indispensable as organs of the struggle for power or for the political rule of the proletariat. Joseph Hansen in 1961 reduced them to mere 'forms of proletarian democracy'. Desirable certainly, but their absence was not enough to justify calling Castro Cuba 'deformed' - indeed it was 'pretty good'. Nevertheless he did advise Fidel to think about them. Weber will not even go that far. At best they are a 'mobilising vision of the future' but here and now would be 'unrealistic'. Soviets are in fact just a mirror. In the case of Nicaragua, and presumably all other imperialised countries which would face exactly the same structural and conjunctural problems, the workers and peasants will just have to make do with a 'paternalist and bureaucratic form of government' instead. This is the politics of the disillusioned petit-bourgeois intellectual who has given up on Marxism and will rest content with bonapartist 'popular power' abroad and reform at home.

In the first part of this review we argued that far from there being a Revolutionary Workers and Peasants Government in power in Nicaragua, there is in fact a government committed to the defence of capitalism. The FSLN coalition in alliance with the anti-Somoza bourgeoisie formed a popular front Government firmly committed to the 'mixed economy'. Despite the frictions between the FSLN and the bourgeoisie this popular front has not been broken. Indeed the commitment of all wings of the FSLN, even its most 'left' to a capitalist 'stage' in the revolution, guarantees it for the present. What we are seeing in Nicaragua, and what Weber's book documents very well, given his unconcealed cynicism with regard to the working class itself exercising power, is the growing bonapartist forms of the regime.

Having come to power on the wave of a massive worker and peasant rising and having smashed the bourgeoisie's army, the FSLN is able for a period to balance between the major classes in Nicaraguan society. To maintain its position it has to control and discipline both its major opponents - the workers and peasants on one side, and the bourgeoisie on the other. It must sometimes lean for support on its left wing, mass organisations which it mobilises in carefully controlled demonstrations of 'popular power', if it is threatened by US imperialism, or its own bourgeoisie. At other times it must strike out against the left - against the independent unions, against land seizures etc - and lean on its bourgeois allies. But always the blows will fall harder on the workers and peasants as long as the bonapartist regime remains committed to the defence of capitalism.

What is clear is that the situation in Nicaragua is a highly unstable one, and that its resolution, as with the Cuban situation between 1959 and 1960, will not be

shevik road



Sandinista leader Jaime Wheelock arguing his case in Washington DC.

the result of internal factors alone. The FSLN government is pursuing a utopian project in attempting to develop a mixed economy, to rebuild a capitalist Nicaragua which is independent of imperialism and one which promises to answer the social and economic demands of the masses. Nicaragua, and the rest of central America, remains caught in the iron grip of US imperialism which content to block all major Nicaraguan aid projects and so cripple the country economically, while at the same time encouraging counter-revolutionary activity. The FSLN's austerity measures and attacks on workers organisations are one result of the economic crisis thus provoked. The FSLN's pursuit of its mixed economy plays straight into the hands of US imperialism which hopes that these measures will erode the mass support which the FSLN still undoubtedly retains as the leaders of the anti-Somoza revolution. It is significant in this respect that the bourgeois daily 'La Prensa' which, albeit for its own demagogic purposes, specialises in exposing the regime's bureaucratic abuses, has double the circulation of the FSLN's daily 'Barrios'.

Neither does the Nicaraguan revolution exist in a vacuum. In El Salvador the FMLN is growing in strength and a full scale civil war rages. In Guatemala guerilla struggle is reaching serious proportions and is likely to intensify in the aftermath of the coup. Reagan, hampered to some degree by the fear and loathing for 'another Vietnam' among the US masses, is trying to ensure the defeat of all these popular movements. Under Reagan's pressure Cuba and the Sandinistas appear to have drastically cut aid to the guerillas in El Salvador, fearful that the growing victories of the guerillas will not promote the 'negotiations' they seek, but direct US intervention.

In fact the future of the Nicaraguan revolution (ie workers power) lies in the hands of a successful struggle in El Salvador and the rest of Central America. To aid that struggle to victory would mean a dramatic break with the Nicaraguan bourgeoisie as well as with Reagan. Ah! , exclaim the Sandinistas and their USFI apologists, the economy would collapse, Nicaragua is too small, too poor etc etc. These good old Menshivist and Stalinist justifications of a revolution by stages always rest on 'specific', 'practical' and 'local' problems. The only thing is that they are *always* and everywhere raised as obstacles to working class power, to thorough-going anti-capitalist measures and to the international spread of the revolution.

The perspective and tactics of permanent revolution of course are not a magic key to success, but socialism (or popular power) in one country, the revolution by stages etc is not a 'practical' alternative. It is rather a suicidal strategy which demobilises and disorients the proletariat and will lead to bourgeois/imperialist counter-revolution or at the very best to another isolated workers state where the proletariat has been politically expropriated by a parasitic bureaucracy. The 'Cuban road' advocates of the USFI in effect settle for the latter option, but it is not only intrinsically a Stalinist and not a Trotskyist perspective - it is also a foolish gamble.

Specific factors - US/USSR rivalry and the latter's willingness to supply massive military and economic aid enabled Castro under threat by US imperialism to make the transition. He made it under the blows of the US and Cuban bourgeoisie. Similar factors may produce a similar result in Nicaragua. The consequences would be the splitting and purging of the Government and the FSLN - the creation of a Stalinist party and state repressive apparatus, the expropriation of the bourgeoisie and East European/Cuban style planification. But collapse or disintegration can occur at any point in this process. Far from being inevitable, it could be aborted. 'Democratic' or 'undemocratic' counter-revolution is at least as likely as a scenario, given that the Sandinista



Managua street poster, June 1981. It reads: "All the People to the Militias". The Sandinistas may have wanted 'all the people' in the militias - they certainly weren't prepared to use those militias to give all power to the workers and peasants in Nicaragua.

strategy - which involves ideologically confusing and organisationally strangling the proletariat - weakens the very force that is the only sure locomotive force of the revolution.

A revolutionary communist strategy for Nicaragua therefore hinges on the struggle for the dictatorship of the proletariat based on workers, peasants and soldiers councils - and on full international support for the Salvadorean and Guatemalan insurgents. It includes the insistent need for the full agrarian revolution in Nicaragua which will bind the peasants to the workers and can rouse the whole peasantry of Central America. It includes as a first stage workers control of production and distribution. Only then when the workers have complete access to the business secrets of the capitalists and bankers and control over these potential saboteurs can decisions on whether or not to immediately expropriate them or to use their special expertise for a period, be taken. But this question will itself be solved by struggle and it would be singing sweet lullabies to tell the workers that the bourgeoisie will help them build up industry out of the goodness of their hearts.

If this is the only real programme for the working class we must of course realise that the proletariat will not shed their illusions in the Sandinistas in one fell swoop or as the result of propaganda received in a state of passivity. The masses learn in struggle, in action, starting off with all their illusions and shedding them to the extent that they take the right course of action and become fully conscious of the road ahead - ie find, rally round and build an alternative leadership - an alternative programme and party. A Trotskyist vanguard in Nicaragua needs tactics, partial, immediate and transitional demands to intervene in mass struggle and win the workers and peasants to their side.

Firstly Trotskyists must fight to build and defend where they exist, independent, democratic organs of the proletariat - the factory committees, trade unions, the CDS's, and militias must be transformed into genuine organs of workers power. Secondly they must defend and assist the poor peasants to do likewise. Thirdly they must defend the democratic rights of all tendencies and parties within the workers movement against government repression.

Such a communist programme would be directed firstly to the workers and peasants, many of whom accept the leadership and strategy of the FSLN, but also to the 'left' of the FSLN who claim to stand most directly for the demands of the masses. We would demand that the FSLN break with the bourgeoisie and implement the above measures - only a government which carried through such a policy basing itself on the workers and peasants councils would really be a revolutionary workers and peasants government.

The Nicaraguan revolution stands at a dangerous crossroads. Only the path of proletarian revolution can offer the workers and peasants of Nicaragua the possibility of defending and extending the gains made through their long and bloody struggle to overthrow Somoza. Only the victory of socialism and the struggle to extend the revolution throughout Central America, offers the possibility of breaking US imperialism's stranglehold on the Nicaraguan revolution. ■

by Stuart King

NB In the first part of this review we referred to Henri Weber as a "leading member of the LCR". We have since learned that Weber has recently left the LCR.

Moreno/Lambert split - SLG reply

Socialist Labour Group,
British Section of the Fourth International
(International Centre of Reconstruction)
BCM BOX 7727, London WCI

March 4th 1982

Dear Comrades, May I, through your column, appeal to those of your revolutionary readers interested in the fight to reconstruct the Trotskyist Fourth International on principled foundations. On March 20th (at 2pm, Room 3D, ULU, Malet St.,) a leader of the recently founded FI(ICR) will address a public meeting on this and related questions.*

It will be an opportunity for militants to hear a more balanced account of the events that led to the demise of the FI(IC) than that conveyed in the article in Workers Power no.29. Whilst it is not possible to answer every piece of mis-information in that article in one letter, I would like to take up some of the more glaring 'errors'.

Chief among these concern the Napuri affair. Ricardo Napuri, ex-member of the POMR was not 'ousted from his organisation and accused of being a CIA agent'. He resigned from the POMR because he was not prepared to pay his Parliamentary salary to the party. That all remuneration paid to the Parliamentary representatives of the Party be handed over to the Party funds is a long standing principle of our movement dating from the Comintern. The necessity for this in a country as impoverished as Peru is obvious. That Napuri has since applied for the commission and pension of his post in the army (from which he was cashiered in the late 1940s when he entered revolutionary politics) indicates his current trajectory. That Moreno has made common cause with this traitor against the French PCI - whatever differences may exist on France - is scandalous.

Secondly your columnist seems to doubt whether responsibility for the split in the FIIC does lie on the shoulders of Moreno, as we have affirmed. It should be pointed out that despite Moreno's characterisation of the OCI (U) and its leading members ('revisionist', 'a transmission belt for social patriotism', 'worse than Stalin' etc), the comrades of the OCI(U) on the leadership of the FI(IC) worked indefatigably to find a framework

for resolving the problems. Throughout the autumn, Moreno refused to attend the IEC, boycotted the General Council, supreme body of the FI(IC) between Conferences, and rescinded all agreement on how to organise the discussion that was reached with his former supporters on the IEC. In fact one of his supporters, Camilo Gonzalez, member of the IEC of the FI(IC) was even expelled by Moreno for trying to find a framework to resolve the problems in the face of Moreno's obstructiveness.

Workers Power may not recognise Moreno's responsibility for the split. But leading members of organisations in Latin America previously loyal to Moreno's leadership have discovered the fact and have acted accordingly. Ruben Rivera, ex-Central Committee member of the Argentinian PST, has recently denounced Moreno's juggling with figures, formation of self-appointed 'external leaderships' and his criminal splitting act. Events have already proved false Workers Power's analysis.

The alleged basis of the split, the so-called adaptation of the French PCI to the Mitterand Government does not withstand serious examination. If popular fronts were destroyed by ritualistic press denunciation, then the PCI would indeed be at fault. In reality the task facing them is to mobilise the French working class to overcome the Mitterand government in practice - by taking the leadership of the class struggle already raging in France. Hence it is the French PCI that organises the first demonstration against Mitterand's policies.

As far as the PCI's sister organisation, the SLG, in this country is concerned, we stand on the gains of the resolutions and documents of the FI(IC). Workers Power denounced the FI(IC) as a rotten bloc before its founding principles were available: the fact that it continues to do so is a least consistent. As to whether they will be able to 're-elaborate a transitional programme for the new period of imperialist crisis' and rebuild the Fourth

International on this basis, when they have manifestly failed to produce such a political platform or to fight in practice for International Trotskyist regroupment, is another matter entirely. The proof of the pudding, as Engels said, is in the eating. At the present Workers Power appear to lack both the ingredients and the recipe. □

WE REPLY:

THE SLG's LETTER purports to take some of the more "glaring errors" which appeared in an article on the split in the FI(IC) in Workers Power No. 29.

On the question of Napuri. As far as our information is concerned, the OCI leadership built a faction in the POMR once it realised that Napuri was going to side with Moreno in the split. That faction gained a majority and made a series of allegations that Napuri was an "agent of the bourgeoisie", had "capitulated before the Belaunde government", etc, etc.

Napuri was certainly "ousted" from his organisation. If in fact the real issue was not the political differences but Napuri's parliamentary salary, why then was he not expelled one and a half years earlier when he became a parliamentary deputy, and, we suspect, failed to hand over his salary then? Of course all this is a smokescreen. It is just one more example of the Lambertists' refusal to discuss political differences. Members who disagree or who defect are always branded as "agents of the bourgeoisie", like Napuri, or lumped into an amalgam like the ex-Bolshevik Faction OCI members in France, who were referred to as part of a provocation engineered by fascists, stalinists and the LCR.

The SLG berates us for not recognising that Moreno

was responsible for the split, and proceeds to list the Morenoite "splitting activities". For every one of these accusations, the Moreno grouping has a reply, but we (and, we would estimate, most revolutionary militants) are not interested in taking sides in the bureaucratic manoeuvrings which preceded the split.

Far-reaching and fundamental political differences appeared less than a year after the founding of their "International". We have given an answer and one that not only analysed the basis of an unprincipled fusion, but pointed out why that would lead to political collapse, long before that collapse occurred.

It is revealing that the SLG attempts to answer none of the political criticisms we have made of the OCI or of the FI(IC). One hurriedly organised anti-Mitterand demonstration might help cover Lambert's tracks, but it does nothing to make up for months and years of adaptation to reformism, as documented in our paper. We exposed the chronic record of Moreno's adaptation to petit-bourgeois nationalism before your fusion, and were the only British group to write a detailed critique of the FI(IC)'s founding principles. Yet, again the SLG appears incapable of replying politically.

The SLG accuses WORKERS POWER of failing to "fight in practice for international Trotskyist regroupment". We find this a little ironic as it was the FI(IC), who having "lost" WORKERS POWER's and the Irish Workers Group's letter expressing our willingness to attend the much-vaunted "open conference" for Trotskyist regroupment, proceeded to abandon the project in favour of their ill-fated fusion conference with the Morenoites. The FI(IC) has given a starting example of the Lambertists' and Morenoites' methods of building a "Trotskyist" international and the results that can be expected from them. ■

*(We received the SLG's letter after the print date for our March issue).

Solidarnosc in Britain

The Solidarnosc Trade Union Working Group in Britain has been active building support for Solidarnosc since Jaruzelski's coup. Workers Power interviewed Andrzej Lodynski, a member of the group to find out about the Working Group's aims and about its attitude to the events in Poland over the last 18 months eighteen months.

WP: Can you tell us about the origins of the Trade Union Working Group and the work that you've been doing since the coup?

A: We set up the group just after the demonstration in Hyde Park. The group consists of people who by chance found themselves abroad in England and our basic aims are to provide information about what is going on in Poland—information interpreted in a certain way because journalists sometimes do not understand very much about what happens. The second aim is to establish further contacts with Trade Unions in this country which is a continuation of the relations Solidarnosc had before the coup.

WP: How much success have you had in your attempts to forge strong links with the British Trade Unions?

A: I don't think the situation in Britain is as good as in other countries. For example in France there is enormous support from some Unions—with the exception of the CGT but there is even a split in the CGT—and there is a group of supporters in the CGT. But in Britain it is not as good and this is one of the things that makes us rather upset. We understand that here there is only one big Trade Union organisation so there is no situation of competition—in some countries the Unions compete and fight for Solidarity representatives but nothing like that happens here.

Another thing is that the TUC is a very big organisation and works very slowly. It moved slowly when Solidarity was born—official TUC recognition came after the strike in August and the Gdansk agreement! Not all the Unions would like to have contacts with us. Unions like the NUM, for example, are rather reluctant.

WP: Have any unions refused support?

A: We have only met those Union leaders who have answered our telephone calls. We didn't try to go to the people who we know in advance are reluctant. We are very small and there are many unions. We haven't had a case of a direct refusal to meet us. We didn't try to meet the miners. However we sent letters to all the Unions with information about ourselves and not every union answered. We don't want to insist very much. If someone is interested we go and we talk.

WP: But what about the response of rank and file workers in factories that you've visited on tours in Scotland and the North?

A: The tours were very successful. Of course there was much misunderstanding. There were cases in Scotland where we were attacked as CIA agents by Stalinists but this was rare. In the most cases our speaker was welcomed with sympathy and understanding.

WP: Could Solidarnosc foresee the coup d'état and were any preparations made for it?

A: No. Solidarnosc did not expect such a widespread precise and sudden operation which by one stroke would crush the whole Union. Such a thing was not expected by Solidarnosc. However in the last few weeks before the coup there was a very tense atmosphere and some people in the leadership and some of the rank and file expected that there would be a confrontation. But nobody had enough imagination to conceive of what was going to happen.

WP: Were there any preparations for an increased level of confrontation?

A: If you mean by preparation the collecting of arms and guns such a thing couldn't happen in Polish society where there are very limited opportunities for access to guns and radio apparatus. All such technical devices are highly restricted and impossible to buy. Moreover such actions would have given the pretext for the authorities to claim that we were preparing for power.

WP: Were there plans for a general strike or demonstration?

A: The pattern was set on that of Bydgoszcz where there was a big conflict and a national warning strike. The National Commission of Solidarnosc called for a warning strike if the Sejm voted for a state of emergency and the banning of strikes. But the military council suspended the session of the Parliament!

WP: We always argued that it was a utopia to attempt to build a free Trade Union on a permanent basis because the Stalinist bureaucracy cannot coexist with independent organisations of the working class.



Demonstrator against the coup in December - the PSC is now on the road to an anti-communist popular front.

A: Nobody can predict which way the Soviet bloc will change. In the long term it will change but we don't know in what way. Any kind of change is possible only through pressure either from below, as with Solidarnosc, or perhaps combined pressure from below and from outside the whole bloc. So far we don't know any examples of where the bureaucracy allowed independent organisations to exist but to say this will never change is a belief that it is only partly supported because the future is always open.

WP: What was the attitude of the Solidarnosc movement to socialism?

A: The Polish people identify 'socialism' with 36 years of bureaucratic oppressive rule. Don't forget Solidarnosc was crushed by the authorities in the name of socialism. If by socialism you mean the system that has existed for 36 years then all the workers are against it. But on the other hand no one ever dreamed of giving the big factories, shipyards and mines back into private hands. Solidarnosc was insisting on deep reforms in the system of power and decision making.

WP: We think the movement of the Polish workers could have laid the basis for genuine workers power in Poland but its leadership always tried to use this power to win reforms rather than destroy the bureaucracy itself.

A: The problem was that almost everyone was convinced that had Solidarnosc tried to crush the bureaucracy and to move in the way you suggest then a Soviet invasion was inevitable. The answer to your question can the system be reformed should be that as long as the Soviet Union is behind such countries as Poland and Czechoslovakia and as long as it strongly holds the Brezhnev doctrine the system is not reformable.

WP: We recognised the danger of the armed might of the USSR against the Polish workers and argued therefore that the Polish workers needed a perspective that went beyond their own boundaries and reached out to the workers of Czechoslovakia, East Germany and the USSR itself.

A: Solidarnosc was a small child. It lived only 15 months. It was first and foremost busy with the struggle for survival and organisation. It was a mass popular movement not a tiny group that had been organised for many years like the Bolsheviks in Russia and who were prepared to take power. It had enormous problems with organisation. Had Solidarity had more time it could have developed in this direction

We always thought our fight was for values that were of universal significance. We did make an appeal to the workers of the Eastern bloc. There were attempts to meet the Trade Unions in Western countries. Bogdan Lis, for example, came to Britain to meet Trade Union leaders.

WP: What about the role of the Catholic Church in Solidarnosc? We've always argued that the Church hierarchy was, on a world scale, a force for reaction and was attempting to use the mobilisation to strengthen its own bargaining position with the bureaucracy.

A: Had Solidarnosc had different aims—for example to overthrow the bureaucracy—then it would have paid less attention to what the Church says. But Solidarnosc did not want to overthrow the authorities, it wanted to rebuild the structures of the state. It wanted reforms like self-management in the factories but in a legal way. The Church was useful for example when the authorities refused to register the peasants organisations Rural Solidarnosc. The Church took the side of Solidarnosc and the authorities climbed down.

I don't think that the Church had very much influence on the decision making of Solidarnosc. To give you an example. During the August strike in Gdansk, Primate Wyszynski delivered a sermon which was the first to be broadcast on TV and was understood to mean 'Go back to work, stop the strike' but the strike leaders and the workers didn't pay attention even though they had pictures of the primate on the gate.

WP: After the initial big mobilisations didn't the Catholic Church strengthen its influence through the advisers and on the leadership itself?

A: I don't think the Church's influence was becoming stronger and stronger. The more Solidarnosc insisted on change the more the bureaucracy objected. Relations between Solidarnosc and the bureaucracy became more tense and, especially in the last three months, the Church was used as a channel of communication by both sides. When the authorities wouldn't speak to the National Commission then messages were transmitted through the Church. We would transmit through the Church what we were prepared to negotiate on and what we were refusing to shift on.

To be clear on one point about the leaders, advisers and the Church. Many people were asked to come to the National Commission and advisers were given the platform to speak but from the beginning the National Commission alone were representatives and had a vote on decisions. The advisers had the right to speak but not to vote.

WP: How far was the National Commission dominated by 'intellectual elements', how far by blue collar workers?

A: I can't give you the exact percentages. Workers in factories often elected non-manual workers because they were seen as more articulate. Workers, as well as other employees, saw one common enemy—the apparatus, the apparatchiks. There was such a big gulf between the people and the apparatus of the government and party that it made little difference whether representatives were manual workers or not because aims were shared. There were so many things to be done and every one agreed that the key thing was whether those elected were honest and strong enough to go to the National Commission to make our point.

WP: How did accountability and recallability work in Solidarnosc?

A: There were some conflicts of course. The most famous case was over Bydgoszcz where a decision had to be made very quickly. Opinion was widespread that the Russians were just about to move. The decision to sign the Bydgoszcz agreement, which was a very weak one, was not taken by the National Commission but by Walesa and his closest collaborators. Gwiazda, for example, accused Walesa of taking this decision in an undemocratic way. Modzelewski resigned as spokesman over this.

In the normal workings of Solidarnosc the bodies were accountable. For example at the Gdansk Congress the various commissions that had been established to negotiate with the authorities were attacked and questioned by the delegates from the floor.

WP: Did base organisations have the power to recall their delegates to the National Commission?

A: Yes, such things happened. It happened in Krakow and Jastrzebie where representatives were recalled. The roots of the system of elections to the National Commission lay in the individual factories. In one factory the workers elected Michnik of KOR as a delegate because of his popularity but he was not employed there or in any other factory. It was decided not to allow this after a lot of discussion lasting for three months.

WP: The coup d'état has obviously led you to examine the history of Solidarnosc and give consideration to what needs to be done now. What are the principal lessons you have drawn and what is Solidarnosc's perspective both in Poland and internationally?

A: Of course I think about whether it was a mistake to have existed in such an open and democratic way and a mistake to have insisted on reforms and negotiations. I haven't changed my mind on this because the threat of intervention. I don't see any very different way that Solidarnosc could have behaved.

As for what to do now there are two positions on resistance. One position is for clandestine organisation and violent resistance. The other, which is being strongly encouraged by Bujak, is to organise resistance in as open a way as possible. For example committees to help the internees should behave in an open way. I believe the authorities are so hated and that there is such a broad base of support for Solidarnosc that every possibility for open work should be exploited. I am against violence, as is the Solidarnosc leadership and there is much evidence that the recent fighting in Gdansk and Poznan was provoked by the police. The secret police can encourage such actions and then take the most active off to prison.

WP: Were there any moves to form a political party that could act as a leadership within Solidarnosc against the PUWP?

A: There were attempts to create such parties. They were not popular because people had set all hopes on Solidarnosc. It was felt that Solidarnosc was an umbrella under which many things would be allowed by the authorities—for example self-management. But a political party would be strongly opposed by the authorities. The State Constitution recognised the leading role of the Communist Party and everything done by Solidarnosc was, as it were, legal because of the Gdansk agreement. Parties would be illegal. There were attempts to create parties but they were not successful.

WP: What in particular do you look to British Trade Unionists to do in the next period and what particular activities do you have scheduled that British Trade Unionists could participate in?

A: Our main objective is to get motions of support for Solidarnosc through the various annual conferences of the Trade Unions. We want them to consider whether it is appropriate to continue relations with the 'so-called Trade Unions' in the Soviet Union for example.

Its up to the Trade Unions to take the most appropriate means to lead to the release of Solidarnosc leaders. We welcome the Massey Ferguson workers decision to block parts from Ursus. Its a sign of genuine solidarity. ■

Picture: John Sturrock (Network)

United strike can defeat austerity plans

BELGIUM HAS BEEN convulsed with massive workers struggles over the past months. A steel strike, occupations of railway lines and banks, violent demonstrations, two one-day general strikes, all raise the spectre of another Belgian general strike.

The origins of the struggles lies in the crisis of the steel industry, located principally in the southern French-speaking part of the country, Wallonia. Here, as in Britain, Germany and France, the steel corporations have been throwing workers onto the streets; 20,000 jobs have been lost in the last ten years.

The EEC commission charged with "slimming" the steel industry, chaired by the Belgian, Davignon, rejected on March 18th a Belgian government plan. This plan had been worked out with the unions, and aimed to cut the projected investment by half, there by threatening a further 3,500 jobs.

This would spell disaster for the highly industrialised Walloon province, already hard hit by slumps in coal and textiles, as well as steel. Already, Belgian unemployment stands at 500,000. In a population of 9,855,000 this is the highest rate in Europe - 13% ahead of Britain's 11.7% and Ireland's 11.9%.

Steel is not the only sector hit by various rationalisation plans. The railways plan to sack 6,000 workers. Big rail strikes have taken place actively supported by teachers who have occupied the main rail stations and blocked the lines.

Belgian workers also face a concerted onslaught at a governmental level. Prime Minister Wilfrid Martens' Social-Christian/Liberal coalition is attempting to enforce draconian measures on the working class. Martens carried through a devaluation of the franc which will hit at workers wages. He wishes to destroy by degrees the indexation of wages - freezing wages till 31st May, and then achieving a 3% fall in real wages in 1982. He wants loss-making industries to cut their workers wages by 5%, to slash social security payments, and reduce the bosses' corporation by 12%. Martens has sought and obtained from the Belgian parliament an act enabling him to rule by decree for 12 months.

This mild bonapartism is needed by Martens to carry through his attacks because of the fragmented nature of the Belgian bourgeois political parties - a source of Parliamentary impotence. The two main parties are surrounded by a galaxy of liberal and nationalist groupings divided not only by linguistic origin but also by the need to watch over the interests of their numerous and different electoral bases. This electoral fragmentation has led to a musical chairs of



Belgian riot police attack steelworkers demonstrating in the centre of Brussels in March

ministries and the need to give them roman numerals, the current government being known as Martens V.

The Belgian working class has a remarkable history of militant struggle, indeed, it virtually "invented" the modern political general strike. It has a tremendous record of using it: all-out general strikes occurred in 1887, 1891, 1892, 1893, 1902, 1913, 1936, 1950 and 1960/61.

Some eighty percent of the workers are unionised. However, the working class is organisationally divided by the Fleming - Walloon split. The Walloons predominantly support the Belgian Socialist Party, and are organised in the Federation Generale du travail de Belgique (FGTB). The Confederation des syndicats chretien (Confederation of Christian Unions - CSC) draws its support mainly amongst the Flemings. The latter tend to vote for the bourgeois Social-Christian Peoples Party. The blight of nationalism and catholicism has historically weighed heavily on the Flemish workers, tying them to the bosses and allowing the clerical-reformist CSC to pursue a more openly class collaborationist policy than the leaders of the FGTB could get away with. The impetus to militancy has come from Wallonia, but in key moments of upheaval the Flemish workers have been drawn into struggle.

The present fight has followed this pattern. On February 8th, the FGTB called a one day general strike against Martens' austerity plan. Then the steel workers erupted into action, centred on the Cockerill steel mills of Liege. A march on the EEC headquarters in Brussels on February 11th ended in fierce battles with the police. A one day general strike in Liege followed on 24th February.

An all out strike in the steel industry was launched on March 1st. A further steel workers march on 16th March, which drew ten to twelve thousand steel workers left 179 policemen and 100 demonstrators injured in fierce fighting. This, despite repeated "calls for calm" before the demonstration started. Le Monde of the 18th March noted that "The trade union leaders, feeling that the rank and file was getting out of control, wanted to avoid a repetition of the incidents which had occurred ... on February 11th".

They counted without the savagery of the police and the desperate anger of the steelworkers. A further one day general strike on March 26th resulted, apparently, in a less solid response than did the February 8th one. If so, this indicates that the on-off, fragmented tactics of the FGTB's rolling strikes is frittering away the solidarity of the working class in a way that an all-out General Strike would not.

Further undermining a united workers response was the CSC's decision to hold a demonstration on the day after the general strike - even though both protests were aimed against the same government policies.

Obviously, the will and the forces exist to smash Martens' and the EEC's closures and austerity plans. An all-out general strike can mobilise these forces, and protect jobs, wages and social services. A fight is needed by the FGTB to form a united front with the christian unions - with their leaders if possible, from below at all costs. Committees of action with delegates from the workplaces must organise the strike and organise workers defence squads against the massive police repression that would undoubtedly be mobilised.

The Belgian general strike of 1960/61, like that of 1968 in France, posed the question and the possibility of working class power. A general strike in the much harsher conditions of the 1980's where the bourgeoisie has little room for concessions poses this question again, and more sharply. ■

by Dave Stocking

BUILD WORKERS' SOLIDARITY

DESPITE THE SUCCESS of Jaruzelski's military crackdown in December, followed by successive waves of military/police "sweeps", the arrest of over a hundred thousand Polish workers and their leaders, and the internment of many thousands in over 50 camps, the hated Stalinist regime has failed to smash the 10,000,000 strong independent trade union - Solidarnosc.

Only the loyalty of millions of workers explains why, in the midst of this repression, Solidarnosc has been able to reconstruct an increasingly integrated and effective underground network. The underground movement is producing bulletins, organising passive resistance in the plants, and maintaining links with Solidarnosc activists in exile. It has established a national centre - the National Commission of Resistance - and it is reported in "Socialist Challenge" to have launched a weekly newspaper in Warsaw called "Tygodnik Mezonozze". The slogan: "The winter is yours - the spring will be ours - Solidarnosc" appears regularly in the streets and plants.

The British labour movement is duty bound, as an act of class solidarity, to aid the Polish workers in their fight to turn this slogan into an accomplished fact. All labour movement bodies should send donations to the Labour Poland Solidarity Fund (the address is given below), to aid the building of the underground in Poland. Labour movement bodies and workplaces should invite representatives of the Trade Union Working Group to address their meetings.

An independent labour movement campaign capable of taking class action in solidarity with the Polish workers must be built. We need a workers united front campaign not a popular front-style campaign like the national Polish Solidarity Campaign (PSC), which is prepared to share a platform with Tories, Liberals and Social Democrats. This can only serve to draw British workers behind Thatcher and Reagan who "support" Solidarity only as a means to strengthen their Cold War campaign, the ultimate aim of which is restoration of capitalism in Eastern Europe and the USSR. These charlatans happily support viciously anti-working class regimes in El Salvador, Turkey and elsewhere.

An independent labour movement campaign can have nothing to do with any economic boycott of Poland, Eastern Europe or the USSR by the British, or any imperialist, government. But it must argue for working class ACTION in support of Polish workers, and key here is the question of blacking Polish imports. The stalinist regime, using its exports to pay off its huge debts to the Western banks, while Polish workers are forced to pay huge price rises for food and basic necessities.

The importance of a political stance completely independent of our own bosses and their political representatives, and based on workers action, is that we give a clear signal to the Polish workers that the international working class is their real ally, not the imperialists. Thanks to over three decades of counter-revolutionary Stalinist rule in Poland this is not necessarily clear to the mass of Polish workers inside Solidarnosc. The stalinists have dragged the name of socialism in the mud. They have turned proletarian internationalism into a code word for Russian tanks. Correspondingly, they have failed to challenge, indeed they have actually engendered, all those political and ideological trends in Polish society, and in the leadership of Solidarnosc, who view "Western democracy" as an ideal to be fought for against Stalinism.

Only an independent labour movement solidarity campaign can aid the Polish workers to see this facade of capitalist "democracy" for what it really is - a mask covering the ugly features of western imperialism.

The fight for such a campaign will have to confront and expose many enemies within the British workers' movement. The right wing within the trade union leadership and Labour Party - Frank Chapple, Terry Duffy, Denis Healey - all claim the mantle of "support" for the trade union rights of Polish workers. The Polish workers could not find less reliable "allies". True to form, these bosses men and CIA stooges use Solidarnosc to cover their attack on the left and rank and file in Britain.

But the trade union and Labour Party "left" represents no coherent alternative. Benn has maintained almost complete silence. So much for his much-vaunted care for "democracy"! Eric Heffer has denounced the coup, but has so far offered little in the way of action proposals or leadership. Particularly despicable is Arthur Scargill's refusal to support Solidarnosc on the grounds that it is not a "real" trade union, but is "political". This means open support for Jaruzelski and Stalinism.

Like many of his companions in the trade union bureaucracy, who have sampled the delights of Bulgarian beaches, or Castro's Cuba, courtesy of the Stalinists, Scargill eyes greedily the power and privileges of his stalinist counterparts. Hence his solidarity with them.

The pretenders to Trotskyism - in particular the Socialist Organiser and Socialist Challenge - have not offered a clear alternative to these fake friends (and open enemies!) of the Polish workers. In mid-January their respective papers published a joint letter announcing their intention, along with London Labour Breifing (LLB) and various worthies, of launching such a campaign. This was clearly an attempt to construct a campaign independently of the already existing PSC and its popular frontist orientation, although this

was nowhere clearly stated in either paper at the time. But when SO and LLB called a demonstration for March 13th in London, SC openly boycotted the march, proclaiming it to be "sectarian".

Part of the explanation for this peculiar behaviour is that the two major signatories to the "united front", SO and SC, completely disagreed about what such a solidarity campaign should actually do.

SO thought all links with the stalinist trade unions and parties in Eastern Europe and the USSR should be broken. SC thought this demand should be limited to the Polish stalinist "unions", and the ruling PUWP. More important, SO called for labour movement blacking of Polish imports and exports, while SC opposed such action. SC began to concede on the blacking question when Massey Ferguson workers in Coventry, under the influence of the Trade Union Working Group, blacked tractor components from the Ursus plant. At the PSC AGM on the 28th March, they finally appear to have plumped for blacking action after months of vacillation.

And it was toward the PSC that the SC was hesitantly heading with its open boycott of the "sectarian" SO/LLB London march. SO, no doubt feeling discomforted at this "sectarian" isolation, quickly followed suit by affiliating to PSC and advocating local Polish Solidarity Committees affiliate to the PSC before its AGM. A complete about face on their previous position, and one that has not been accounted for.

Indeed there had been evidence of some dissent in the ranks of the PSC over the articles in its Campaign News, openly espousing popular frontist / anti-communist positions (see WP No 29). Workers Power therefore did not oppose local committees affiliating, but only on the basis of a sharp fight for an independent labour movement campaign at the PSC's AGM. That meeting proved to be decisive in determining the future direction of the PSC.

The PSC is a bloc between a "left" wing with a popular frontist conception of a solidarity campaign and a hard anti-communist / anti-Soviet right wing axis around Robin Blick and Adam Westoby. The latter are in the lead because the former will not break with them politically. They thought the Liberals, SDP and Tories should be given a platform as long as they "genuinely" support Solidarnosc, or verbally state they support "independent" workers trade unions throughout the world. The two sides are further bound by personal ties - in short they are a clique.

The two wings combined in the AGM of just over 100 individual members and delegates to crush any moves, in the main initiated by SC, towards an independent labour movement orientation. Instead, at

the instigation of Blick, the doors were opened to all political parties apart from the fascist right and the "fascist left"!! A major focus of activity is to be a petition to participate in the PSC regardless. Like Solidarnosc. Anti-Sovietism is to be the tenor of the campaign's propaganda.

SO cautiously went along with some of these positions, interpreting ambiguous formulations about the campaign being open to all who support free trade unions in a favourable light, having decided in advance to participate in the PSC regardless. Like SC they refuse to state clearly that Trotskyists stand against the anti-Sovietism and anti-communism that such a campaign will inevitably involve. While we condemn absolutely the bureaucratic usurpers in the degenerate workers states, we nevertheless defend the property relations in those states. They are the established pre-requisites for constructing socialism, and can be used as such once the bureaucrats are overthrown, by workers not imperialism.

SC did oppose the drift of the conference, and did fight for a clearer labour movement orientation than SO. But where the SO has chosen the Blick clique, the SC is playing into the hands of the reformist do-nothing merchants. Their main emphasis is now on building for a solidarity demonstration - Next December!! This de-prioritises workers' action in the here and now, and allows the likes of Eric Heffer to get away with promises that might never have to be fulfilled.

Workers Power believes that in the face of the PSC's hardening popular frontist stance there is now, more than ever, the need for a workers united front of solidarity with the Polish workers movement.

We call on the comrades of Socialist Challenge and Socialist Organiser to reinstitute their call for an independent labour movement campaign; to disaffiliate from the bankrupt PSC; to call on the local solidarity committees in which they have influence to disaffiliate from the PSC. Such a campaign, starting by turning the conference called by the Lancashire Association of Trades Councils into a springboard for action, must fight for:

- * No shared platform with the bosses and their parties. For a workers solidarity campaign.
- * Workers action - blacking, demonstrations, pickets and protest strikes - in support of Polish workers. Break all links with the PUWP and its phoney trade unions.
- * End martial law in Poland, Release the Solidarnosc internees. For the right of Solidarnosc to exist as an independent trade union.
- * Turn established local committees into delegate-based labour movement bodies. Build such committees where they do not exist. ■

by Quentin Rudland

workers power

AGAINST A BACKGROUND of ferocious ruling class attacks on workers' rights and living standards, the Conference of the Liaison Committee for the Defence of Trade Unions (LCDTU) on March 27th should have been a rallying point for militants. But the opportunity to launch a workers' counter-offensive against Tebbit's Bill, the crowning piece of the current bosses' offensive was squandered.

The Communist Party organisers were doubtless haunted by the sticky end their bureaucratic methods brought to the last major LCDTU conference. On that occasion an attempt by delegates to hold a democratic discussion was met by full scale thuggery from the Stalinists. After meting out violence against those who had the temerity to disagree with them, they simply ended the conference! This time round they opted for a smaller, more manageable gathering, overwhelmingly comprised of their party faithful.

Even so they were taking no chances. Despite the LCDTU's standing orders, which makes the committee responsible for holding conferences of delegates from all bona fide trade

union organisations, the organisers deliberately excluded some trade union branches from participating (though there were empty seats). On his own authority LCDTU secretary Kevin Halpin turned down requests for credentials on the grounds that this was to be a "very selective conference". Furthermore an explanatory note to delegates made it clear, with spurious reasoning, that the organisers would not hear any resolutions originating in sponsoring bodies-though resolutions had been submitted.

In fact the only subject of discussion was a previously prepared declaration, circulated after the meeting had begun and therefore with no possibility of delegating bodies discussing it in advance. Indeed delegates themselves had very little time to consider it given the conference lasted only three hours! But even then, as the Explanatory Note bluntly put it, "There will be no amendment to the Declaration".

At a time when hammering out a strategy to beat Tebbit and the bosses is crucial, this well-trained Stalinist crew had set out to gag any meaningful discussion and ensure that only their ideas would be fed to the delegates. From such a bureaucratically strait-jacketed Conference all that bona fide labour movement delegates could expect was the usual dose of passive protest we have come to expect from

LCDTU dodges call to action

the CP. They duly obliged.

The 'strategy' put forward amounts to a postponement of any real action until after the Bill becomes law. Much of the conference was given over to fiery rhetoric about the resistance that would follow on the imprisonment of trade unionists under Tebbit's law. While all militants would have to fight the Bill if it became law the key task now is to prevent this from happening. We must beat the Bill before the sanction of the law legitimizes attacks on trade union rights in the eyes of many workers.

For the time being, however, the only concrete proposal coming from the Liaison Committee is a lobby of the TUC on Monday 5th April at which the TUC will be urged to call a lobby of Parliament, backed by local two-hour stoppages at workplaces at some unspecified time in the future.

The weakness of these action proposals reflects two things. First, the

LCDTU of today cannot muster anything like the rank and file support it had in the early Seventies. Then it could call and get strikes against the Industrial Relations Bill. But the strategy of the CP to limit those actions and use them merely as pressure levers to gain friends and influence within the trade union officialdom, ensured that this support was reduced to playing the role of stage army. It was criminally dissipated by the Stalinists in their bid to capture official positions. The result has been smaller LCDTU conferences calling for ever more limited forms of action.

The second reason is that the CP, because of their strategy, will not allow the LCDTU to challenge the inertia of the TUC. On the day of the conference Halpin, in the Morning Star, took comfort from the fact that the TUC's paper position on Tebbit is "far in advance" of its previous position on the Industrial Relations Bill. He added "We see no contradiction between a militant leadership and a militant shop floor".

But there is a mammoth contradiction between the existing TUC leadership, the Boyds, Duffys, Basnetts and Evans' of this world and a leadership genuinely and democratically based on the shop floor. This is what the LCDTU and the CP will not and cannot admit to. They pin all their hopes on persuading the existing leadership to be more progressive, and gaining a few official positions to assist this.

This is why they are forced to exclude militants from the rank and file from their conferences. Amongst such militants exists the potential for building a rank and file opposition to the TUC. The LCDTU want no part of such a project.

Workers Power will support any initiative to defeat the anti-union laws. We will argue that the lobby of the TUC on 5th April should be supported. But we will also argue that the TUC must act now. We will argue for the

positions contained in the following resolution, sent to conference by Reading Central 73/RE branch of the AUEW on the initiative of Workers Power. "Co-incidentally" this branch was not allowed to send its bona fide and democratically elected delegate to the LCDTU, and along with all other resolutions it was prevented from reaching the conference floor.

"Conference calls on all delegates to support the LCDTU called lobby of the trade union executives meeting on April 5th by:

- i) delegates from shop stewards committees/workplaces to be sent to the lobby
- ii) organise workplace meetings in work's time to discuss opposition to Tebbit's Bill.

Delegates should use the lobby and action around it to launch a campaign in the unions to fight for:

- * the blocking of Tebbit's Bill before it becomes law
- * the withdrawal of all union representatives from NEDC and other government committees
- * a commitment from the executives of the unions and the TUC to make all strikes official and pledge solidarity action with any section of workers victimised by Tebbit if his Bill becomes law, and with any workers victimised now under Prior's anti-trade union laws
- * campaigns in every union should begin now to force the TUC and all affiliated unions to call a strike against the Bill on the day it begins its Third Reading in Parliament. No return to work until the Bill is scrapped"

Action along these lines will, necessarily, be built in opposition not only to the TUC leadership but also to their Stalinist hangers on. ■

by Dave Jenkins



Kevin Halpin, LCDTU galeiter: interested in kicking out Tebbit or keeping out militants?

S.D.P. - UNION BASHERS

THE RECENT STRIKE by white-collar staff at Islington began when the three month old, unelected Social Democrat Council refused to allow Rob Webb, a Nalگو member in the Housing Department, to work in accordance with a freshly signed contract. In response workers in the Housing Department walked out and, after a week's delay, their action was endorsed when the 2,000 strong NALGO branch struck in support.

This resolute response to the SDP's provocation was sufficient to force Council leaders to reverse their decision on Rob Webb. The SDP, in the main supporters of Tebbit's anti-union legislation, had clearly picked the wrong issue in what was an attempt to test the strength of the NALGO branch. Breaking the union would have paved the way to their declared policy of redundancies and further cuts. But a total retreat was too much for these pioneers of 'moderation, common sense and hope' to swallow, especially with local government elections looming in May. The opportunity to enter the elections as the party that 'tamed the Town Hall Union' and kept the rates down was too tempting a prize to let slip so easily.

So the victory celebration of the hundreds of noisy pickets who waited 4 hours on a cold February night to hear the news of Rob Webb's reinstatement was cut short. The news came in that the SDP had taken advantage of the splendid solidarity

action of the residential workers to close two children's homes. Though one of the homes was quickly re-opened, the SDP seemed determined to keep 29 Sheringham Road shut, cutting the service and threatening the jobs.

This squalid manoeuvre was designed to smash the initiative from NALGO, which, despite paper policy against cuts and redundancies, has an unhappy record of not taking action to protect them (as massive cuts in local services and the rapidly falling local government pay-roll testify). More significantly previously residential workers had always been left to fight alone. The Islington SDP were clearly intent on splitting the union. But the next mass meeting voted by a huge majority to continue the strike until the home was re-opened and jobs guaranteed. The same meeting voted to step up the strike in a number of ways, crucially by attempting to spread the strike to Council Manual Unions (the Council had already laid off UCATT members for refusing to do NALGO work).

However a second mass meeting that same day delivered several blows to the strikers - courtesy not of the SDP this time, but of the NALGO National Executive. While an emergency committee of the Executive had made the strike official, strike pay would not be paid for the first week and a half. Secondly, negotiations were taken out of the hands of the strikers and a full-time official was installed. Finally they decided to make continuation of the strike dependent on a secret ballot. This

was more than an insult to the 1200 and more who were attending the almost daily mass meetings. It was a weapon in the hands of the SDP.

A further week passed before the SDP played their final card. They offered to redeploy the residential workers, while keeping the home shut pending a review in consultation with NALGO after a return to work. Despite the fact that both the review and redeployment were spurious (to Watford in one case) they calculated on finally splitting the union. Undoubtedly though they were feeling the effect of the strike which had remained solid and virtually paralysed the Council.

At this crucial stage in the strike, when the SDP were known to be split and under increasing pressure the branch needed only to show its determination. Victory was in sight.

The branch meeting called to discuss the 'offer' decided to reject it. But this time the margin was narrow. Why? Certainly not because the 'offer' was tempting. No, the answer is to be found in the actions of the union leadership.

First, the union official, Andrew Jack, gave his 'honest opinion' after 'years of experience as a negotiator', that no more could be got from the SDP. And he had the audacity to add that the SDP were waiting for the ballot to go against us!

Secondly, the Communist Party dominated branch leadership was itself divided. Long-standing branch secretary and CP member, Bob Ford, refused to give a lead. In fact he didn't even speak, passively

approving the arguments for 'realism'. Typically the branch's decision to try and spread the strike to the manual workers' unions became, in the hands of the faint-hearts, a discussion with the leaders of the other unions.

Against these defeatist attitudes Workers Power argued for spreading of the strike through direct appeals to the rank and file of other unions. We argued that there should be no return to work until all the strikers' demands were met in full (including the re-opening of the home). Only this way could the strike be certain of delivering a body blow to the wretched gang of SDP union bashers.

The final return to work was cynically engineered by Andrew Jack despite a mass meeting vote of 900-600 in favour of staying out. Though some concessions had been wrung out of the SDP they had been able to keep the home closed. The lesson for militants is clear.

The SDP will have no qualms about attacking the unions head on. But, in the ranks of the trade union full-time bureaucracy the bosses and their parties have reliable fifth columnists against the working class. Only militant and democratic rank and file organisation can serve as a counterweight to that. In Islington it is to be hoped that the strike has provided a launching pad for building such an organisation. ■

By a Workers Power member of the Strike Committee

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