

Workers Power

MONTHLY NEWSPAPER OF THE WORKERS POWER GROUP

INSIDE: CHINA
INTERVIEW
WITH ARGENTINE
TROTSKYISTS

Stop the sabotage! Step up the action!

THE TUC WERE at pains to prove that the September 22nd Day of Action was merely a public demonstration of support for the health workers. With Ford workers putting in a claim for £20, the miners for 31% and with water-workers set to strike for a day in support of their own claim, the TUC was terrified of allowing the day to become a rallying point for concerted action by the whole working class.

The pressure of the healthworkers will not let the TUC get away with doing nothing at all. On the other hand, the action they do take - like the proposed transport strike in November (!) - is designed to contain that pressure and keep the various struggles workers engaged in fragmented.

More than anything the TUC fear a generalised conflict with the Tories, which they risk losing control of. That is why their record of organising struggles against the Tories is such a scandalous one. They defused the potential Welsh general strike during the Steel Strike in 1980. In 1981 they organised the Jobs Express, but held back from supporting the major battles against redundancies such as those at Lee Jeans, Plansees and Anells. And now, in 1982 and under the chairmanship of Frank Chapple, they are working overtime to prevent the health strike generating a class-wide response to the Tories' class-wide attacks.

Typically the class enemy had a clearer view of the issues at stake in the present conflict than did the blind mice of Congress House. Norman Tebbit brandished the carving knife of his anti-union legislation: "The strike action has been largely confined to areas where the closed shop gives unions the power to punish those who want to work". The Closed shop is to be attacked by Tebbit's Bill. Tebbit's

second-in-command Norman Lamont was, in his own way right when he added, of the strike: "It had everything to do with politics".

In the present health dispute, in the coming pay claims, particularly those pitted against the 3.5% limit, and in the struggle against the Tory anti-union laws, workers must face this fact. Strikes against the bosses and their government have always been political. They must become direct challenges to the priorities and strategy of Thatcher and her grasping class. In such struggles the union bureaucrats cannot be relied upon. They have even thwarted attempts to force them to withdraw from the NEDC, so dear do they regard their cosy chats with Thatcher's ministers and the CBI. Their whole world view is based on negotiation as a substitute for confrontation, with the bosses in defence of the workers' interests.

In mobilising for future days of action around the health dispute, militants must act independently of the bureaucrats. In each area action committees must be formed consisting of delegates from unions and workplaces either supporting the health workers, or involved in their own struggles on pay or jobs. These committees must coordinate local action actions, build national links and forge a rank and file movement that can:

- * Organise indefinite strike action and solidarity action to win the health workers' claim.
- * Co-ordinate the struggle against the Tory pay limit.
- * Force the TUC to call a general strike to smash Prior's anti-union laws and Tebbit's bill - laws that aim to destroy our rights to take effective action. ■



The pathetic Spanswick hangs behind the sinister Chapple on September 22nd. Don't leave the health strike in the hands of these men!

HALT ZIONIST BUTCHERY

IN THE WAKE of the horrific massacre in the West Beirut refugee camps of Sabra and Chatila, Reagan's marines have landed in Lebanon in the hypocritical guise of protectors of the Palestinians.

US imperialism hopes to garner the full fruits of the genocidal Lebanese war. It was the US that armed and encouraged the Zionist butchers Sharon and Begin - their "special" allies in the Middle East.

Secondly the US obstructed any UN intervention and threw its economic and diplomatic weight into keeping the Arab regimes from rendering the slightest assistance to the beleaguered PLO. Whilst Israeli artillery pounded the Palestinian refugee camps and Lebanese towns, signalling that Sharon and Begin's aims were the complete elimination of the Palestinians from Lebanon, Reagan was still having friendly phone calls with "Menachem". It was only with the bottling

up of the PLO in Beirut that the US felt it necessary to adopt a different role. Here Reagan's envoy Philip Habib attempted to remove and disperse the only armed defence militia the Palestinians possess "by peaceful means".

Caught between the hammer of Zionist and Phalangist military superiority and the anvil of US-orchestrated indifference from the whole Arab world, the PLO withdrew. The PLO leaders falsely claimed this as a victory. The PLO fighters however knew the horrific dangers their people would suffer. The memories of Tel Al Zataar where 3,000 perished, showed what mercy Palestinians could expect from the bloody Phalangists.

A Lebanese army under the control of their "fuehrer" Gemayel was going to be no protection. Pogrom was inevitable and indeed played a well-tried part in the Israeli-Phalangist plan for a restored Maronite Lebanon allied to (ie subordinate to) Israel.

Tensions between Bashir Gemayel and Begin developed as the former adopted an "independent" stance, more inclined to US plans to achieve a solution via "West Bank" autonomy.

Certainly the Begin-Sharon axis has important tactical differences with Reagan. They wish to settle and absorb the West Bank in the coming decades. They wish to find a suitable pretext to seize a good slice of Southern Lebanon, utilising its water for irrigation and opening it up eventually to the "created facts" of Israeli settlement. Begin's Likud-dominated coalition has to deliver to the hitherto discriminated-against, and hard-done-by oriental Jews - this cannot be done without expansion, without choice land for new settlements.

US imperialism, and the newly triumphant Maronites have a divergent view. They wish to restore the old role of Lebanon as the financial centre of the Middle East, the valve through which the raw materials and petro-dollars of the Arab world are pumped to the imperialist powers, and the manufactured goods and western investments are pumped in.

Every defeat the Israelis inflict on the oppressed Palestinian people, every humiliation they visit on the Arab regimes that have established with Soviet aid, a basis for occasional anti-imperialist actions and more regular anti-imperialist rhetoric, is welcome to the United States. But the constant expansion of Israel and its consequent destabilisation of the conservative Arab regimes upsets the plans for the extension of the Camp David system. The US want formally independent Arab semi-colonies, safe for US investment and safe from radical nationalist, pro-Soviet or working class "disruption". Thus Begin's massacre can be utilised by the US to call a halt to "excessive" expansion.

But the US plans hold no hopes for the Palestinians. The Phalangist rulers of Central Lebanon and the Israeli occupation forces are now, after the Sabra-Chatila massacre, conducting systematic, brutal terror against Palestinian civilians. The lives of the 7,000 admitted Palestinian prisoners in the Arisa concentration camp and the many more rounded up but whose imprisonment is ominously denied by the Israeli military authorities, are certainly in danger. Neither will be satisfied until the Palestinian nation is scattered to the four corners of the Arab world - handed over to semi-feudal pro-Western stooges like the Saudi or Hashemite Kings, or fraudulent "anti-imperialists" like the Syrian or Iraqi Ba'athists.

The armed resistance of the courageous Palestinian fighters and the mass struggles on the West Bank against Israeli encroachment indicate that serious as the defeats are that imperialism, Zionism and Arab reaction has imposed, the forces exist which can still defeat the projects of these vultures.

The PLO leadership's reliance on the Arab "radical" and "reactionary" regimes, on the Soviet bureaucracy and on the West Bank autonomy ploy of imperialism, has been cruelly exposed. All these forces colluded to destroy the only guarantee of protection for the Palestinian people.

However, the revulsion at Zionist crimes and US and Western European collusion with them, Arab shame at the prostration of their governments, can be the basis for a radical reconstitution of the anti-Zionist, anti-imperialist struggle within the Israeli state and the occupied West Bank. If the political lessons are learned then the Palestinians can escape from the dead-end ideologies and leaderships - Stalinism, Arab nationalism, Islamic fundamentalism, that have led to defeat after defeat. A programme which seeks to mobilise the proletariat of the countries of the Middle East, against imperialist intervention, against the Zionist agent of imperialism, against the semi-feudal, bourgeois and bonapartist regimes, can alone be the basis of Palestinian victory.

In the imperialist heartlands that exploit and divide the Arab world, which support with capital and armies the Zionist butchers, the duty of the labour movement is to fight for the breaking of all links with Zionism, for a cessation of all arms, finance and trade which support the Israeli state's war against the Palestinians. The basis of any real movement to effect this must be the working class and its own direct action. No trust can or should be put in Tory or Liberal "friends of Palestine", let alone appeals made which could include the sinister forces of the far right. Bourgeois "anti-Zionism" is at best support for the most reactionary forces in the Arab world (and the imperialist interests involved in their maintenance). At its worst it is anti-semitism. The real needs of the oppressed will find no favour with such "allies".

Zionist troops out of Lebanon!
US/French/Italian/UN troops out of Lebanon!
For the armed self-defence of the Palestinians!
For trade union blacking of all trade and arms shipments to Israel! ■



US Marines come ashore in Beirut - August 1982

Photo: Judah Passow (Network)

TRADE UNION BARONS BLOCK VOTE THE WITCH-HUNT

THE BLACKPOOL LABOUR Party Conference has witnessed the most thorough trouncing of the left in nearly ten years. The passage of Foot's witchhunters charter and the restoration of unhindered Right Wing control over the NEC underlines just how seriously the left was defeated.

Foot's victory was not, of course, the product of any rightward shift among rank and file Trade Unionists or Labour Party members. Labour Party conferences do not work like that. It only required a handful of Union leaders to flout their conferences or their executive decisions and the votes of silenced millions could be stacked up against Benn and the left. It was the block votes of the Union leaders that bulldozed Huckfield, Maynard and the NUM's Eric Clarke off the NEC.

Three years ago when all around us were hailing the progress of the left and the potential for democratic advance in the Labour Party - we pointed to the fact that the central problem confronting those struggling against the Labour Party Right was to take the block vote into the hands of the Union rank and file. We correctly warned that the alternative would be a successful Right Wing counter-attack.

"We recognise the hold of the bureaucrats in the unions as the most important bastion of the Labour Party leaders. Unless this hold is broken the hold of the parliamentary leaders will not be broken." (Workers Power No.8 Sept.1979)

"...we are in favour of taking the block vote out of the hands of the bureaucrats and into the hands of the bodies in which the affiliated members exist and struggle, using the block vote as a lever for politicising the millions who are made formal members of the Party through union affiliation." (Workers Power No.8 Sept. 1979)

Events at Blackpool showed just how correct our approach has been.

The manner of Foot's victory guarantees that it will be a pyrrhic one for him and his 'soft left' supporters such as Kinnock. The block votes served to obliterate Foot and Kinnock's only independent strength - their ability to hold the balance between the Right and Left. Healey and Hattersley will utilise the register and their NEC majority to push for a more thorough going witch-hunt than the one the soft left have already agreed to. Hattersley has already warned that "There may be painful surgery ahead" and he won't flinch from administering it. Golding and Healey want 'hundreds of expulsions'. Of course the Right will have to act with some caution. They do not possess unlimited powers. They must act roughly within the limits that have been set by the Basnett-Evans cartel of block votes if they themselves are to avoid the fate of being trimmed down to size at the next conference.

LITTLE COMFORT FOR LEFT

The left however, can draw little comfort from their alibi that they were pushed from power by the the union bureaucrats. They were all too ready to fall, if not to jump. Benn and the Left leaders prepared their own downfall by, secretly agreeing to halt the democracy movement and to not utilize the existing machinery, specifically the electoral college, in return for a worthless unity pledge at Bishops Stortford. Licking the Right's boots is the shortest way to get a kick in the teeth.

Benn and his parliamentary and journalistic inner circle held back. Despite promising to 'fight like a tiger' Benn proved himself a typical Left' tame cat. The Bennite leadership were completely unnerved by the fear that the Parliamentary Right would split and that the union bureaucrats would turn on the left. Even after Benn refused to stand against Foot, then after he capped the Left's defeat with a platform oath of loyalty to the leadership of Michael Foot not one of his galaxy of 'far left' supporters has dared to come out and openly criticise him. Still determined to hitch a ride on the 'tiger', Labour Herald, Socialist Organiser and Socialist Challenge have all remained - as yet - mum on Benn's pathetic performance.

The Right and their backers in the media, from the Guardian to the Economist know well that whilst the bloc votes and the NEC may propose a witchhunt, the constituency parties have to dispose of the individuals expelled. Had the Left rallied the constituency parties into a solid front pledged to refuse to implement any expulsions the NEC decrees and to support only those candidates selected by themselves then the Parliamentary and trade union mandarins could be defied and would probably beaten a retreat before, or during, the conference. But the Left played another way. Starting with the ILP, followed by the LCC and the CDLM the various pressure groups, one after another, signalled their unwillingness to fight. The LCC in July declined to register "at this stage" but said it would re-consider in November at its AGM. The Scottish LCC testified to Militants "dishonesty" about its secret organisation.

The CLPD whined that "If this is accepted by conference, the efforts made at Bishops Stortford to create a new sense of unity within the party will be swept aside" (Labour Weekly 17.9.82) and offered a "fall back position" of pressing for a year of delay of expulsion on the Register - a compromise Foot and Co swept contemptuously aside at Blackpool despite the CLPD bleating that it was "not aimed at Michael."

NO CALL FOR DEFIANCE

Militant, despite the rally of 2,700 at Wembley has very carefully avoided calling for defiance of the undemocratic conference decision. The Socialist Organiser, initially advocats of an 'Unregistered Alliance' and sellers of 'I am un-registered socialist' badges is now calling for resistance of an extremely vague and unspecified sort.

The Left had, and still has, only three lines of defence:

*Not to register any group, paper or pressure group and so force the NEC and the Walworth Road bureaucracy to investigate as best it can.

*To pledge constituency no-compliance, defiance obstruction to all aspects of the witchhunt.

*To rouse the rank and file in the unions against the the bloc voters.

Determination on these fronts, combined with all out mobilisation in support of a real direct action fight against Thatcher, will rally every honest element in the Labour Party. It can put the right Wing back into retreat. But any turn away from the real battles against the Tories - the struggles of Health Workers and miners - towards the hot air electioneering which Foot and Benn have in mind will prepare the way for defeat on all fronts.

At very best the 'unity behind Michael and the existing policies' line means fighting for a Labour Government exactly like the last one.

Perhaps its Manifesto would have 'Left' promises on disarmament, the Common Market and the Alternative Economic Strategy. So did the 1974 manifesto. Perhaps Tony Benn might even have an important ministry. So he did in 1974/5. But this government would buckle under the pressure of the City the IMF and the Americans more swiftly than the Healey /Callaghan Government that fell in battle against the working class in 1979.

The room for manoeuvre for a Labour Government would be even less than in the 1970's. The chronic crisis of British capitalism rules out even the marginal reforms of 1974/5. That the rank and file of the unions and the party have, in substance, not more control over their leaders than they did in the 1970's would mean that the Labour leaders would be free to once again toe the line of the City and the IMF. Already the Labour Right have conjured up a new name for their next attempt to im-



Foot looks to see if there are signs of trouble from the left: but his peace seems intact.

pose an incomes policy. Healey's 'annual economic assessment which would include earnings from employment' joins the ranks of its illustrious anti-working class forbears - the wage freeze, the planned growth of wages, incomes policy and the social contract. It makes no change whatsoever from them except that each has had to conceal its affinity with its predecessor. All are deceitful phrases to cover the promise to impose a halt to real wages to pay for cosmetic social reforms.

The as yet unrevised long term decline of Labour's percentage of the electorate, the atrophy of the Labour Party membership indicates the total bankruptcy of the traditional Labour programme - Left words and right practice, and should this lead to Labour's failure to secure a Parliamentary majority there will be no shortage of candidates to lead a Government dependent on SDP/Liberal support or in open coalition with the Liberals and the SDP

NO STANDING ASIDE

Revolutionary socialists will not, of course, stand aside from the struggle being waged in the Labour Party. Whenever workers take up the call to hold their existing leaders to account revolutionaries have the duty to join in united action. We do not share the illusions that Benn and co have in a revived parliament as the basis for a socialist transformation. We do not believe that a "broad church", including outright agents of the boss class is an instrument to settle decisive accounts with the bosses. We do not have any illusions that Benn, Holland, Meacher have either the ability or the will to replace the Foots and the Healeys. Moreover we believe it is necessary to say this loud and clear. But we believe in putting every progressive step of these influential Lefts to the test of action.

Their programme is worthless, but whenever it raises a pro-working class demand that clashes with the interests of the bosses we are for the maximum mobilisation to win it. We do not believe that Benn or the CLPD's reforms of the Labour Party will turn it into an adequate instrument of socialism but whenever they advocate or defend an extension of workers democracy we are with them 100%.

Revolutionaries cannot abstain from united action against the bosses and their agents inside as well as outside the Labour movement. Nor for a minute can they abstain from criticism of the Left reformists. The role of the latter, and of course some of them are unaware of this, is precisely to revivify the 'hope' and 'belief' of the working class in a party that has proved time and again in practice to be an instrument of the bosses when in power. The task of the 'Lefts' is to convince working class voter "this time it will be different".

The years 1979-82 saw a very vigorous campaign by Benn and co to do this - vigorous because Callaghan and Healey wore Labour's credibility into rags and tatters. Now Foot Kinnock, Hattersley want to put this new credibility together with the hatred of working people for the Tories into the

wherewithal to re-run the old show - a bosses Labour Government.

The task of revolutionaries is to fight for the tactics and the strategy that can bring our class to power. How can the rank and file - the health workers, the miners, the transport workers, the unemployed save themselves from the grim succession of bosses governments - Thatchers, Jenkins, or Foots? A Tory or Alliance victory at the polls or an anti-working class Labour Government is not an inevitability providing we learn vital lessons whilst fighting and winning vital battles.

Firstly to defeat Thatcher and defend workers' jobs, social services, wages and union and democratic rights demands militant direct action. The rank and file have teetered on this road countless times since the Tories came to power - over the Steel closures, the Leyland axeings, and now in the huge and increasingly active support for the health workers. United solidarity action can smash Thatcher's public sector incomes policy. Such action can create and organise the forces to crush Tebbits bill, via a general strike. Strategic defeats for the Tories will drive them from office. To win these battles, and press forward to working class power, we need in and through these struggles to

*democratise the unions - regular election of all officials, no salaries inflated above the average wage of the members, full power to lay-delegate national committees and annual conferences. For the recallability of all officials who betray their mandates.

*politicise the unions - full political rights for all working class parties and tendencies - turn the union's bloc vote in the Labour Party into the expression of the affiliated memberships' democratic decisions.

*Democratise the Labour Parties - full rights for all tendencies and parties claiming to stand for the abolition of capitalism to affiliate to the Labour Party.

*Subordinate the parliamentary representatives of the Labour Movement to its discipline - subordinate the PLP to the NEC conference.

AN OPPORTUNITY TO UNITE

Labour Weekly has smugly predicted that "A campaign against the register is being organised, but but significant sections of the Party's Left Wing are unlikely to become involved." (1.10.82) Already Benn has signalled that he accepts the register as a conference decision but will use his minority to vote to protest expulsions that conference has not sanctioned. Late in the day and despite previous missed opportunities Hackney North CLP's anti-witchhunt conference - called for October 30th - presents an opportunity to unite the constituency parties and the Left groupings in defence and defiance. It must be mobilised for on the widest possible scale. It must lay the basis for a fighting campaign to destroy the register and defeat its advocates.

by Dave Stocking

Defend Jim Tolton

AUEW shop steward Jim Tolton has been sacked by management at the Fox's Glacier Mints factory in Leicester. His crime? He showed health workers the way to the works canteen and they proceeded to explain their case to the workforce.

The AUEW District committee has declared the dispute official but USDAW officials - who organise the shop floor workers - have dragged their feet in giving real backing. USDAW ordered their own members back to work after they walked out in support of Jim Tolton.

In the wake of the 22nd September management throughout the country has been trying to get

tough with union activists. Rowntree Mackintosh - who own this factory - want to use this sacking to instill fear in the workforce of even elementary acts of solidarity. They must be stopped.

Already health workers have picketed the plant in support. 800 signed a petition for Jim Tolton's reinstatement on the 22nd September mass picket of Leicester Royal Infirmary. Jim Tolton now needs the backing of all workers who have supported the struggle of the health workers.

Resolution passed, and messages of support should be sent to,

11 Bisley Street, Leicester.

Prostrate before Left reformism

AS THE LEFT wing in the Labour Party has suffered setback after setback over the last twelve months, from the turning point at Brighton 1981, through Bishop's Stortford to the witch-hunts of late 1982, Alan Freeman has been putting the final touches to, and patiently awaiting the publication of, his book "The Benn Heresy".

Currently being given away free with subscriptions to "Tribune" and "Socialist Challenge" (the newspaper Freeman works for), the book is a description and analysis of the politics and development of Benn and the Bennite movement. It is also, unbeknownst to Freeman, a graphic example of the terrible degeneration of Trotskyism, and of the prevalent malaise among British "Trotskyists", of abasing themselves before left reformism. As such this book tells us more about the author and the politics he represents than it does about Tony Benn.

Freeman's theme is that Benn is a "heretic" whose views run counter to those of the established Labour tradition. In order to present Benn as a novel phenomenon, and in order to pursue not-so-novel opportunist tactics towards him, Freeman has to go to extraordinary lengths to show that a massive divide exists between the tradition represented by Bevan and the new "movement" of heretic Benn. His argument does not work.

According to Freeman, the unique components of Benn's politics are his desire to combine parliamentary change with popular protest and his call for the unions to use industrial power to secure social change. Benn is unique because he points to the existence of extra-parliamentary state powers and calls for control over them. And, taken as a whole, Benn represents a "mass movement" in a way that Labour lefts have never done in the past. As Freeman puts it, Bennism, "though a minority current, is nonetheless deeply popular. It has swept the constituency labour parties, it has won over two million votes in the unions... This is a new, mass popular social movement". (p 14).

Freeman's hagiographic account is certainly not based on any sound material evidence. Bevan, for example, wrote of the House of Commons: "It is an elaborate conspiracy to prevent the real clash of opinion which exists outside from finding an appropriate echo within its walls. It is a social shock absorber placed between privilege and the pressure of popular discontent" (In Place of Fear, page 26).

He, like Benn, was perfectly capable of rhetorically denouncing the extra-parliamentary power of the "establishment". But this should not blind us to the fact that a massive gulf separates Benn, as well as Bevan, from the programme of revolutionary Marxism.

For both men the role of parliament is central, fundamental and sacrosanct. Bevan claimed proudly "Other parties do not assert the wisdom of collective action through parliament as the core of their creed" ("In Place of Fear" p 52). For Benn, one of the great dangers is that "If the perspective of peaceful change were to get blocked within the Labour Party, it would not just be the Labour Party but parliamentary democracy itself that might be threatened" ("Arguments for Democracy"). The fact that Benn supports mandatory reselection and encourages the prospect of protest demonstrations outside the Commons does not alter his root loyalty to Parliament - a loyalty he shares with the rest of the Labour Party leadership past and present.

His programme is aimed at preserving and extending parliamentary democracy, not destroying it. And Benn has never attempted to hide that fact.

Alan Freeman refuses to accept all the evidence on this question. He knows it would be difficult to sell an avowed left Parliamentarian as the spokesman of a mass, popular, and objectively revolutionary heretical creed. He suggests that because Benn calls on the unions to act in the social arena, his politics contain a dynamic which enables traditional parliamentarism to be transcended.

The best way to test the truth of this is to examine Benn's attitude to capitalism and the role of the unions in relation to it. If he is calling for the working class to secure real "social change" by its own efforts and to its own benefit, it should surely manifest itself in this field.

During 1974-75, Benn was Secretary of State for Industry with Eric Heffer serving under him. Together they put forward an Industry Bill as Labour's answer to the economic and industrial crisis facing Britain at the time. It called for the setting up of the National Enterprise Board (NEB), with powers to "open the books" of firms (confidentially, of course), and to take up to a 30% share in certain industries.

The unions were to be involved in a series of tripartite agreements with government and management best described in the following words of Benn himself: "the NEB should invest in potentially the most profitable areas of industry and should in the long term make profits which could be reinvested so that eventually it could extend its influence over a very substantial area of the economy" ("Arguments for Socialism" page 57).

The programme - similar in all essential respects to Benn's present programme - was for state-directed investment within capitalism. True, it was greeted with outrage by the bosses and civil servants, many of whom claimed the Bill represented a step towards socialism. But that's no excuse for our "Trotskyist" biographer to get it all so wrong.

The left at the time recognised Bennery as a state-capitalist trend within the ruling class, using state intervention to shore up problem companies and incorporating the working class - at all levels - in the administration and maintenance of the bosses' system. For example, under the headline "Benn's Industry Bill: it's no threat to the bosses" one newspaper wrote: "Benn's plan is quite decisively a right-wing conception. His leftish mask should not deceive us" (Workers' Fight 8/2/75). And 'Red Weekly', the fore-runner of Freeman's newspaper, had a banner headline: "Benn's Bankrupt Bill", and wrote: "Far from having anything to do with socialism, and despite its pretensions to 'extend public ownership into profitable areas of manufacturing industry', its just another way of giving state hand-outs to the capitalist class" ('Red Weekly' 6/2/75).

It speaks volumes for the impact of Bennery on the "revolutionary left" in the early 1980s that Freeman can now dramatically re-interpret Benn's record. Talking of this period he now declares:

"Benn's policies thus guaranteed that the Industry Department in 1974-5 would become the cockpit of a momentous struggle between contending classes, in which no less than the authority of and legality of the state would be at stake... Here was a danger that as Western democracy declined, Marx's old ideas could be revived in the fire of struggle - lit by the spark of Benn's ideas" (p 57).

All this is justified by the fact that Benn called for trade union involvement in the planning agreements. This could - our born-again Bennite reviewer



would have us believe - have been the cue for the workers to go a bit further and wield real control over the bosses. But how was this going to happen within the context of Benn's actual programme? Benn has never hidden his own opposition to the expropriation of the capitalists - surely one of the most important of Marx's "old ideas", and the prerequisite of "real control". In fact Freeman quotes Benn to that effect when he is trying to paint Benn favourably as an opponent of traditional Labourite nationalisation: "We are not a party of expropriation... investors there will always be" (p57).

Freeman tries to explain this all away in a claim that Benn "did not see socialism coming from the slow conquest of ownership in order to get control. He saw it coming from the slow conquest of control in order to get ownership" (p 57). This empty phrasemongering may come easy to Freeman. He may even call it dialectical. But it neither clinches the case for Benn's supposed breach with previous left labour methods, nor gives us a clue as to how Bennery can serve as a spark to light the fire of revolution.

Benn aims at securing a "mixed economy" within which Parliament and the labour movement work in harness to ensure that the owners - and owners there will still be - dispose of their property with social responsibility.

In this respect, as in all others, Benn's "movement" does not qualitatively differ from those of previous left leaders such as Cripps and Bevan. Both put forward programmes for state intervention in order to stabilise capitalism. Both advocated some degree of incorporation of the working class into the maintenance of capitalism.

For his pains, Cripps was expelled from the party in 1937 (although he eventually became Chancellor of the Exchequer). Repeated attempts were made to expel Bevan in the early 1950s (although he eventually returned to the fold and spoke virulently against unilateralism). Freeman gives no decisive evidence to convince that the final history of Benn will turn out any differently.

As Freeman proceeds with his argument, it becomes even clearer that despite his Trotskyist credentials, he is, in fact, an apologist for Benn. He wilfully ignores the ample evidence of Benn's fidelity to traditional Labourism and capitalism so as to present a Benn that "Socialist Challenge" can adapt to and tail behind. Not only are Benn's policies supposedly radically different to those of Bevan, so too is the "movement" that Freeman longs to embrace.

Freeman's case for calling Bennism a unique and popular mass movement is as shallow as the rest of his reasoning. According to him, after its 1979 defeat, Labour's ranks were swollen not only by 80,000 new members, but by a new type of activist. Ex-supporters of the Anti-Nazi League, followers of "Beyond the Fragments" came into the Party, causing the CLPs to "swing sharply to the left. This forms the base of the Bennite movement, together with the 2 million votes... in the unions". This last estimate (presumably referring to the Deputy Leadership election) can only be true by the standards of the union bureaucrats, who on occasion pretend that the cards they wave in the block vote at Labour Party Conferences directly represent the views of their members.

Even if we adopt such dubious criteria, the uniqueness of the base of Benn's movement still disappears. Didn't Bevanism "sweep the constituency labour parties" in the 1950s? Bevan repeatedly came top of the poll in the CLP section of the NEC. And when Bevan was elected Treasurer of the Party in 1956, he got over 2 million trade union block votes!

But in the final analysis, all these points are peripheral to Freeman's main orientation and conclusions. They simply reflect the attempt of Freeman and his co-thinkers on "Socialist Challenge" to claim that the Bennite movement, whilst not led by a revolutionary, and not necessarily composed of conscious revolutionaries, has an internal political logic which is revolutionary.

The driving force of this momentum is seen to lie in the aspiration of rank and file Labour Party members to exert control over their party, their party's policies and over the implementation of those policies when Labour is next in power. He argues that a Labour Party faced with the resistance of the ruling class and its creatures in the state machine would be forced to either embark on the revolutionary road, and deal with that threatening state machinery, or accept a massive defeat. As such

there is no alternative but for Trotskyists to swim with this revolutionary stream. As Freeman tells us:

"Once a movement for democracy begins one may not stand like Canute and dictate terms to it. The choice facing us is not whether to have a revolution but whether to support it; not whether to make a revolution, but what to make of it. The issue is whether one embraces it and directs one's efforts to a democratic socialist outcome, or opposes it and opens the door to a terrible defeat. The issue is whether one chooses to win or chooses to lose" (page 142).

...And the only winner in this schema can be Tony Benn! The avowed Marxist Freeman explicitly concedes to Benn the leadership of an approximately revolutionary movement and accepts that the programmatic content of that movement shall be that of Benn's left labour parliamentarianism.

"British socialism has nothing to fear from elections if it has secured a democratic foundation for them, a lay accountable, working class state - With this, it would get a majority in any representative body. True, our existing parliament could do with the removal of some ceremonial relics, and an elected second chamber might be an idea - perhaps made up of national and oppressed groups like the Bolsheviks' second chamber" (page 141).

These are not the hesitant maunderings of a reformist, but the recipe of a supposed revolutionary. Freeman junks the Marxist programme for a state of a new type based on workers' councils and a workers' militia, and advocates a programme of reformed parliamentary government. When Benn rejects the Marxist theory of the state and argues that the existing state apparatus can be rendered accountable to workers through a process of reform, we are never surprised. Freeman joins the queue of one-time revolutionaries who have given up trying to argue against him.

What are the conclusions that Freeman draws from his whitewash of Benn? The complaints about "standing Canute-like" and the cosmetics applied to Benn's programme make it quite clear where Freeman is going, and where he'd like others to follow. He is for the political liquidation of revolutionary Marxism into the Bennite movement, and for the programmatic adaptations and revisions that would make this possible.

This has been made all the more clear in the author's recent sorties in "Socialist Challenge". In the pre-Labour Conference edition, Freeman finished an article on 'Socialists, Democracy and the Labour Party' with a call for socialists to continue to organise within the Party whatever the decisions of conference. Of course we don't disagree with that. But the key question, as always, is around what programme should socialists organise? Freeman's answer is that socialists should organise around the existing policy of the Labour Party and the Trade Unions - against those who are trying to subvert it.

"The alternative view is to try and construct a left in the Party which is rooted in mass campaigns, mass struggles, trade union action and which promotes in the Labour Party those policies which will advance those struggles. Such a left wing could be very broad in character because it could organise around a very small number of very important demands, many of which are already Labour Movement policy, and fight to involve the Labour Party - particularly the youth - around actions in support of them. This is the policy which Socialist Challenge promotes." (Socialist Challenge 25.9.82) This campaigning Left is explicitly to be formed as the Party of Labour on a Labourite programme. "The Labour leaders say there should be no 'party within a party'. But they have a 'party within a party' - the party of capitalists in the Labour Party. We say Labour's socialists should build another 'party within a party' the Party of Labour." (ibid)

From the pages of his book to the pages of Socialist Challenge Freeman's political line remains the same. It is a familiar one. This Socialist Challenge journalist is travelling the road that Socialist Organiser's key journalists have already trodden - the road of programmatic and political prostration before Bennery. ■

by Matthew Cobb



Top: Bevan (on far right), with supporters (from left to right): Harold Wilson, Jennie Lee, Dick Crossman, Barbara Castle and Geoffrey Bing.

Top right: Sir Stafford Cripps
Bottom right: Benn



Interview with Política Obrera

THE FOLLOWING INTERVIEW is based on written questions submitted to a representative of Política Obrera (PO), an Argentinian Trotskyist organisation affiliated to the Fourth Internationalist Tendency, in early September. The interview followed discussions in July between Workers Power and representatives of PO on a series of political questions, including the situation in Argentina. In the course of the discussion on Argentina it became apparent that while we had considerable agreement on the line we would have argued within the Argentinian working class in relation to the Galtieri regime, we differed on the question of the immediate response of revolutionaries to the retaking of the Malvinas.

PO's position, which is summarised in this interview, held that while there was no doubt that the Malvinas belonged to Argentina, it was not possible to characterise the retaking of the islands as an anti-imperialist action - 'a real act of national independence'. PO argued, quite rightly, that Galtieri's motives for retaking the Malvinas had nothing to do with a desire to challenge imperialism. The Junta hoped to head off the rising working class struggle which threatened to topple the regime and place itself in a stronger bargaining position with US imperialism, being able to offer strategically

important bases to the US when needed. In this context, PO argued, it was not possible to support the invasion.

We argued that the correct position from the start was to support the invasion as an objectively anti-imperialist attack on a British colony. This did not mean that revolutionaries would have campaigned for, or advocated this course of action. Neither did it mean that the reactionary Galtieri regime itself became any less reactionary as a result of its invasion ploy. But once the islands were seized it was necessary to support that invasion against British imperialism. That support had to be carried out with our own methods and our own objectives. Thus Workers Power's statement issued two days after the invasion declared: "Argentine revolutionaries would denounce the manner in which the Junta has taken on imperialism - an adventurous manner that leaves the Argentinian people unprepared either to face possible reprisals from Britain or carry through the conflict to the end. They would call for a genuine anti-imperialist struggle - the nationalisation of all

foreign holdings, the nationalisation of the banks, the institution of workers' control, the arming of the whole people, an internationalist appeal to the workers and peasants of Latin America." (Anglo-Argentine clash over the Falkland Islands - Workers Power Statement April 4th 1982).

We made it quite clear that the struggle for the Malvinas was a just one. At the same time we pointed out that the pro-imperialist Galtieri would betray it and that the struggle against the Junta must continue. We pointed out that only a victory by the working class over the Junta and its bourgeois backers would have ensured a victory against imperialism. Only this position allowed a clear and unambiguous opposition to imperialism from the start of the crisis.

While we disagree with PO's position we recognise the pressures that an Argentinian organisation was under particularly in the context of the massive upsurge against the regime that occurred just before the occupation. PO's position appears contradictory to us but, as far as we know, the way PO acted on

this position in its propaganda and agitation was no way unprincipled. PO did not call for the withdrawal of the troops from the Malvinas or call for any actions against the invasion. Indeed the emphasis of their statement of April 5th, as shown in the interview, was on denouncing Galtieri's failure to pursue even the struggle over the Malvinas through to the end.

The same cannot be said for a British group that adopted the same position. To refuse support for the invasion of the Malvinas against British imperialism was inexcusable. We have dealt at length in previous papers with the positions publicised by 'Socialist Organiser' during the war. We will not repeat our old argument here. However the recent publication of Workers Socialist Review No. 2 has brought to light the existence of a 'Minority Tendency' in the Workers Socialist League which seem to have eventually adopted a position very similar to that of PO. This minority, it appears, adopted a position of neutrality between their own imperialism and Argentina up until actual fighting broke out

Argentine Trotskyist and Thatcher's w

Workers Power (WP): Can you give us a brief explanation of why the Galtieri regime was willing to challenge British imperialism over the Malvinas?

Política Obrera (PO): Galtieri's government decided to occupy the Malvinas for two main reasons. On the one hand, it wanted to reach an agreement with American imperialism, to a certain extent at the expense of British imperialism, to transform the colonial status of the Malvinas into a semi-colonial one. This meant taking away Britain's formal sovereignty over these islands in order to hand over real sovereignty (exploitation of natural wealth, military base etc.) to the USA in order to develop a privileged relationship with American imperialism. On the other hand, it was trying to politically control the masses. It stepped up the exploitation of the working class, shoving the whole weight of the economic crisis onto the shoulders of the workers under cover of a 'patriotic effort'. The military camarilla tried to use the question to build up 'national unity' around it and take the initiative in this field.

It is necessary to remember that the crisis of the dictatorship preceded the Malvinas crisis. The situation was characterised by political crisis, economic bankruptcy, a rejection of the dictatorship by all classes and especially by a tendency for the masses to intervene in the political crisis. There were 40,000 demonstrators out on March 30th, with the open presence of contingents from the factories in spite of the trade union bureaucracy's attempt to disorganise and sabotage them. This demonstration showed that the masses would inevitably intervene in the dictatorship's political crisis.

WP: What positions did PO take during the war? What were your main demands?

PO: Our organisation's position was stated in the editorial of our newspaper on April 5th. We said that taking back part of Argentina's historical territory was not enough to allow us to say that this was a real act of national independence. We did not support the occupation of the islands and, at the same time, we denounced the dictatorship's intention to negotiate with imperialism. The editorial on April 5th stated our position on the wider questions involved, with the following programme: "1) Denunciation of the intention to capitulate before imperialism, either through capitulatory negotiations (over economic or foreign policy) or through a withdrawal of troops in exchange for a gradual return of the islands with conditions attached. 2) Demand for control over all foreign capital, which is already sabotaging and speculating against the national economy. 3) In the event of war, it is necessary to spread it to all of the mainland by attacking and confiscating big imperialist capital and, above all, by calling on the workers to arm. 4) Immediate satisfaction of the demands of trade unions and other workers' organisations and satisfaction of the demands of the movement of Families and Mothers for the 'disappeared'. 5) Encourage the formation of an anti-imperialist united front to implement this programme."

The attempt by the dictatorship and American imperialism to reach an agreement failed due to Galtieri's and Thatcher's crisis. For the British government, what was at stake was not sovereignty over the islands (in the past there were concrete plans to leave the islands) but rather the credibility of British imperialism internationally. Its aim was to defend its participation in the exploitation and strategic use of this region of the world, bearing in mind its links with South Africa as well. The basis for this was undermined by Galtieri's seizure of the Malvinas and by his desire to replace British by American imperialism.

The crisis of Galtieri's government was even more decisive. The occupation of the Malvinas was designed to get the government out of its problems but only succeeded in creating more since it gave greater force to anti-imperialist sentiments of an explosive nature among all of the Argentinian people and since it increased tensions within the Argentinian bourgeoisie. These reasons explain why no agreement was reached between these two governments under the wing of American imperialism. The occupation led to open war.

Faced with this imperialist aggression our main slogan was 'All-out war against imperialism', stressing the political, economic and military attack (expropriation of imperialist property, abrogation of all agreements with imperialism, arming of the masses) against British and American imperialism.

But it was not only a question of a set of slogans. It was necessary to organise the independent intervention of the proletariat with its own methods and objectives. This was a key to our activity, ie. to encourage the reconstruction of workers' organisations and the creation of new organs of mass struggle, the formation of anti-imperialist committees of the people, the organisation of street demonstrations. All this meant rejecting 'national unity' and struggling for the masses' own demands: that the cost of war should be paid by the capitalists and imperialists, workers' control over production and the financial system, jobs for all and job security, trade union and political freedoms.

Our political position was based on the following criterion - the struggle against imperialism does not over-rule class antagonisms between the proletariat and the bourgeoisie and between the masses and the dictatorship; in reality it sharpens them. What changed was the way in which workers struggled against the dictatorial regime. The fight against imperialism was pushed to the fore. In this fight the working class had to denounce and go beyond the capitulation of the bourgeoisie and constitute itself as the national leadership of the masses, imposing its own methods and objectives in waging the war. A defeat for imperialism through an independent intervention by the masses would have meant destroying the basis of support for the dictatorship. Its fall as a result of working class action would have immediately been on the agenda.

WP: As you know, many groups in Britain claiming to be Trotskyist took a position of refusing to support Argentina against British imperialism, saying 'one cannot support a fascist regime' that 'the Kelpers have a right to self-determination', or even that 'Argentina is no longer a semi-colonial country'. What is PO's attitude to these arguments?

PO: The organisations in Britain which claim to be Trotskyist and for the 4th International had a heavy responsibility with regard to the Malvinas war: to practise proletarian internationalism and to counter the imperialist chauvinism of the metropole. This could only have been done through unconditional defence of the entire Argentinian cause.

Here I want to deal in particular with the position of the Workers' Socialist League because it is an organisation from which we could have expected a Trotskyist position. Regrettably, this organisation was well to the fore of those who capitulated before the imperialist bourgeoisie.

They refused to characterise the war as aggression by an imperialist country against a semi-colonial country and even outlined the curious theory according to which Argentina is not a semi-colony because of its capitalist development. This shows a basic misunderstanding of the Marxist position on imperialism, saying that, for marxists, no capitalist development is possible for semi-colonial countries. However, for marxists, this capitalist development does take place but it is backward (and of a kind that continually renews this backwardness) and subordinated to imperialism. Argentina is a country which is exploited by imperialism and to deny this evidence is a despicable theoretical manoeuvre designed to justify political capitulation.

The political nature of a country's regime is no criterion for basing a marxist position on war. Thatcher did not wage war to defeat the dictatorship. She

did it to stamp out a timid expression of independence by an oppressed country, which happened to be led by a dictatorship. To wipe out distinctions between nations and put differences in regimes in their place leads to pure subjectivism; international relations between states are robbed of their class basis. Trotsky criticised this capricious interpretation stressing that one must not become tricked by appearances and that we have to analyse phenomena from the standpoint of the international class struggle. There is a class divide between countries, some of whom are imperialist and some of whom are its victims, independently of who happens to be leading the latter. The original criterion of Socialist Organiser would lead us very far indeed. For example, to deny the working class nature of states dominated by the bureaucracy because the latter is too imperialist...

The argument for the self-determination of the Kelpers is openly reactionary and can only be of an imperialist nature. What is the real meaning of the idea that the Kelpers should be able to decide their own future? The same as that for which the British fleet was sent to the Malvinas - to recover British colonial domination. This is because of the fact that the only distinctive feature of the Kelpers is that they are British colonial settlers. And their so-called self-determination can only be to remain part of the British empire. We are for the self-determination of peoples as part of the struggle against imperialism. But it is totally absurd to argue for the self-determination of the colonial settlers.

Socialist Organiser tailed the Labour Lefts, who expressed one of the positions of imperialism: to try to reach a semi-colonial agreement between the military junta and world imperialism. That is why, in issue no.83, SO supported the position that Thatcher and Galtieri should negotiate the future of the islands instead of fighting. This meant that (a) British and Argentinian people should line up behind their respective governments; (b) Galtieri and Thatcher could reach a just, that is, anti-imperialist solution through negotiations; (c) imperialism is something other than a war machine against the people; (d) the imperialist bourgeoisie can be convinced that war is bad and that the conflict could be resolved peacefully. Their 'super-revolutionary' position - neither Thatcher nor Galtieri - in practice became 'for Thatcher and Galtieri through negotiations.'

SO presented the ideas of the Labour Lefts as being opposed, even timidly, to this war when, in reality, they were the main means by which chauvinism was encouraged to grow within the ranks of the working class in Britain.

WP: What have been the effects of the defeat on the military regime? What role has the bourgeois opposition - the Multipartidaria - played during the crisis following the defeat? The leadership of the trade unions remains in the hands of the Peronists - what has their attitude been to the regime since the defeat and what role have they played in demobilising working class opposition to the regime?

PO: The Malvinas war and the military defeat accelerated the disintegration of the regime. The fall of Galtieri took place in the unprecedented situation of direct pressure by the masses (the demonstration on June 15th). This is why American imperialism's plan to crown the victory of the British fleet with a recomposition of the military government through a palace coup failed.

This acceleration is mainly due to the fact that the masses did not identify themselves with the dictatorship during the war. On the contrary, they accused it of colluding with imperialism and of being responsible for the defeat. It was not the defeat which created the dictatorship's political crisis. The defeat



Defiant anti-imperialist demonstration in Buenos Aires

was the means by which this crisis came to a head. Intervention by the masses stopped this crisis being resolved through manoeuvres between the camarilla and imperialism.

There is also the economic crisis, which has taken on catastrophic proportions. Hyperinflation and the breakdown of the Argentinian monetary system is the agenda. The situation of the working class and the petty-bourgeoisie is desperate. The bourgeoisie is divided and world imperialism has stepped up pressure. The class struggle has been greatly sharpened.

Bignone's government is weak because it was the result of a new balance of power within the bourgeoisie and between it and other classes. It is rather the result of an emergency deal between the representatives of the various sections of the bourgeoisie and the military camarilla. And the various economic plans it has tried to implement have accentuated divisions within the bourgeoisie. Faced with impending bankruptcy, the argument is about which section is going to be hit first.

The 'institutionalization' scheme [institutionalization] - In Argentina this term essentially means a move towards a government, other than military, which is subordinated to forms of bourgeois institutions - legal, political etc.] whereby the government has said that it will transfer power to an 'elected' government by March 1984, is the expression of a compromise to try to hold the regime together. The various bourgeois parties in the Multipartidaria and the Communist Party are protecting the military dictatorship by supporting this 'institutionalization'; they are trying to prevent the military dictatorship's death as only from taking a violent form. This bourgeois front is defending Bignone's government and professed 'institutionalization' tooth and nail, without ruling out the possibility of a coup or immediate elections. It is compromising itself with a government which has no future - which is repudiated by the immense majority of the people - because it knows that the fall of this government would increase the tendency for the masses to intervene independently.

The same is true for the trade union bureaucrats. The tendencies within it have played a waiting game and have used fake negotiations with the govern-

Northern Ireland elections

No choice for workers in Prior's poll



insisting that strike action should be subordinated to chasing purely symbolic electoral support.

THE VERY FACT that the Prior initiative has got beyond the electoral starting post is symptomatic of the crisis of leadership facing the Irish working class as a whole and the anti-unionist working class in particular. The elections to the 78 seat consultative Assembly, which take place on October 20th, represent a further step by the British bourgeoisie in the direction of re-establishing Unionist, pro-imperialist rule within the context of partition. This initiative is devoid of even the sops of 'power-sharing' and the 'all-Ireland dimension' provided for in the 1973 Sunningdale proposals. It gives the lie to speculation that the Tories ever contemplated more than 'security' and economic co-operation in the talks with Haughey, initiated in 1980 and now in cold storage.

The deepening recession of world capitalism, taking its toll in Britain and Northern Ireland, together with Britain's interest in safeguarding its western flank as part of the new, cold-war, strategic re-armament of imperialism, make it imperative to screw the lid down on the anti-unionist revolt. This, in turn, will force the British ruling class to revamp the old reactionary mechanisms of partition and sectarian rule in the North, thus paralysing the working class as a whole, strengthening the allegiance of the protestant workers to 'their' protestant state and leaving the anti-unionist working class beleaguered and isolated. Meanwhile the remainder of the Irish working class is left under the reactionary rule of the clerical southern bourgeoisie.

Paradoxically, while there are no illusions about the purpose of Prior's Assembly among the anti-unionist working class, the likelihood is that they will turn out to vote in the elections. The attempted boycott campaign called for by Peoples' Democracy (PD - Irish section of the USFI) - turned out to be a damp squib. The arch-conservative, bourgeois nationalists of the Irish Independence Party were the only ones to go through with their own boycott. The SDLP, sensitive to the dissent among the anti-unionist population, but confident that there was no real 'danger' of general militant mobilisation of anti-unionist workers, decided to stand in the elections but promised not to take their seats unless the old chestnuts of 'power-sharing' and the 'all-Ireland dimension' were included in the package. On the basis of the SDLP decision, in late August, Provisional Sinn Fein decided that they too were going to stand candidates. They sensed that it would give them a chance to undermine the SDLP claims to represent the 'Nationalist population'. They too, therefore, implicitly recognised that there was no real likelihood of a militant and extensive mobilisation against the Assembly. In any case they see the military and bombing campaign as the only way to bring down the Assembly. All they want from the election is evidence of support among the 'Nationalist population'. As they wrote recently in their newspaper: "The essence of republican struggle must be in armed resistance coupled with popular opposition to the British presence. So, while not everyone can plant a bomb, ever everyone can plant a vote." (APRN, Sept. 16 p.1) In this way the bombing campaign begets its own brand of electoralism.

It was not difficult for revolutionary marxists to predict the inevitable failure of PD's project of a Nationalist boycott campaign. A clear recognition of the significant defeat which the ending of the Hunger Strike, just over a year ago, represented for the anti-imperialist struggle, provides the key to the inability of either the PD or Sinn Fein to turn the opposition to Prior's plan into a genuine movement based on the direct mobilisation of workers' action. There is a tendency among republicans and centrists to underestimate or even deny the seriousness of that defeat. But, after five years of escalating protest actions, culminating in the death of ten prisoners, to have settled for less than the five demands, to have dropped the explicit call for political status, and to have failed to chip the paintwork of Thatcher's determination even at the height of the campaign, and then to deny a defeat, is no service to the anti-unionist population or the Irish working class as a whole. That defeat, as the IWG argued before, flowed largely from opportunist accommodation to bourgeois, Catholic nationalism, and the subordination of direct working class action at all times to the dictates of publicity-getting and apolitical appeals to humanitarian sentiment. At the same time, any criticism of the continued bombing campaign or military strategy was kept outside the scope of militant activists in the campaign. This perspective, which ultimately squandered the mass energy on symbolic protest marches and failed to extend spontaneous strike action around the strategic slogan of an indefinite general strike, was the practical outcome of the PD's abstract, and ultimately populist, conception of 'mass action'. At every point they opposed the efforts of the IWG to change the strategy, to put the strike action and revolutionary working class methods of struggle to the fore. In the end they collapsed into naked electoralism in the North and in the South,

Thus, it is not really surprising that PD should be the last to recognise the futility of an active ie. revolutionary, anti-imperialist boycott in the present context. In fact, their conception was of a nationalist boycott with no content in terms of class action. In this way the only content it could possibly take on would be moral support for the 'real' struggle ie. the Provo military and bombing campaign. The PD also argued, if the boycott did not come off, for electoral alliances with Sinn Fein to take the nationalist vote from the SDLP. Not surprisingly, when Sinn Fein decided to run candidates, they also intimated that they were quite capable of fighting for the nationalist vote under their own banner.

What approach should revolutionary marxists therefore take in the context of Prior's Assembly? Starting out from a clear understanding that the strategic task is the smashing of both pro-imperialist, capitalist states, we must relate to the concrete possibilities for taking that struggle forward on each front at any given time. The IWG believe that the perspective of active boycott was not operable, even as a focus for the minority of the working class in revolt against the Northern state. We believe furthermore that it closes off the possibility of addressing the needs of the whole working class, faced as it is with a swingeing, combined offensive from the British and Irish bourgeoisies on all fronts. While we can make no concessions to Unionism or imperialist policies in any section of the working class, the present offensive on jobs, social services, wages, trade union organisation makes it imperative for revolutionaries to boldly present a programme for a united fightback by Protestant and Catholic workers together. Such a programme must address the objective weakness of the Northern working class, not only internally divided but also beleaguered as a whole within the Unionist enclave. Thus the key focus must be for the mobilisation of the all-Ireland labour movement and the solidarity of the British labour movement around the struggles of Catholic and Protestant workers.

The united combativity of Northern health workers for the full claim is a clear promise of the possibilities of generating class antagonism against the Unionist ruling class and its Loyalist machinery of 'divide and rule'.

Thus given the stalemate of the anti-unionist revolt, with the anti-unionist working class powerless to sweep away Prior's Assembly under the present Republican leadership, whilst fully recognising that the Assembly is part of the attempt to put the lid on that revolt, we are not, in principle, opposed to using the elections as a platform for revolutionary propaganda, focused on the present conjuncture, but flowing from a strategic conception of the goal of smashing both bourgeois states in Ireland.

There is no question of capitulation to Prior in such a principled tactical use of the elections as long as it is clearly subordinated to, and a means for, calling the working class to action on the key fronts of the struggle. Even in the event of the Assembly convening, it is not the issue of how reactionary it is that determines whether it is principled to use it for the purposes of propaganda and agitation, but what is the best way to take forward the mobilisation of the working class in struggle. Therefore, although our resources do not permit us to stand revolutionary marxist candidates, we would, in principle, use the elections, and the Assembly itself if it were convened, as a focus for rallying the proletariat to action.

In the present situation there are no candidates standing on the basis of a fighting programme for the class. Furthermore we give no political support to the programmes of the Centrist PD or to the Republicans. The PD's call for an electoral united front has no meaning because it does not pose any call to action that concretely addresses the strategy of imperialism. Therefore we say to workers: "There are no candidates worthy of your support. In the absence of such revolutionary candidates we must say 'Don't vote!' Organise to fight and force the ICTU to mobilise for

- * Solidarity with the health workers' demands.
- * Stop the cuts North and South!
- * For a fighting organisation of the unemployed - 300,000 North and South!
- * For nationalisation under workers' control without compensation to fight closures and occupations to fight redundancies.
- * For trade union based resistance to repressive legislation, special courts North and South, and Army and RUC harassment.

by a member of the Irish Workers Group

"In the first stages when the task force was despatched, it was not at all clear that Thatcher would be prepared to launch a war if diplomatic efforts failed. The South Georgia operation was conducted without bloodshed and the officers invited to dinner afterwards. It changed with the bombing of Port Stanley airstrip, the sinking of the Belyano and the Sheffield, the shooting down of aircraft and the extension of the total exclusion zone..." (WSR No. 2 p.28)

For a start British imperialism's intentions could only have been 'not clear' to those who failed to start from a marxist analysis of the meaning and the seizure of the islands to British imperialism, or who willfully stuck their heads in the sand and hoped they would not be called on to take sides in a war. For the WSL minority it was probably a combination of both. As for the supposed 'change' of situation, one might be forgiven for thinking the comrades of the minority had never heard that 'war is the continuation of politics by other means'. Nothing politically changed with the outbreak of war, British imperialism was just resorting to different measures having found that threats and economic sanctions against Argentina had not achieved a withdrawal.

We think the positions put forward by the WSL minority in Britain demonstrate the weakness of PO's position when transferred to the imperialist country. It is clear that even had the WSL minority been the majority throughout it would still have been unable to arm its organisation with a genuine internationalist position in the most crucial test for British revolutionaries in the past period. ■

Our key slogan is to 'Kick the dictatorship out now', the only possibility of opening up a democratic perspective which, for us, is the democratic constituent assembly.

The tendency of the workers' movement is to engage in strike movements in spite of the difficulties it has had in organising itself and the state of retreat. In Argentina there is a great deal of tension and strikes are an elementary response to a desperate situation and a regime that is breaking up. This tension is affecting housewives, students, etc. We have to organise this tendency towards strikes to ensure that it does not fritter away in isolated or localised activities, without any prospect (due precisely to the desperate nature of the crisis.)

Our organisation has launched a mass campaign for a general strike to organise this tendency of the masses, to express the need to face up to the social and economic catastrophe and to organise the fall of the dictatorship. Concretely we say that it is necessary to have a national mobilisation of the working class through factory meetings to draw up lists of demands, elect strike committees and demand that the TU leaders (nationally the TU bureaucrats are divided into two TU confederations) organise strikes accompanied by mass participation through meetings, demonstrations, etc. We pose the need to centralise the various strike movements nationally to wipe out the extreme poverty, unemployment, the dictatorship and the military camarilla. In this perspective we call for united action with all TU and political tendencies which participate in the anti-imperialist and anti-dictatorial struggle in order to 'kick out the dictatorship now.'

WP: How do you see the political situation in Argentina developing in the next period?

PO: The most likely situation is that the present government will not remain in power for a long time. This poses the alternative of a military coup or immediate elections. A coup d'etat would try to solve the weakness of the present government through a 'process of institutionalization' which would be controlled with an iron hand. This implies a change in the tempo of the present process and not a turn round. The Multi and the Stalinists are ready to accept such an alternative but this leaves the problem of the economic policy of such a government unanswered. This is why there is a confusion of factions preparing coup d'etats - all of whom have different answers to the crisis.

The current state of division and decomposition of the military regime poses the possibility of bringing forward the date of elections if the situation worsens. A pseudo-democratic government arising out of such elections would have the task of demobilising the masses with a combination of promises and illusory gains, as a temporary solution to the crisis to allow the bourgeoisie to prepare a decisive attack on the working class.

These policies, and the collaboration in them by bourgeois parties, the CP, and Moreno's PST (Socialist Workers' Party) have a common objective: to stop the working class movement from intervening in the current crisis. The development of the political situation is determined by the attempts by the bourgeoisie and imperialism to hold the regime together and by the tendency for the masses to intervene directly. The preconditions for a revolutionary situation are present. There is a breakdown of the economy and a general political impasse. But there are already certain elements of a revolutionary situation: sharp division in the ranks of the exploiters, feelings of exasperation among the people, incipient but real tendencies by the proletariat to reverse the downturn in activity and go over to direct action and revolutionary methods of struggle.

The Argentinian proletariat needs to get rid of bourgeois democratic illusions through mass struggle against the regime and against imperialist oppression and the crisis. This is not yet the case. Our organisation is attempting to give this struggle a conscious revolutionary leadership. In this way the pseudo-democratic and nationalist episode will be short, opening the road to proletarian revolution. ■

over the Malvinas.

It is when we see this position argued in the British working class in the middle of Thatcher's war preparations that the weaknesses in the PO position become apparent. While the PO interview makes many correct and direct criticisms of the WSL majority, the minority's recently published position remains a muddled and totally inadequate basis for fighting the opportunism of the majority.

During the crucial period when Thatcher was whipping up British chauvinism and assembling her war fleet, both minority and majority of the WSL were agreed in condemning the invasion, calling for the withdrawal of Argentinian troops in the face of Thatcher's threats (see April TILC resolution printed in WSR p.30) and even demanding 'negotiations' between the two Governments!

The middle-headedness of the minority, which undoubtedly contributed to the strength of the more clear-sighted opportunists of the majority can be seen in the following explanation of the minority's change of position to support for Argentina in May:

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ment to demobilise members. The wage increase granted by the government was an insult to workers. This has encouraged strike movements. In this situation the TU bureaucracy has launched isolated actions to disorganise the movement and, to try to maintain its hold over the mass movement, it is even talking about the possibility of a national strike.

WP: What is the legal position of PO and the other left parties at the moment and what has been the major focus for your group's political activity since the defeat?

PO: One of the first measures following the 1976 coup d'etat was to make PO illegal, along with 3 other left organisations. The CP was not illegal. Its political activities were suspended in the same way as those of bourgeois parties. From then on all our activities have had to be carried out in the strictest clandestinity. The repression cost us a lot - 'disappeared', imprisoned, exiled - in a period in which even the possession of the newspaper could lead to the 'disappearance' of comrades. Our organisation passed the test of struggle against dictatorial repression and maintained and developed its organisations, its publications and its intervention in the class struggle. Our open political work took a great leap forward during the Malvinas war. We can say that PO is a factor in the political struggle of the workers' movement, and especially of its vanguard.

The fundamental basis of our activity in the current period flows from what I said earlier. It is a question of providing a revolutionary answer to the regime's political crisis and to the social and economic crisis. We have to deal with democratic illusions which many layers of the population might develop. We have to make sure that the proletariat does not become trapped by the pseudo-democratic alternatives or by the bourgeois nationalists.

We say it is necessary to kick out the dictatorship now, against all forms of collaboration with its 'institutionalization' (which is an attempt to keep it in place until 1984 and stabilise imperialist control).

Arthur enthroned does not mean rank and file power

LAST MONTH WE looked at the way the Broad Left in the NUM organised itself on the basis of a purely electoral perspective. The network of Communist Party and Labour Left members in the mines set as their goal the election of 'left' full-time officials. With Arthur Scargill now enthroned as President and Michael McGahey as Vice-President, it would seem that this perspective has borne fruit.

The left is now set to democratise the NEC and thereby undermine the right-wing's ability to constantly vote it down. The anomaly of Cumberland and Lancashire, where a few hundred miners have had the same number of NEC members as Scotland with over 15,000 miners, is to be removed. The NUM headquarters is to be moved to a mining region. To top it all, Arthur Scargill has made plain his total hostility to the NCB's 8.2% pay offer for this year, and denounced the NCB's secret plans to carry through pit closures.

This is all heady stuff - all the more so when it is set in the context of the growing ascendancy of the right in most of the unions, and of a real downturn (with notable exceptions) in working class militancy. Even one-time arch critics of Scargill, the WSL have now been forced to declare: "The union conferences this year have generally shown a shift to the left. Most spectacular was Arthur Scargill's first conference as president of the National Union of Mineworkers, which set the NUM firmly on course for confrontation with the government." (Workers Socialist Review No.2).

The IMG, long the most prominent 'Trotskyist' members of the Scargill fan club, have aired similar sentiments in the pages of Socialist Challenge. These views do reflect the hopes that thousands of rank and file militants have in Scargill. We would add, however, that they also represent the dangerous illusions that militants have in Scargill.

Scargill was a relative latecomer to the charmed circle of Broad Left officials. He rose to prominence with the help of the Broad Left and crucially, its CP stalwarts, but to a large extent he was an independent operator, a free agent. Scargill's split from the CP back in the 1960s was precisely over his refusal to accept party discipline - a fetter on his own personal ambitions. To fulfil these ambitions Scargill, particularly in the late 1960s and early 1970s, relied heavily on mobilising rank and file support for militant actions. (See WP No.35). He was both a reflection of and a catalyst for, rank and file militancy. His maverick nature earned him the distrust of the more cautious elements of the Broad Left (ie. the CP). But it served his purpose. It won him power in the Yorkshire officialdom. Once he got this power, however, mobilisations of the rank and file became secondary. The struggle he faced after 1973-4 was no longer with the union machine (remembering he had once been expelled from the union for organising an unofficial strike committee) but was now *within* the union machine. In the world of the NEC manoeuvrings Scargill's best allies were official 'lefts', McGahey, Williams and co., *not* the rank and file. Indeed after 1974 there were a whole number of instances where Scargill and the Broad Left dissipated militancy rather than leading it.

In 1975, faced with the Labour Government's wage cutting Social Contract, Scargill repeatedly fudged a confrontation over wages. At the 1975

conference Scargill accepted a composite proposal that the Yorkshire resolution calling for £100 a week with its phrase 'demand' be dropped in favour of a resolution which was phrased 'seek to achieve'. On these grounds the NEC were able to drop an immediate fight for £100 a week and accept the government's £6 wage limit! In every wages round the same story was repeated. Scargill made militant demands, declared against incomes policy, and promised a fight. But on no occasion did he act as he had done in 1969 and 1970. At no time did he try to mobilise the large militant areas of Yorkshire, South Wales and Scotland (together with the smaller Kent coalfield) to actually strike for the demands he was raising. The result was to allow the Labour Government to get away with three years of incomes policies.

The story was the same when Tony Benn introduced divisive productivity deals in the mines. Twice the miners rejected the deals in ballots. Finally a desperate Gormley flouted these democratic decisions and gave the regions the right to negotiate productivity deals. In doing so he was consciously dividing the areas - setting those likely to gain from the deal against those who were not, and so opening up the possibility of breaking up the union. Gormley was in fact trying to demonstrate the authority of his leadership and rout the left. In the face of this challenge the left played straight into his hands.

The left did not organise any serious rank and file opposition to Gormley. Their own bureaucratic strategy in fact left them disarmed. Vic Allen sums up the state of the left at this time (1977) with telling accuracy: "A special edition of *The Miner* was distributed to explain and advocate the scheme but left-wing areas were caught unprepared for after the vote against incentives at the Annual Conference their officials never contemplated that there would be such rapid developments. Most of these officials gloomily anticipated that the Executive recommendation would be endorsed. They were deeply concerned by the way in which the Union constitution was being misused but could see no way within the rules of redressing the situation." (The Militancy of the British Miners, p.275)

No way of redressing the situation despite two ballot results and a conference decision in their favour! What Allen discloses is the left's refusal to use these mandates to challenge Gormley, and to mobilise the rank and file to see through that challenge. Instead, when Gormley pushed through the decision on local deals the bastions of the left, Yorkshire, South Wales and Kent took Gormley and Daly to court in December 1977. The result was predictable. The courts backed Gormley. Scargill fumed against the judgement - but productivity deals are today in operation in every area, including Yorkshire.

As the time for Joe Gormley's retirement approached the demands of electoral responsibility exercised an ever heavier toll on Scargill's militancy.

As the 1982 pay struggle looms miners would do well to recall Scargill's role in the pit closures dispute in February 1981. When the NCB announced its programme of closures miners in South Wales responded immediately by taking strike action. They set in motion a wave of militancy that could have prevented any pit closures and turned the tide on the Tories. The stage was set for a battle that could have ended this job-cutting government. Scargill never tires of announcing from public platforms that he favours industrial action, not merely over economic demands, but also for political ends. We agree with his sentiments. However when faced with the possibility of translating such



South Wales miners strike against closures, February 1981

Picture: John Sturrock (Network)

sentiments into action, Scargill balked. First he delayed bringing Yorkshire out alongside South Wales. Despite an overwhelming mandate to call strike action against any closures, he would not move until a date agreed by the Executive and designed by them to take the heat out of the situation.

Even when the miners in Yorkshire's threatened pits walked out, Scargill insisted on holding his fire. Then, on the basis of a telephone conversation with NCB chairman Ezra, who promised drilling tests before closing Yorkshire pits, Scargill recommended a return to work. His bluster about taking on the Tories counted for little as he placed sectional and even regional interests before those of the whole working class. While the rank and file revolt may have stayed the Tories hand at the time, the left's role in containing that revolt has allowed them to carry through their programme out of the glare of publicity. Since February 1981 12 of the 23 threatened pits have closed.

This record makes us somewhat more circumspect about Arthur Scargill and the Broad Left in the NUM than the WSL and the IMG seem to be. We start from the position that trade union bureaucrats, left or right, are fundamentally incapable of defending the interests of the working class. Their role is to bargain about those interests when they conflict with the needs of capitalism. Our position is that the interests of the working class must always be asserted against the needs of capitalism. Scargill's record, and that of the Broad Left he represents, has shown increasingly marked tendencies to bargain with and concede to capitalism. This is a warning that militants must take heed of in the build up to the October 28-29th ballot. It is a warning that needs to be acted on now.

Within the NUM militants need to organise themselves both to mobilise the rank and file and challenge every hesitation of the official leadership. They need to organise the nucleus of an alternative rank and file leadership.

Such a leadership would have to fight to overhaul the union. The basis of the NUM's pit organisation is the branch, meeting outside the pit and representing the whole of the workforce. This system is inadequate. It has left the miners with a tradition of merely rudimentary organisation on the job. The branch - which should meet regularly in

work time - must be supplemented by regularly elected representatives of each workteam, each shift and each pit. Such representatives would be the equivalent of shop stewards, more numerous and more accountable than the handful of 'lay' officials who run each branch.

The present system of secret balloting would also need to be replaced by regular sovereign pit-head mass meetings - real democratic forums in which arguments could be put and decisions taken on all major issues. Area organisation should be on the basis of pit-representatives, organised into area committees and empowered to hold local full-time officials to account. And, all full-time officials should be regularly elected and subject to recall.

Scargill should set an example by submitting himself for re-election. Furthermore he, like every other official, should be paid the average wage for miners.

Rank and file militants should organise to fight for this democratic programme. They must also fight for the political transformation of the union. Militants must try to win the miners to an action programme that defends and extends the sectional interests of the miners and links the struggle for those interests to the struggle of the whole working class. Miners must become the conscious vanguard of the working class' struggle against the Tories. The first step in this struggle is to link the miners' wage claim to the NHS workers' claim. Strike with the NHS unions! Support them taking all-out indefinite strike action! Smash the Tories public sector incomes policy! No closures in the mines, no cuts in the social services, no redundancies in either! Meet both the claims in full! Smash Prior's Law! Don't let Tebbit's Bill reach the statute book - Force the TUC to call a General Strike to smash all anti-union laws!

These are the policies militants must organise around. They are the policies that Scargill must be tested on. Illusions in Scargill would be fatal. Rank and file control of him will be vital. Without it there is no guarantee, indeed there is every possibility, that he will go the way of many other 'left' bureaucrats, into the lap of the bosses. ■

by Mike Rooke

GERMANY CONTINUED FROM BACK PAGE

was, in fact, handed to them on a plate by Schmidt himself. His insistence on the need for collaboration between workers and bosses was translated at the governmental level into the coalition with the otherwise unimportant FDP. The real purpose of this alliance was to allow the SPD, which has always been intent on carrying out the policies needed by the bosses, to hide behind the FDP when government practice came into collision with SPD policy. The claim that they were obliged to accept measures which they themselves would not have dreamed of implementing has been a constant refrain of the SPD in the last period. Naturally the policies, when implemented, undermines working class support and it was this gradual attrition of SPD popularity upon which the bourgeoisie decided to concentrate their attack. The idea was that, over a relatively long period, the SPD could be made to appear to have lost its mandate to rule, hanging on to power long after by-elections, local elections and elections to the second chamber had proved that they were no longer the "people's choice". In such a situation a transfer of government power by purely parliamentary means gave the CDU/

CSU/FDP coalition the prospect of going to the polls at the end of the fixed four year life of parliament as a ruling government. All this has now duly taken place - only earlier than was initially intended and in circumstances that could easily benefit the SPD and not the bourgeoisie's own CDU/CSU.

Much was made of Schmidt's manoeuvring in the days before the final vote of no confidence, of how he forced the Liberal FDP to 'come clean' about the policies they really wanted and of how the German electorate, at least in Hesse, rallied to him as the injured party in a cynical and treacherous example of political horse-trading. The Hesse election, and Schmidt's tactics do indeed illustrate some important political points of which revolutionaries in Germany should take note. Firstly, the SPD can still rely on widespread support in circumstances where they can appear as a direct alternative, and opponent of, the openly bourgeois right wing parties. Secondly, that support has a class basis. It is still overwhelmingly the working class which votes for the SPD. Thirdly, Schmidt, and the SPD generally are as committed now as they ever were to

carrying out the policies of the bourgeoisie, with their own methods. This was summed up by Schmidt's repeated insistence that he remained convinced of the need for a new coalition with the 'honest' members of the FDP should he win the confidence vote.

The new government now looks set to embark upon a direct onslaught on the working class. Count Lambsdorff, the FDP Economic minister under Schmidt and now under Kohl, will have the new Chancellor's backing for his austerity programme. This programme will reduce the dole and rent rebates, increase insurance contributions, increase hospital charges, cancel maternity leave benefits and student grants, introduce an incomes policy for all civil servants and reduce starting salaries for teachers.

The working class must be mobilised to oppose this austerity plan. In the first place the SPD itself must not be let off the hook or be allowed to introduce piecemeal and clandestinely what the open bourgeois parties proclaim as their programme. To oppose the Genscher coup either by mobilisations in defence of the Schmidt government or by demanding a new election would be to lead the working class into confusion

either by suggesting that the policies of Schmidt were fundamentally different from those of the CDU/CSU/FDP or by accepting that the real problem is only one of the correct constitutional procedure.

Against such illusion mongering revolutionaries must argue for the mobilisation of the working class in a general strike to thwart the parliamentary coup's objective - the implementation of an austerity plan. Such a general strike could throw back the bourgeoisie's chosen line of attack and lay the basis for preventing Schmidt's implementation of the same programme. Whilst the demand for a general strike has to be made on the leaders of the ADGB (German TUC) no reliance can be placed on them to call it, if they do not then the workers through their own local and plant based organisations should mobilise the strike themselves, especially important given that the political strike is unconstitutional according to German law.

The object of a general strike must be the defence of working class living standards against the bourgeoisie's austerity plans, *not* the call for a general

election. However if an election were to be called the workers must answer:

*Vote SPD continue the strike until all demands are met. Organise to fight!
*For an SPD government which relies on workers' action to force through pro-working class policies. No coalition with the Liberals or any other open parties of the bourgeoisie. The SPD must not be allowed to hide behind the excuse of "preserving a coalition".
*Force the SPD to meet the most pressing needs of the workers:
Defend all jobs. For a 35 hour week and a sliding scale of hours!
Defend the public sector. For a programme of public works!
Defend living standards through a sliding scale of wages!
No attacks on women's rights and jobs!
No attacks on immigrant workers - and the expulsions; full political rights and rights of permanent residence to all immigrant workers!
Out of Nato! Expel all occupying armies! No Cruise or Pershing!

Around these policies the working class can ensure that the end of "social peace" means the beginning of a fight for working class power. ■

AGEING STALINISTS TAKE CAPITALIST ROAD?

THE TWELFTH CONGRESS of the Stalinist Chinese Communist Party (CCP) has completed its work. As expected it brought about few changes in the policies already being pursued by the dominant faction around Deng Xiaoping. As is always the case in the internal proceedings of the Stalinist parties the Congress was only held when the dominant faction was sure that it would rubber-stamp its policies and sanction the defeat of rival factions within the ruling bureaucracy. In fact, the main function of the congress was to confirm, in retrospect, the policies of the dominant group in the CCP since they succeeded in removing the "Gang of Four".

The Congress took place at a time when the faction around Deng Xiaoping was confident that it had successfully suppressed the major forces of opposition to its rule. The leaders of the old "Gang of Four" have been put through their own show trial and sentenced. The confident Deng has decided not to carry out the execution of Jiang Qing-Mao's widow. The majority of the supporters of the Gang of Four have been routed in subsequent 'Reversals of verdicts' in the localities. Grassroot opposition from the 'Democratic Dissidents', which flourished in the aftermath of the turmoil that accompanied Deng's return to power, has been suppressed by harassment, detention without trial and - in those rare situations where trials have taken place - extremely severe sentences.

In spite of speculation that the oldest members of the Standing Committee and the Politburo would stand down, nothing of the sort took place. In fact the 12th Congress set up another ruling body - the Party Advisory Council - in order to accommodate the ageing leaders of Deng's faction. The Congress confirmed the new leadership of Hu Yaobang as the Party General Secretary, and Premier Zhao Ziyang. Both Hu and Zhao are proteges of Deng. There is no doubt that Deng will be able to continue wielding power through them.

Deng can also maintain his control through his ally Ye Jiang Ying on the Military Affairs Committee and his own position as the effective head of the People's Liberation Army. He remains a member of the standing committee of the Politburo.

Deng further secured his position in the CCP by removing Hua Guofeng from the Politburo. Hua was the successor appointed personally by Mao on the recommendation that 'With you in charge, I am at ease'. Hua had endorsed all the major Gang of Four policies including the bloody suppression of mass demonstration of 100,000 citizens in Tiananmen square against Mao and the Gang of Four in 1976. Congress criticised Hua for what it termed 'leftist' leanings and blamed him for the delay in outlawing the slogans and policies that dated from the cultural revolution. Hua was also criticised for sanctioning over-ambitious investments in 120 heavy industrial projects which have been hurriedly cancelled by the Deng faction.

Hua was not the only prominent figure to lose his position. Congress agreed to set up a Central Commission for Discipline charged with overseeing a rectification campaign and a re-registration of all party members next year. This is officially aimed at purging the party of corrupt and dishonest members but will serve to further root out anti-Deng elements among the 39 million party members - many of whom joined the party and rose to power during the Cultural Revolution.

Changes in the party constitution led to the deletion of allegiance to Mao as the 'Great Leader' and the main task of the Party is now to achieve the modernisation of China.

The Congress met against the background of mounting evidence of stagnation and crisis in the planned economy. Congress endorsed the report of General Secretary Hu and his proposals on the 6th Five Year Plan with regard to the tasks of the 4 Modernisations. The Plan does little more than sanction what has already been in practice over the last two years. Its most important features are the opening up of China to the West and the dramatic decentralising of the domestic economy. This is the strategy of the Deng faction for delivering the Chinese economy from the ten 'bad years' after the Cultural Revolution and its present economic stagnation.

All the indicators highlight the very serious crisis that has hit the Chinese economy. Growth rates in industrial production over the last three years have remained low. The absolute value of heavy industrial production suffered an estimated decline of 5% in 1980. [Far East Economic Review 11.12.81] Likewise grain output fell by 5% in 1980 compared to 1979 and energy output decreased by 2.9%. [October Review] The government was faced with a high financial deficit of 17.06 billion Renminbi (RMB) in 1980.

The inflation rate rose to 5.6% in 1979 and is expected to reach double figures in 1982. Though workers' wages and peasant incomes have officially increased by 10-20% over the last two years through bonuses and increased prices for agricultural products, real incomes have in fact declined. Premier Zhao Ziyang was forced to admit that "serious financial and economic crises are latent" and if unredeemed, will develop into "explosive crises." [October Review.]

Faced with this crisis the Chinese Stalinists are moving to strengthen China's dependence on Western capitalism and the operation of capitalist market mechanisms within the planned economy. In the hands of the bureaucracy the planned economy necessarily stagnates under the dead weight of corrupt parasitical management. In order to drag themselves out of the impasse the Stalinist bureaucracies of East Europe as well as China historically look to the piecemeal adoption of capitalist mechanisms to bale them out. Either the working class will overthrow the bureaucracy and take the planned economy into its own hands, developing its full potential, or the bureaucracy will progressively dismantle the plan, the state monopoly of foreign trade and place China once more in the hands of the institutions of world imperialism.

Deng stated during the Congress that China would run its own affairs while "unswervingly following a policy of opening to the outside world" [Guardian 2.9.82] This means increasingly China is taking steps towards integration in the world trade system. This November it will be sending observers to the ministerial session of the General Agreement of Trade and Tariff (GATT). It had been anticipated that China would eventually join GATT, ever since Peking became a member of the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund in 1980. The price China will have to pay for the benefits of GATT membership will be the 'liberalisation' of its own import and trade procedures. Similarly the IMF made conditions for China's membership and loans, for example by insisting on an agreement to abolish the present system of dual exchange rates for internal and external currency transaction.

The World Bank's report on the Chinese economy [FEER 14.8.81] suggested the use of high capital inflow in the form of foreign loans to fuel economic growth. This line was dutifully adopted by the 5th National People's Congress in December 1981.



Deng and Thatcher

The budget for China in 1981 included in its revenue foreign loans worth 8 billion RMB (4.76 billion US dollars) mostly made up of purchasers credit. Wei Yuming, Vice Chairman of the Foreign Investment agency gave the figure of 17.3 billion US dollars for the last two years loan agreements with various governments and organisations, including 400 million US dollars from the World Bank, the Japanese Overseas Economic Corporation Fund and the Japanese Export Import Bank. China now faces debt servicing costs amounting to 15% of its total debts. Some of this will be paid in coal, oil and non-ferrous metals, the remainder must be paid with scarce foreign currency.

China is relaxing its restrictions on foreign investments and has approved of 29 joint-venture projects and more than 400 co-production schemes as well as compensation trade to the value of 1.5 billion US dollars. An oil deal struck with the US company Arco is an example of what these openings to foreign capital and technology will mean. Though the terms are secret, it is believed that the US company will pay for the cost of exploration in the South China Sea and, if successful, will recover these costs when production starts. The Chinese state obtains about 90% of the oilfields profit and the company receives 10%. Moreover, Chinese officials indicated further concessions with a low 30-35% foreign corporate tax rate, creditable against tax liabilities in the US.

Other measures are being used to woo foreign investors. In some industries, tax exemption is offered for the first year and reduction in subsequent years. Under a generous joint-venture agreement the foreign partner provides technology in return for royalty payments. For 2 years after the joint venture ends or the operation reverts to the Chinese partner, royalty payments will continue at 3 times the average paid in the last 3 years of the joint venture.

Little wonder then that Mrs Thatcher, on her recent trip to China, attempted to clinch deals for British Companies such as Cable and Wireless and GEC to build a nuclear power station and a microwave telecommunication system in Guangdong. The imperialists are all eager to cash in on the bureaucracy's 'liberalisation' programme.

Further more, a new plan put before the State Council recently gave new economic autonomy to 11 coastal provinces. Like the smaller special economic zones (SEZ), these Special Economic Areas (SEA) no longer require prior central government approval on matters concerning imports, customs duties, foreign exchange, interest rates, concessions on loans and investment projects. These zones will come increasingly to resemble the foreign concession areas in pre-1949 China. The other key element in Deng's strategy to revive China's economy is the decentralisation of the domestic economy. This 'restructuring' and 'readjustment' shifts the responsibility for investment and sources of investment onto individual enterprises and banks. Since 1980 China has gradually been converting state owned 'administrative corporations' into 'enterprise corporations' responsible for their own profits and losses. Tax is paid to the central government on profits earned rather than all profits being remitted to the state as before. At the same time, prices have gradually been adjusted to reflect more closely the actual market condition for producer goods and finished materials. This 'profit retention' system gives considerable leeway to enterprises to decide how much of their profit will be reinvested and how much will be distributed to management and workers as bonuses.

Coupled with this is the switch over to credit financing of the enterprises. Instead of being allocated state funds for capital investments, state enterprises are now free to request medium and short-term loans from the People's Bank of China. Within certain stated limits, enterprises can set their own production quota, arrange to buy or sell to other enterprises, and to export finished goods. At present enterprises are allowed to arrange imports but have to receive permission to purchase foreign currency from the central economic agencies.

The centralised planned economy in China is therefore being partially dismantled and transformed into a new system that incorporates features of the market economy. At the moment the state retains overall control through its allocation of loans to each sector - for example in 1980 2 million RMB

was allocated to equipment and installation and 3 million RMB to priority industries. But it is increasingly relying on the economic levers of the market economy to indirectly control the level of investments in the various sectors through controlling interest rates, the supply of credit and tax rates. This policy was summed up by Hu Yaobang in the report he made to the 12th Party Congress:

"Enterprises may be allowed to arrange their production flexibly in accordance with the changes in market supply and demand. The state for its part should exercise control through policies, decrees and administrate by industrial and commercial offices and should help those enterprises with the supply of certain important raw and semi-finished materials". [FEER 10.9.82]

The same tendency is reflected in the official encouragement and inducement for private enterprises. In the same speech Hu reiterated the position that planning took precedence but added:

"A number of small commodities which are low in output value, great in variety and produced and supplied only seasonally and locally need not and cannot be controlled by planning." [FEER 10.9.82]

New regulations allow private enterprises to hire up to 2 persons and take on 4 apprentices. The private entrepreneur can open a bank account and borrow the initial capital from the Bank of China. This has led to a mushrooming of small enterprises, especially in retailing - there has been a dramatic increase in the number of shops selling craft wares, fresh food, fruit, vegetables and meat as well as restaurants and snack stalls. The density of retail shops has doubled in 3 years and the self-employed now make up 16% of employment in the retail sector. This has been useful for the Stalinists as a means of absorbing the urban unemployment. Private retailing, however, remains limited to those items not designated Category 1 and 2 goods: grain, oil, cotton, certain industrial and medical materials.

Parallel to this is a partial de-collectivisation of agriculture. The Communes' land has been divided up into small parts for cultivation by households or labour groups. It is estimated that 50% of the collective units, particularly in the richer areas, have taken up this 'production responsibility' system. While the state maintains acreage quotas for all major crops, peasant households are either contracted by the collective for specific work or are free to grow what they like in an allocated area as long as they are able to meet the state quota and the collective's levy. This has resulted in the short space of 2 years in a sharpening of marked differences in peasant incomes between those who have the skill and money to invest in fertiliser and other inputs, and those without.

Deng has always been fond of saying that 'it does not matter whether a cat is black or white as long as it catches mice.' Bourgeois commentators lavish praise on such statements as examples of 'pragmatism' and 'realism'. In fact this saying gives full expression to the degenerate cynicism of the Chinese Stalinist bureaucracy. They owe their power to the overthrow of capitalism in China but they stand to lose all their power and privileges should the workers and peasants of China take the post-capitalist property forms into their own hands and commence the construction of a socialist economy. They therefore preside over a property form that they cannot render dynamic or stable because they must at all times deny the toilers themselves all democratic rights.

Faced with crises and stagnation they are driven to apply capitalist recipes to patch the economy together rather than risk losing their power and privileges at the hands of the workers. And the application of those remedies serves to accelerate the process of disintegration of the post-capitalist property form. Sections of the bureaucracy - notably based around the military and heavy industry - have periodically attempted to block individual measures of decentralisation and reform. But in China, as in all the other workers' states, no major section of the bureaucracy has any lasting or viable alternative solution to the stagnation of the planned economies. The Chinese Stalinists' Congress highlights the indisputable fact that the bureaucracies remain an objective force for the restoration of capitalism in the workers' states. Only the destruction of bureaucratic rule through political revolution can save the working class from paying the price of the bankrupt policies of the Stalinists. ■

by Din Wong

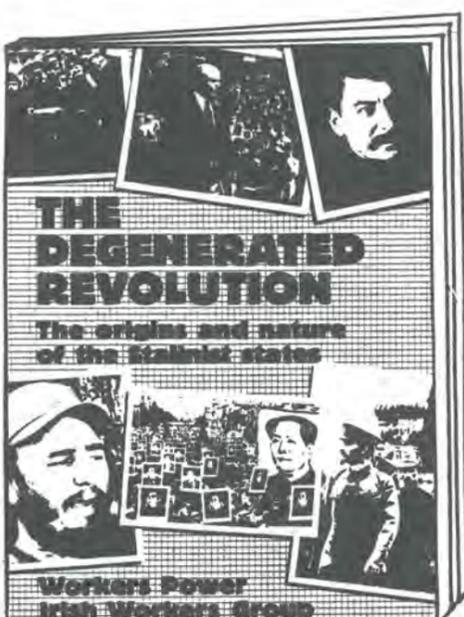
In order to launch the publication of *The Degenerated Revolution* - a new book from Workers Power and the Irish Workers Group, Workers Power is organising a day of lectures, debates and discussion on the topics covered in "The Degenerated Revolution".

The aim of the day is to stimulate wide-ranging discussion on the British Left about a question that continues to cause confusion in its ranks. To this end we will be inviting speakers from the major tendencies on the British left, challenging them to test their theories on the nature of the Soviet Union, Eastern Europe etc, in debate with us.

Plenary sessions will be organised to allow plenty of time for discussion. We urge all those interested in resolving a burning theoretical issue with enormous practical revolutionary significance to attend this event. All are welcome.

Date: Saturday November 13th
Time: 10.45 Registration; 11.00 start;
Venue: Digbeth Civic Hall, Birmingham.
Tickets: £1 waged 50p unwaged

Agenda:
11.00 - 1.00 Plenary: "The Degeneration of the Russian Revolution"
1.00 - 2.00 Lunch break
2.00 - 4.30 Debates on: "Is Russia a workers state?"
"The Cuban Revolution and Castroism"
"The theory of structural assimilation"
4.30 - 5.00 Break
5.00 - 7.00 Plenary: "Stalinism - what it is and how to fight it".



Copies of "The Degenerated Revolution" are now available, price £2 (plus 40p p & p).

Orders for the book and for tickets for the debate should be sent to:
Workers Power, BCM Box 7750, LONDON WC1N 3XX (Cheques payable to Workers Power)

workers power

Health workers:

RANK AND FILE MUST TAKE LEAD NOW!

THE THATCHER GOVERNMENT has decided to try and defeat the health workers by dramatically upping the stakes in the dispute. The widely publicised 'Think Tank' report, which proposed a short-term programme of scrapping the NHS altogether was a blatant provocation to the health workers. While it has been shelved for the time being (out of electoral consideration) its objective of savaging the NHS and boosting private medicine is still being pursued by the Tories.

For the Tories, defeating the health workers is integral to their strategy of dismantling the health service albeit bit by bit. This is what the bosses are now openly clamouring for. In an attack on Thatcher from the right Walter Goldsmith of the influential Institute of Directors complained, 'The greatest failure of the Thatcher government and that giving greatest concern to its business supporters is the fact that it has proved unable to reduce the 45% of gross national product consumed by the public sector.' Through a programme of gradual cuts and gradual closures the Tories aim to deliver the goods to their backers.

As well as cuts the Tories have thrown down another gauntlet - the 3.5% pay limit for the public sector in the coming pay round. While Fowler has offered health workers an extra 1/2% on top for next year, this incomes policy is explicitly designed to condemn the public sector to permanent low pay.

It makes the present dispute all the more vital for thousands of workers in the health and throughout the public sector. Victory for the health workers now can mean defeat for a cornerstone of the Tories pay strategy.

Last month we argued that the trade union bureaucrats at the head of the

health service unions, principally Spanswick of COHSE and Bickerstaffe of NUPE were squandering the rank and file militancy that could win the dispute. Now after the Tories' provocation and after the day of action in which hundreds of thousands showed their readiness to fight, those same leaders continue on their disastrous course.

The way to win the strike is to launch an all-out indefinite strike in the health service (with emergency cover being decided on by the health workers themselves) combined with solidarity strike action from other sections of workers. With the government's 3.5% pay limit and the NCB's refusal to grant the miners' claim the case for solidarity is strengthened. The pay fight can be broadened by workers bringing forward their claims and striking alongside the health workers.

However, no such calls can be heard from Congress House. Furthermore Spanswick, Bickerstaffe and co are in fact opposed to such a determined course of action.

For example, when London's ambulance men decided overwhelmingly to go on strike on September 22nd they were immediately rounded on by Spanswick and NUPE's National Officer Bob Jones. Instead of support the ambulance men received exhortations to abide by the management's emergency cover schemes.

Bickerstaffe on the day of action could offer only more days of action. He refused to use the platform to call for the implementation of NUPE's conference policy on an indefinite all-out strike. In arguments with Workers Power health workers after his speech Bickerstaffe maintained that he was not prepared to go any further than the TUC health services committee and was definitely not willing to launch a campaign in support of NUPE's policy aimed at the rank and file of the other unions.

Bickerstaffe may sound more militant than Spanswick, but then words are cheap. When it comes down to it he accepts Spanswick's strategy of allowing this strike, like a popular show, to run and run. Spanswick summed this up say-

ing, 'The TUC campaign will now get much harder and there will be more thrust to it. This campaign will go on indefinitely' He also insisted, 'We are not in the business to have a national strike as such because a national strike is used to bring down governments.'

If the government falls because of a national strike to win fair pay for health workers then so much the better. But, if the campaign is dragged on "indefinitely" then the government stands every chance of riding out the dispute. The militancy will be worn down by days of action, like the coming series of rolling strikes, which appear increasingly pointless to many workers. Militants must act now to check this sorry tale of misleadership. They must mobilise the militancy that exists and not allow it to be dissipated. They must take the dispute out of the hands of the bureaucrats and place it in the hands of the rank and file.

The build up to September 22nd and events since then show how this can be done. In Sheffield and Leicester Workers Power health workers played a vital role in organising rank and file actions. Our regular health workers bulletin, *Red Pulse*, has repeatedly put the case for indefinite strike action. Its influence played a role in winning the majority of the Sheffield hospitals, for example, to support a call for indefinite action. Our supporters played a leading role in getting the Area Joint Shop Stewards Committee to make direct appeals to rank and file workers in the steel and engineering industry. As a result both industries were almost solid in their support for the day of action. At the Laycocks Engineering plant, for example, after a mass meeting addressed by a Workers Power health worker, a vote of 600-29 decided to strike for the day.

This militancy and the links that have been established must be built upon. In Leicester the Health Strike Co-ordinating Committee has taken important steps in doing just this. It has established an Action Committee open to delegates from unions who took action on the 22nd and is convening a local con-



ference of rank and file delegates to discuss taking the dispute forward. Also it has called for a national conference of delegates from health workers' stewards and strike committee in late October. This call has been endorsed by Nether Edge hospital joint shop stewards committee in Sheffield. Every militant in the NHS must build for this conference. It could become the springboard for organising a rank and file alternative leadership to the ditherers in the TUC health service committee. This conference, which must be open to resolutions from all delegating bodies and must be conducted in an open and democratic

fashion, must commit delegates to building co-ordinated indefinite strike action. The weakness before has been that areas taking such action did so in isolation. This conference can ensure that this is no longer the case. It must resolve to organise the maximum forces in co-ordinated strike action to win the full 12% with the officials' support if it can win it, without it if it can't.

Details of the Conference can be obtained from:
Ron Giles,
The Pharmacy,
Nether Edge Hospital,
Sheffield.

Germany: the end of social peace

TWO WEEKS OF Parliamentary parlour games have resulted in a new government for the Federal Republic of Germany. The 13-year old coalition of the Social Democrats (SPD) and the Liberals (FDP) ended on September 17th after the SPD Chancellor, Helmut Schmidt, challenged Genscher's FDP to choose whether or not to stay in the government on the SPD's terms. Genscher defected and now, after a "constructive vote of no confidence" a new conservative coalition of the Christian Democrats and Bavarian Christian Socialists (CDU/CSU) and FDP has taken office, with the right-wing Helmut Kohl at its head. A general election has been postponed until March 1983.

This parliamentary coup marks an important change in the policy of the German bourgeoisie and heralds a concerted attack by them on the living standards of the German working class. However, their strategy of bringing down Schmidt via blatant manipulation of parliamentary procedure, rather than by for-

cing a general election, underlies their uncertainty about how to deal with the increasingly obvious impact of the world recession on the German economy.

The policies of 'social peace' associated with the SPD-FDP coalition have begun to conflict with capitalism's needs. These policies, which ensure high productivity through the granting of important concessions to the working class in the form of high living standards, can no longer be afforded. Unemployment is steadily rising, currently standing at 7.8%. Two million on the dole in Europe rope's showpiece economy indicates a slowing down of growth rates and investment in West German industry. Furthermore the enormous cost to the state of unemployment benefits is becoming intolerable for the capitalists. Benefits account for 38% of all of West Germany's social spending having risen from 15 billion US Dollars in 1960 to a staggering 250 billion in 1981. With Schmidt and the SPD committed to retaining these levels of spending, indeed preparing an expansion of public spending (albeit only a short-term cosmetic one), the bourgeoisie were forced to use the FDP to provide a governmental crisis and clear the way for an austerity budget. It was significant that on the day the

coalition collapsed prices on the Frankfurt stock exchange rose sharply, showing finance capital's seal of approval for the parliamentary coup.

Genscher's gamble, as The Economist has dubbed it, was an undoubted risk. The nondescript CDU leader Kohl is not the ideal saviour that the bourgeoisie would like to see become Chancellor. However they were prompted to take the risk because of a fear that the SPD would not be able to convince the working class to take the necessary cut in living standards required in the interests of capitalist profitability.

History has often shown the experience of a social democratic party in government (that is to say a party supported by the workers as 'their' party but nonetheless a party which rules solely in the interests of the bourgeoisie) leads to a whittling away of its mass support as promises are broken and pledges left unfulfilled. Rapidly rising unemployment and the partial, even total collapse of giant firms and traditional industries (for example the technical bankruptcy of AEG Telefunken and the demise of the steel industry of the Ruhr) have resulted in increasingly militant mobilisations of the trade unions. Trade Union leaders, the SPD's willing allies in the

class collaboration of the long boom, have been under increasing pressure to speak out against the SPD's attempts to force the working class to pay the costs of the crisis in terms of jobs, living standards and cuts in unemployment pay.

Parallel to these developments the developing conflict with the US, illustrated by, but by no means limited to, the Siberian pipeline were an important factor in the German bourgeoisie's calculations. The SPD was identified in the public mind both nationally and internationally with the 'Ostpolitik' that is, increasing trade with the Soviet bloc and the avoidance of outright political confrontation. The public feuding within the SPD over the stationing of the Cruise and Pershing missiles in West Germany was further proof, for the capitalist, that the SPD was rapidly outliving its immediate usefulness and had to be replaced by a new government committed to both a material and ideological offensive on the working class.

Their problem over the last two years has been how to achieve such a government given the SPD victory in the 1980 elections. The chosen strategy

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