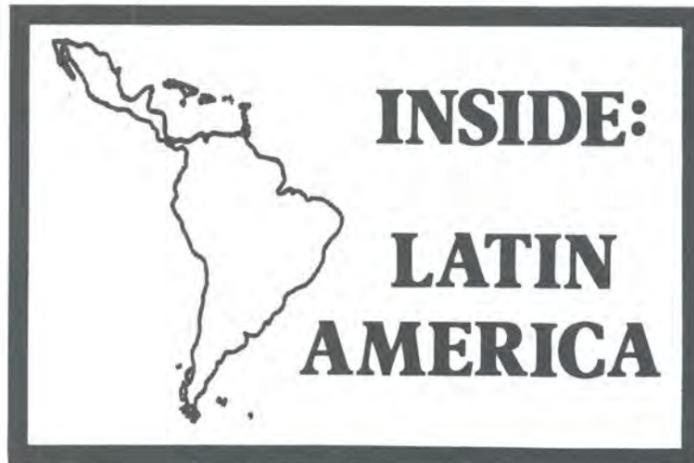


Workers Power

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the knowledge that the union leaders had scuttled the possibility of a united fight back. A serious defeat for the working class was in the making. The TUC merely had to put the finishing touches to it. The NGA responded to the largest fine against a union in history, £525,000, on December 9th, with the threat of a national one day strike. Once again Wade was handing it to the right wing in the TUC on a plate. He was refusing to mount a serious challenge to the courts that could have sparked a generalised strike wave. As a result Murray was able to overturn EPOC's decision to adopt a "sympathetic and supportive attitude" to the strike at a full General Council meeting on Wednesday December 14th. This day will go down as a day of betrayal and defeat. The 29 to 21 vote *not* to support the NGA allowed Wade to call off the one day strike with impunity. He turned around and blamed the TUC without at the same time challenging that decision with mass rank and file action.

The whole spectacle was sickening. Yet it fitted perfectly with the strike-breaking role that the bosses want the TUC to fulfil. Lord Marsh of the NPA expressed it well on the eve of the TUC's betrayal, "The only people who can apply pressure and influence now are the TUC General Council, and I think they will probably do it." The bosses certainly had the measure of men like Murray - lickspittles. Murray's reward was praise from every section of the bourgeoisie. Thatcher herself recognised his contribution, "I welcome the gracious action of the General secretary of the TUC." she stated. The bosses recognise and welcome the scale of the TUC's treachery. Militants must recognise and organise against it.

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Direct action by rank and file workers upsets the normal pattern of these professional negotiators. It constantly threatens to get out of their control. As such it is a challenge to their power and position. This is why they have a very real interest in settling disputes quickly, even if the settlements fall well short of their members' interests. Of course the bureaucrats use the members and, now and again, use them to take action to strengthen their bargaining power. This, however, leads them to use the members as a stage army, to be marched up and down at their pleasure.

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It was the distinct interests of the bureaucracy that led them, as a whole, to stab the NGA in the back. The Trade Union leaders are set on trying to re-establish their role as tame negotiators with the Tories. The confrontation with the law threatened to scupper their sweetheart relationship with King before it had really got going. Moreover the spectre of mass rank and file action on a scale that would quite simply engulf the bureaucrats, terrified them. To avoid it they were prepared to hand the Tories a decisive victory and sacrifice the NGA.

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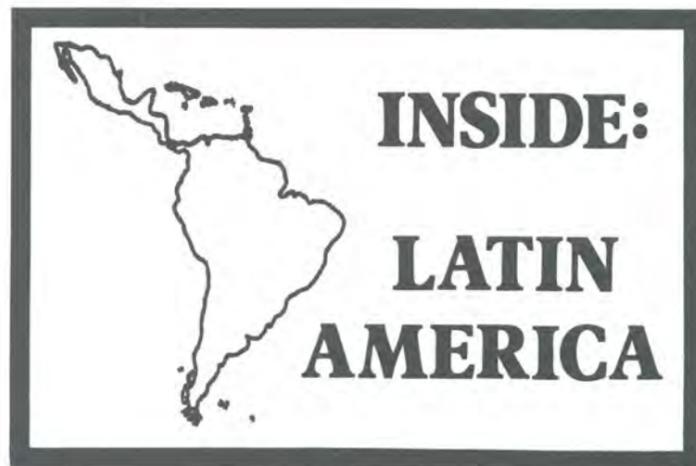
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INSIDE:
LATIN
AMERICA

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If these measures are fought for and implemented the unions can be transformed and put on war footing to fight the Tories. At present however only a small minority of militant workers are prepared to do battle with the traitorous TUC leaders. That minority itself does not have the organisational weight or the political confidence to prevent the rotten betrayals of December. That is why we say that the burning task facing us now is to organise the militant minority in every workplace, in every union and across the unions. They must be organised not in docile electoral caucuses like the Broad Left coalition that fell apart the moment the courts took action against the POEU. They must be organised for struggle and to win the argument for class struggle amongst the mass of rank and file workers.

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I.R.A. BOMBINGS

ON 17th DECEMBER an I.R.A. car bomb outside Harrods - the "top people's store" - killed six people, including three police officers. Even more than previous bombings, this attack has called forth a torrent of hypocritical rage from the bourgeoisie and their press. The gutter press screamed "Evil Bastards" and "Savages" from front page banner headlines. Each funeral has been carefully televised and used as a propaganda vehicle against the IRA. Thatcher herself cashed in on the bombing during her trip to the north of Ireland, playing her favourite Iron Britannia role.

Yet the papers and the television, the politicians and commentators are far from even-handed in their concern for the victims of the Irish war. They dutifully ignore the repeated crimes committed against the Irish nationalist population in the Six Counties, which lead to the war being brought to the mainland. They conveniently forget the massacre of 14 civilians on Bloody Sunday eleven years ago. They choose to never mention the fourteen innocent people (half of them children) killed over the last several years by the British army's plastic bullets. Their bereaved families are never interviewed to explain why they cannot forgive British imperialism for these murders.

A car bomb planted outside a place that "symbolises everything they hate about the English" (*Sunday Mirror*) - its imperialist grandeur and obscene luxuries - merits full press attention. Yet when Tory and Labour governments alike plant anonymous SAS death squads in the heart of the nationalist community, nobody here is informed of the actions of these "evil bastards". Rest assured, however, the SAS never give their victims the benefit of a 37 minute warning.

Labour's "friends of Ireland" have joined the chorus of attacks on the IRA. Ken Livingstone said "I am horrified at this appalling crime...I hope that those responsible will be quickly caught". *Tribune* moans that "the bombings have made it difficult if not impossible, for mainstream politicians to associate themselves with the Irish republican cause" (30/12/83). Even *Socialist Worker* can't resist stating "No one can fail to condemn the bombing" (24.12.83).

The plain truth is that the reformist "friends of Ireland" are fairweather friends, and the SWP has never been able to stand against the anti-IRA prejudices of British workers. Workers Power defends the right of the IRA, which enjoys majority support amongst the oppressed workers in the Six Counties, to conduct their resistance when and how they see fit, and to this end we must resist the wave of condemnation in the unions and workplaces. As revolutionary communists we do not think that the bombing campaign - whether directed at ruling class shops, the Household Cavalry or economic targets - is a correct strategy. We say this because it will not force Britain to pull out of Ireland.

Only the mass, political, direct action of the 32 county working class, with British workers in active solidarity, can do that. The strategy of a guerrilla campaign separate from a mass struggle to defeat the British is, in fact, self-defeating. It actually leads to the demobilisation of the masses and the substitution of a small armed elite.

However, our criticism is subordinate to our solidarity with the struggle to remove British troops, British sovereignty and British control from the north of Ireland. The North was a creation of Britain designed to serve British imperialism. The Unionist "majority" is an artificial entity. It is far from being a majority in Ireland as a whole and oppresses the nationalist minority in the northern state that British imperialism maintains with armed force.

For these reasons we understand why the IRA make strikes on the mainland, and fully defend their right to do so. They are the extension of a justified war of national liberation. A sad fact of war is that civilians get killed. This does not alter our understanding of the war in Ireland, and it does not alter our support for the anti-imperialist fighters in that war. For that reason we do not make a distinction between "legitimate" and "innocent" targets, even though we may criticise the choice of targets and method of struggle. Our support is unconditional.

In the weeks and months ahead, the tasks for socialists and militants are clear, if difficult. We must oppose the attempt by the Tories to rush through even more draconian legislation in the shape of the Prevention of Terrorism Bill. The existing one, renewed every six months, is already being used to harass the Irish republicans and solidarity activists in the wake of the bombing. We must campaign for a dropping of all charges, the release of those detained under the PTA, and the repeal of the Act. The Home Secretary Leon Brittan is confident that Labour MP's opposition in December to a new permanent PTA will be dropped in the wake of the bombing. Given the condemnation of the IRA by Kinnock and Soley, this is possible. We must campaign to prevent it.

It is unlikely that Sinn Fein will be banned because of practical difficulties, but Prior is actively canvassing the use of incitement laws to arrest and detain prominent Irish republican leaders such as Gerry Adams. This would be more damaging than a legal ban. Labour Party and union activists must continue to invite Adams and others over to put their case, more necessary now than before.

Finally, one immediate casualty of the hypocrisy and repression may be the Bloody Sunday Commemoration March in Sheffield on January 29th. To prevent this being banned, every sympathiser must become an activist and build for a big turn-out to commemorate the massacre of twice as many innocent victims of terror as were killed at Harrods. The message of the march must be loud and clear. Brittan and the police have said time and again since the bombing: "there is nothing we can do to prevent these bombings". This is a lie. If British workers want to see an end to this suffering, then they have a duty to get British troops out of the north and allow the whole of Ireland to determine its own future. ■

GRENADA'S DOSE OF WESTERN DEMOCRACY



U.S. paratrooper and stogie policeman lead away a detainee.

"Now that the ideological future of Grenada is assured, we feel this is the big take off". This was how the leader of a group of US businessmen from Fort Lauderdale aptly summed up their view of the future of Grenada. Perhaps "big rip off" would have been a more appropriate description of their plans for Grenada. They were there to secure tax and land concessions to acquire prime sites for two new US owned luxury tourist hotels.

While what Newsweek described as "a second invasion" of US businessmen prospected around the Island, the purported reasons for the first invasion, to "restore democracy", was looking even more thread bare than at the time. The so called "Governing Council", launched with a fanfare of publicity as proof of US intention to hand over power to Grenadians, was quickly exposed as a hollow sham.

The man chosen to become "acting Prime Minister", deputy Secretary General of UNCTAD, Meredith McIntyre declined the post on grounds of "ill health". This was quickly followed by Anthony Rushford, British Government advisor and architect of the 1974 Grenada Constitution resigning as Attorney General and denouncing the Governor Sir Paul Scoon as a "little Caesar" who ignored the Council. In fact Scoon bears little relation to a Caesar except in pretensions. Real power in the Islands after the invasion lay with two men - the US ambassador, Charles Gillespie, and the head of US forces in Grenada, Major General Jack Farris. The Americans had no intention of handing over power to the council of "experts", preferring to rule through their stooge Scoon. Thus all important decisions are taken at a daily meeting involving Gillespie, Scoon and the head of the Caribbean "Peacekeeping" force the Jamaican Lieutenant Colonel Leroy Ormsby.

It quickly became apparent what the Americans meant by the need for a preparatory period before elections could be held. Over two thousand people picked up and interrogated by the occupation forces, and over 1000 jailed at one time or another. This was part of a deliberate policy of intimidating the population and gathering information on New Jewel Movement supporters. Kendrick Radix, prominent NJM member, imprisoned after the Coard/Hudson coup, was picked up and held in one of the US army "isolation centres" before being released and banned from "anti-government activities". This is an injunction which covers virtually any criticism of the US/Scoon administration. Thirty seven people at least, remain held at Richmond Hill jail without charge or trial and, amidst allegations of ill treatment have been refused permission to see lawyers or even a visiting of US Congressmen who asked to interview them. In a typical display of "even handedness" Scoon has just pardoned those sentenced to death for the bomb outrage at Queenspark when 3 women died and 100 were injured after right wingers attempted to assassinate

Maurice Bishop.

Meanwhile the US "Psychological Operations Unit" has been working overtime to win the "hearts and minds" of the Grenadians. While unable as yet to attack Maurice Bishop because of his personal popularity, they have concentrated on exposing the "Marxist threat" from which they supposedly rescued Grenada. Helicopters still hover over mythical Cuban guerilla units calling on them to surrender, while the American Aid mission floats stories about how Bishop's government "looted" the economy for their own gain. They are aided in this by the timely, and well financed reappearance of the "the Grenadian Voice" a rabidly anti-NJM and pro-American rag whose editor Leslie Pierre was imprisoned under Bishop.

However the US is still in no position to ensure that a sufficiently servile government would emerge from any elections held immediately. The popularity of Bishop's policies - his government's reforms in health, education and the economy - would still pose a threat if the NJM or a successor party was able to organise freely during the elections. Thus the US Government and the lickspittle British journalists persistently harp on the "political vacuum" which exists in Grenada. This is used to justify the delay, sometimes floated as being anything up to two years, before elections can be held. The US is using this period to generate a victory for a pliable client party.

It is aided in this by the fact that the NJM is in a severe state of disarray. The NJM was always a small party, never more than 300 strong, which drew its mass support from the popularity of Bishop. Because of the nature of the party, the policies of which were decided by a small group within the leadership, the sudden appearance of divisions within it and subsequent bloody internecine conflict have virtually destroyed it. Its former militants are largely passive and demoralised and its mass support, with Bishop gone, dissipated.

Certainly the Scoon administration and any which follow it will face growing problems and discontent as they roll back the few remaining gains of the Bishop era. Work on the airport remains at a standstill and measures such as free milk for mothers and babies and aid for cooperative farms and agriculture has been suspended. Urban doctors, nurses and dentists are replaced temporarily with US army personnel but with no long term commitment to stay. The US government's sole effort on unemployment has so far been limited to paying some unemployed Grenadians to fill in pot holes and cut the weeds at the road side!

Their real priority is revealed by the fact that \$12 million of the \$15 million "US aid" programme has gone to training the Caribbean Peacekeeping Force (CPF). Britain has contributed £1.5 million to this important task. The much publicised departure of the remaining two thousand

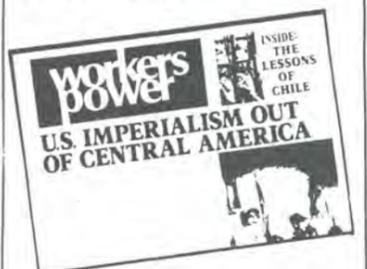
soldiers of the invasion force before Christmas disguised the fact that over 300 military "advisors" police and technical personnel were staying in Grenada indefinitely. As one journalist pointed out this is six times the number of Cuban military advisors that were on the island before the American invasion.

The role of this military presence is not only to ensure continued imperialist control over Grenada itself - the advisors were busy training a Grenadian para-military police force and have already opened fourteen police posts throughout the island, but to establish the CPF as a regional land based security force in the Caribbean. A joint Caribbean para-military police force of the six nations supporting the invasion plus the new Grenadian force will be the first line of defence against any repetition of the Grenadian revolution in any of these or other states in the region. As the US Department of Commerce declared when certifying Grenada for "Overseas Private Investment Insurance Status" the US action "has served notice on any Marxist nonsense anywhere in the Caribbean." ■

by Stuart King

workers power

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ANOTHER RETREAT FOR ARAFAT

UNTIL THE LAST week in December 1983, all the bourgeois regimes of the Arab world treated Egypt's President Mubarak as an outcast. Under President Sadat Egypt had signed a peace treaty with Israel (Camp David 1979) which served to further expose the weaker Arab states to the full force of the Zionist state's expansionist ambitions. The Palestinian people's fight for a state of their own - based as it has been on winning the support of conservative Arab bourgeoisies rather than the independent class mobilisations of the Palestinian workers and poor peasants - received a severe setback as Sadat cut loose Egypt's lines of support to the PLO. Mubarak inherited this legacy and has been true to it.

The logical outcome of this fragmentation has been unbridled Israeli aggression. This culminated in the June 1982 invasion of the Lebanon, the progressive destruction of Palestinian bases there and a *de facto* annexation of the territory south of the Awali river.

Despite Egypt's role Arafat proceeded to Cairo for the first time since 1977 immediately after he and 4,060 of his fighters were expelled from Tripoli on December 18/19th. He embraced Mubarak and hailed him as a "champion of the recovery of

With the expulsion of the PLO from Beirut in September 1982, the simmering disputes within the PLO surfaced. The faction led by Abu Musa revolted, laying the blame for the military defeat suffered at the hands of Israel squarely on Arafat's shoulders. They blamed the defeat on his reliance upon the goodwill of the imperialists (particularly the Europeans) and the conservative Arab states to achieve a Palestinian state.

They further criticised Arafat's decision to surrender Beirut without a fight as leading to the massacres of Palestinians in the Sabra and Chatilla refugee camps. They opposed Arafat's project of a West Bank state at the mercy of the Jordanian regime which was responsible for the Black September massacre of Palestinian militants. It was these divisions pressed to a military conclusion in North Lebanon over the last 8 months that finally led to Arafat's defeat and exodus from Tripoli.

While the grievances of many of the PLO guerrillas were genuinely felt and justified the political leadership of Abu Musa is equally bankrupt and offers no new departure for the Palestinian masses.

Musa shares responsibility for Arafat's overall strategy since 1974. While placing himself at the head of a group of genuinely disaffected fighters sick of Arafat's accommodation to imperialism, his faction has not broken with Arafat politically. He merely counterposes increased military resistance to Arafat's retreat. He has no programme for politically mobilising the Palestinian workers and poor peasants within Israel or on the West Bank around their own class demands and thus organising them into a mass force, the only mass force that can shatter the foundations of the Israeli Zionist state. On the contrary Musa and the faction's most recent spokesman, Jibril, have become increasingly dependent on Syria to supply arms and fighters to depose Arafat. Despite Musa's cynical awareness that Syria is no supporter of Palestinian independence, he has played cat's paw to Syrian nationalism. The Syrian bourgeoisie has no interest in advancing the cause of Palestinian independence to the point of a decisive showdown with imperialism. It too wants to use the Palestinian struggle to boost its own negotiating position with imperialism relative to that of the other major Arab regimes. It has ensured that it keeps a tight grip on the operations and organisation of the anti-Arafat forces.

NO SUPPORT

For these reasons it is impossible to give even critical support to the Musa opposition to Arafat. It does not represent a movement within the Palestinian working class seeking, even blindly, to turn away from exclusive reliance upon the methods of petit-bourgeois guerrillism. Yet neither can support be given to Arafat, who stands in the vanguard of reconciliation with Egypt and, through it, Israel and US imperialism.

Arafat is fast coming off the fence. Booted out of the Lebanon he is no longer able to hold the entire PLO together. At his late November meeting with the Russians in Moscow he was dumped by the Kremlin. This served as a catalyst for him to carve out the only role left open to him as the spokesman for an Egypt-Jordan-Saudi coalition.

One by one the centrists in the British left have fallen in behind the Arafat faction. *Socialist Action* and the *Workers International News* have given Arafat their critical support in the conflict. Their reasoning is revealing. Only too aware of Arafat's pro-imperialist leanings they give him critical support because "the political independence of the PLO (is) expressed by the Arafat forces." (*WIN* 4) or as *Socialist Action* (18 November) has it because "the end of Arafat is the temporary end of the Palestinians' ability to negotiate for a withdrawal of Israel from the West Bank" (sic). In fact the deposing of Arafat will free him to pursue his negotiations to this reactionary end, not end them. Whether he can unite the Palestinian people behind him in this is another matter.

What lies behind this support for Arafat is an inability to distinguish two separate tasks that face revolutionary socialists. First, there is no such thing



Troops loyal to Arafat

as the "political independence" of the PLO. The PLO exists in a state of political dependence upon various bourgeois and petit-bourgeois Arab regimes. The PLO compromises the objective interests of the Palestinian masses and leaves them at the mercy of the occupation forces in the West Bank. To counterpose a "new" or "independent" PLO to the old one is a utopia. The divisions and splits are a consequence of the politics of petit-bourgeois nationalism.

The fight for Palestinian self-determination has rarely, if ever, been in a weaker position. The Palestinian forces have been dispersed and imprisoned within several reactionary Arab states, and demoralised and disorientated on the West Bank. They have lost their military base in the Lebanon and been banished to Tunis and North Yemen on the fringes of the Arab world.

The prospects for a successful destruction of the Zionist state and the creation of a secular workers' republic of Palestine have been greatly set back over the last 18 months. What is now needed is a military united front of all PLO factions against imperialism and Israel and, most vitally, the building of a revolutionary party based on the programme of Trotskyism, of permanent revolution. It must be built on a programme that recognises that the only

force that can create a secular workers' state of Palestine is the Arab proletariat of the West Bank and Israel. Any other Palestinian state will be a miserable fiction policed by the murderous King Hussein and rubber stamped by the Zionist state.

A Syrian-vetted PLO is no advantage to the great majority of the Palestinian masses. Neither is a pro-Egyptian one under Arafat's leadership. To propose a PLO that is not beholden to one of these regimes is to peddle reactionary illusions. These are the cruel lessons that must be learnt from the last period. At the same time we must defend the right of the Palestinians to elect and choose whatsoever leadership they will and to prevent the combined forces of imperialism and Zionism destroying this leadership. In this sense we must continue to defend the PLO. But far more is at stake in the conflict between Arafat and the rebels. Arafat's meeting with Mubarak has already produced further splits with Arafat's No.2 Salah Kalaf, denouncing the meeting. A further polarisation is inevitable and necessary. Jordan and Saudi Arabia will be quick to follow Arafat in welcoming Egypt's return to the fold. At the other extreme, genuine fighters of Zionism will be searching for an answer. Only Trotskyism can provide it. ■

by Keith Hassell



Yasser Arafat

West Bank". How is this extraordinary event to be explained and what are its likely consequences?

Israel's original invasion of Lebanon in 1982 had the full backing of American imperialism. Ever since 1948 when the Zionist state was created by the forcible expulsion of the Palestinians from their homeland Israel has sought to destroy all remaining enclaves of Palestinian resistance. After 1970 Lebanon became the main territorial base of operations of the PLO and was thus an obvious target. Israel's objectives are to cripple the PLO, demoralise the Arabs within Israel and the occupied West Bank as a result and prevent unity between the bourgeois Arab regimes. The latter is also in the interests of US imperialism, whose enormous oil investments would be challenged by a unified Arab world. Yet precisely because of the USA's oil producing interests in the Gulf it has an interest in reaching agreement with the arch-conservative Arab states in order to find a political solution to the "Palestinian problem" which is a constant source of irritation to the rulers of countries like Lebanon, Jordan and Saudi Arabia.

THE SPLIT IN THE P.L.O.

The most preferred plan of the imperialists and Arab monarchies is a "West Bank state" in confederation with Jordan. This would entail explicit recognition of the illegitimate Israeli state and a "Palestinian state" policed and guarded by the reactionary pro-imperialist Jordanian monarchy. Until 1974 the PLO refused to consider this "solution". In reality it is a utopian project as peaceful co-existence with an inherently expansionist settler state like Israel is impossible. Egypt welcomed the 1982 Reagan Plan along these lines. Within the PLO Yasser Arafat has fought an internal war to get this idea, or a similar one emanating from Saudi Arabia (the Fez plan) accepted. However, until his expulsion from Beirut the fact that Arafat was the leader of an unstable coalition of interests prevented him from openly espousing the idea of recognising and living with Israel. Most of the PLO's finance comes from Saudi Arabia but a majority of its factions and many of its activists and fighters look to Syria, Iraq or even the USSR for guidance.



Abu Musa

IMPERIALIST TROOPS OUT OF LEBANON!

ON ONE SIDE in the bitter civil war in Lebanon are ranged the Lebanese Army and the imperialist "peacekeeping" force headed by 5,000 US marines. On the other, the predominantly Muslim forces of the Lebanese left backed by Syrian arms and 80,000 Syrian troops in the Bekaa valley.

American imperialism's overriding aim in the Lebanon remains to shore up a stable pro-imperialist Arab regime which would continue to maintain key banking functions for the US in the Middle East and prove politically amenable to long-term reconciliation with Israel. Hitherto, the US had hoped to achieve this by backing the Maronite/Phalangist monopoly of political power. The problem is that this has proven too weak militarily to defend its supremacy and has had its control eroded to the environs of Beirut alone.

The withdrawal of Israeli invasion forces to a line south of the Awali river precipitated a crisis as the Lebanese left filled the vacuum and threatened Gemayel's rule. The "peacekeepers" stepped in to save him. If Gemayel and the Maronite rule is to be shored up longterm without concessions to the Muslim forces then the US must sponsor a decisive military defeat of the Syrians. The last week of 1983 witnessed direct bombing (by Israel) and shelling (by the US) of Syrian positions, signalling US preparedness to do just this. However, the US would have to enlist Israel to do this. The US marines alone could not push Syria out of the Lebanon. At most they can give Assad a bloody nose and throw a cordon sanitaire around Beirut. But the loss of two US planes and the deaths of nearly 270 marines had underlined the difficulties of even this. This has fuelled a powerful withdrawal lobby in the US.

It is also more than possible that divisions within the Israeli bourgeoisie and between the US and Europe, may make an all out assault on Syria extremely difficult. Hence the importance attached to the Geneva "reconciliation" talks between the Christians, Muslims and Syria. The US aim to encourage a nominal relaxation of the grip of the Maronites on the helm of the state to induce the Shi'ite, Sunni and Druze into laying down their arms and taking co-responsibility for a pro-imperialist Lebanon. The Geneva talks are suspended but due to begin again in January. Syria insists that Lebanon tears up the May 1983 agreement with Israel as a pre-condition for further progress.

The European bourgeoisie remains firmly committed to the Geneva talks and have openly stated

their opposition to further US military involvement in the Lebanon. Behind this is naked self-interest. Europe depends heavily for its oil supplies on the Arab states of the Gulf (unlike the US) and cannot risk another Middle East war.

The chief obstacle to the US remains Syria. Whilst armed by the USSR, Syria has never been a trustworthy client of the Kremlin. In fact over the last period the nationalist aspirations of President Assad have led Syria in the direction of closer accommodation to the US. Syria, in fact, seeks US recognition for a Lebanese protectorate of its own. It would like to prove to the US that it could make the same transition made by Egypt in the early 1970s under Sadat away from Moscow. For Syria, however, this is not possible, since Sadat achieved US client status by first breaking all ties with the Soviet Union. Assad cannot do this whilst Syria is in conflict with Israel and even the US itself at the moment. Syria seeks to prevent the creation of a pro-Israeli Lebanese state not the overthrow of imperialism's interests. Syria wants a role as guardian of those interests.

Assad pursues a carrot and stick policy to achieve it. On the one hand, he maintains military resistance when attacked and gives military backing to the Lebanese left. On the other, he seeks to control the PLO and so dictate the nature and limits of the Palestinian resistance to Israel.

While we reject this corrupt petit-bourgeois nationalist aim of Syria we unconditionally support them in conflict with the US and other imperialist "peacekeepers". While we demand the withdrawal of imperialist troops from the Lebanon and continued unfettered aid to the forces of the Lebanese left who are struggling against imperialism, we do not demand the withdrawal of Syrian troops from Lebanon. To call for this under the guise of Lebanon's right of self-determination would be in effect to call for Lebanon to remain an imperialist enclave.

However, political dependence upon Syria is a fatal flaw. Military operations under their guidance will not destroy imperialism's grip. The way ahead was demonstrated in the last days of 1983 with the workers and urban petit-bourgeoisie of the occupied Southern Lebanon organising strikes and demonstrations against the Israeli troops. It is this method of independent class mobilisations, together with armed militias that holds out the promise of mass unified resistance to imperialism and its agents in the Lebanon. ■

LEARNING FROM DEFEAT

THE T.U.C.'s DESPICABLE betrayal of the NGA, and Len Murray's spineless toadying before the Tories has called forth references to "Black Friday" and the record of Jimmy Thomas.

Whilst history does not repeat itself in a literal sense, important lessons must be learned from the great defeats and betrayals as well as from heroic victories. Unfortunately at the present we have great need of learning the lessons of days like Friday 15th April 1921.

The years immediately preceding the First World War, the last two years of the war itself and the two years succeeding it were years of advance and ascent for the working class movement in Britain. In 1910 total union membership stood at 2.5 million; by 1920 it had reached 8.3 million. These were years of massive and militant struggles: the seamen's and dockers' strikes of 1911, the railwaymen's strike of 1911 and the miners' strike of 1912 were the first fully national strikes in their respective industries.

Not only did this period see an unprecedented intensity and breadth of struggle, it also saw the birth of real anti-bureaucratic rank and file movements in many unions. The most notable were the Miners' Unofficial Reform Committee, established in South Wales in 1911, the Amalgamation movements in the rail and engineering industries, and the wartime Shop Stewards' and Workers' Committee movements.

The militant rank and file accordingly played an important role in initiating the wave of unrest that swept Britain. On the 28th January 1919 *The Times* complained that "the instigators of these revolts have almost as bitter a distrust and hatred of those trade union officials as they have of the 'bosses' or the government".

Lloyd George's Cabinet Secretary, Tom Jones, in a memo dated 8/2/19 referred to the "mutiny of the rank and file against the old established leaders".

The most powerful sectors of the working class were undoubtedly the engineers, the transport workers, the railway workers, and most powerful of all - the miners. The latter three sectors had formed or reformed powerful federations or industrial unions in the pre-war period. In early 1914 they had come together to form a Triple Industrial Alliance pledged to assist each other in disputes given the obvious and immediate need for solidarity between the three sectors.

The rank and file of these unions were militant and the grass roots leaders imbued with syndicalist and socialist ideas of a class-wide struggle against the bosses and the government, and for nationalisation of their industries and for workers' control. The official leaders were cast in a distinctly different mould.

THE MINERS' DEMANDS

Frank Hodges, the Secretary of the Miners' Federation of Great Britain (MFGB) was pronounced "moderate". James Henry Thomas - Jimmy Thomas - also MP for Derby, became General Secretary of the NUR in 1917. He was an enthusiastic recruiter in World War 1. He was a friend of Lady Astor and a repulsive fawner on the aristocracy in general. He was a bitter foe of the rank and file of his union. At first sight the leaders of the Transport Workers' Federation - to be transformed in the years 1920-22 into the Transport and General Workers' Union - were more promising. Robert Williams, Secretary of the Federation since 1910, architect and advocate of the Triple Alliance, was also a founder member of the British Communist Party.

But the most powerful and central section of the British working class remained the miners. There



Lloyd George



Thomas (left), Ramsay MacDonald, Clynes and Henderson

were over one million miners at the end of World War 1, and over 800,000 were members of the MFGB. In 1918 the coal industry produced a record 287 million tons, of which 98 million tons were exported. There were 3,000 pits owned by half that number of firms.

In 1917, Lloyd George had been obliged to take the mines into state control, whereupon a system of national agreements with the MFGB had been instituted. The union set itself the threefold aim of achieving a minimum wage, permanent national agreements and the nationalisation of the industry. On the other hand with the post-war boom promising record profits, the employers were pressing Lloyd George to hand control of their pits back to them.

At a national conference in January 1919, the MFGB adopted demands for a 30% wage increase, for a six-hour day and for nationalisation. When Lloyd George refused, they balloted the members for strike action, gaining a six to one majority in favour. Conditions could not have been more favourable to the miners. The 3.5 million-strong army was in what Churchill later called "a convulsion of indiscipline". In the great transit camps at Folkestone and Dover, 12,000 soldiers demonstrated. At the Army Service Depot at Kempton Park, a soldiers' council was elected which declared that it would fraternise with the workers. On January 6th, armed soldiers demonstrated in Whitehall. At the end of January, Glasgow was convulsed with a general strike which spread to Edinburgh and Belfast. Even the police force was restive.

Yet the miners' leaders allowed Lloyd George to talk them into a parliamentary commission led by Sir John Sanbey. Whilst the majority of the commission came out in favour of nationalisation in June 1919, this was a Pyrrhic victory for the MFGB. The commission produced four separate reports and Lloyd George used this as a pretext to shelve the lot in August. Having let one vital moment slip, the miners' leaders now allowed the enormous mood of sympathy for them to slip away, by taking their case to the TUC in September.

IN PLACE OF STRUGGLE

The TUC refused any industrial support proposing instead a classically toothless publicity campaign - "The mines for the nation" - which proved a miserable failure. Thus the opportunity to force the nationalisation of the industry was lost and the general impetus of the working class offensive broken.

Despite being totally solid, a national rail strike in October 1919 was settled with a rotten compromise. The government had wanted to lower railwaymen's average wages from 51/- a week to 40/-. J H Thomas settled on an agreement to maintain the existing level for one year only. Thomas carefully avoided asking the Triple Alliance for industrial support - using the other union leaders only as

mediators with the government. An interesting story told to Aneurin Bevan by miners' leader Robert Smillie and retold in "In Place of Fear" sums up the mentality of the union leaders, faced with Lloyd George:

"He (Lloyd George) said to us 'Gentlemen, you have fashioned in the Triple Alliance of the unions represented by you, a most powerful instrument. I feel bound to tell you that in our opinion we are at your mercy. The Army is disaffected and cannot be relied upon. Trouble has already occurred in a number of camps. We have just emerged from a great war and the people are eager for the reward of their sacrifices, and we are in no position to satisfy them. In these circumstances, if you carry out your threat and strike, then you will defeat us.

'But if you do so', went on Mr Lloyd George, 'have you weighed the consequences? The strike will be in defiance of the government of the country and by its very success will precipitate a constitutional crisis of the first importance. For if a force arises in the state which is stronger than the state itself then it must be ready to take on the functions of the state or withdraw and accept the authority of the state.

'Gentlemen', asked the Prime Minister quietly, 'have you considered, and if you have, are you ready?'

'From that moment on' said Robert Smillie, 'we were beaten and we knew we were'."

REVOLUTION ABROAD

Faced with trade union leaders who feared victory and dreaded the very thought of a struggle for power, Lloyd George - a sly and adept ruling class warrior - knew the cards were stacked in his favour. Yet as long as the balance of forces was still in favour of militant action, the Cabinet and the whole ruling class could not sleep easy in their beds. Cabinet Secretary Tom Jones recorded in his diary that at the beginning of 1920 "Ministers have the wind up to the most extraordinary extent about the industrial situation. From a meeting yesterday I came away with my head fair reeling. I felt I had been in Bedlam. Red revolution and blood and war at home and abroad".

In fact it was the attempt to intervene against revolution abroad that brought about the Labour movement's last great victory of the post-war period.

Since the Bolshevik revolution of 1917, the British government had been intervening in support of the forces of counter-revolution in Russia. Since 1918 British troops - in limited numbers - had been assisting the White armies. By the early summer of 1920 the Red Army had moved onto the offensive against the Poles who had been spurred to attack the young Soviet republic by Anglo-French imperialism.

In concert with France, the British government threatened the Soviet Union with war, began the despatch of large quantities of munitions to Poland and summoned the Chiefs of Staff to consider mili-

tary action. The response of the working class was immediate. On May 10th the London dockers refused to load the SS *Jolly George* with munitions for Poland. A week later the dockers' union put a general ban on the loading of all munitions destined for use against Russia. On August 3rd the situation became critical when Lord Curzon, the Foreign Secretary, despatched an ultimatum to the Soviet government.

The next day Labour Party headquarters telegraphed all local parties and trades councils to initiate anti-war demonstrations for August 8th. The call roused massive demonstrations and was followed up by the TUC's Parliamentary Committee and the Labour Party Executive issuing a warning to Lloyd George's government: "the whole industrial power of the organised workers will be used to defeat this war".

They immediately summoned a National Conference and constituted a Council of Action, mandated to secure not only the withdrawal of the war threats, but also diplomatic recognition of the Soviet Republic, and the resumption of normal trading relations with it. The Council of Action was empowered to call a general strike to this end. Rhetoric was heady at this special conference. J H Thomas, secretary of the NUR exclaimed, "When you vote for this resolution, do not do so on the assumption that you are merely voting for a simple tools-down policy. It is nothing of the kind. If this resolution is to be given effect to, it means a challenge to the whole constitution and the country".

The Chairman of the Labour Party went even further in his warning to the government: "if they cannot run the country in a peaceful and humane manner without interfering with the lives of other nations, we will be compelled, even against all constitutions, to chance whether we cannot do something to take the country into our own hands for our own people". Delegates rapturously sang the Red Flag and the Internationale.

On the 16th August the wily Lloyd George, recognising the impossibility of further war moves, declared that the policy of the government "appears to differ in no way from that enunciated at the Labour conference".

The episode demonstrated that the labour movement's power was unbroken. It also demonstrated the lengths to which even right-wing reformist leaders can go if pushed by enormous mass pressure. But once the immediate danger had passed these same leaders rushed to dismantle the councils of action and refused to broaden their scope to the question of Ireland - where British troops were brutally suppressing the nationalist rising - or to combatting unemployment which was beginning to rise sharply.

The end of the post-war boom marked the sharp change in conditions that enabled the government to take the offensive. Yet even now the working class had the forces to resist - to turn defence into defiance and a working class offensive. It was the treachery of the union leaders and the unpreparedness of rank and file militants and even revolutionaries that enabled the ruling class to get away with

A CLEAR MAJORITY FOR ACTION

In the summer of 1920 the miners demanded a rise in wages and a lowering of coal prices. A strike ballot recorded a heavy majority in favour and strike notice was given for 25th September. The Triple Alliance partners were called on for support. At once the other unions demanded a postponement and renewed negotiations. The government was adamant and the miners' strike began on October 16th. Having failed to stop the confrontation, the NUR balloted its members on strike action and - doubtless to Thomas's dismay - received a clear majority for action.

The strike was settled a few days later on the basis of a temporary settlement which was due to expire in March 1921. In the aftermath of this disgraceful display of weakness, the union leadership did nothing whatsoever. In marked contrast, the government acted swiftly to take advantage of the time allowed by the agreement to prepare their forces for a showdown. In just five days they rushed the Emergency Powers Act through Parliament. This allowed for Orders in Council to be passed, and for courts to be set up for summary jurisdiction in the event of a "national emergency". This act effectively allowed for a war-time type of dictatorship similar to the "state of siege" that the pre-war Prussian regime had at its disposal. This act was to serve the ruling class well - both in 1921 and 1926. Yet again the TUC made only verbal protests.

As the new year dawned, the full force of the economic crisis hit. Prices, including coal prices, tumbled. Between January and March 1921, losses in the coal industry were running at £5 million a month.

The owners clamoured for wage cuts. In Wales, for example, they demanded a 49% reduction. The government announced its intention to decontrol the mines on the day the temporary wages agreement expired - March 31st. The extent of government - employer collusion was underlined when the employers announced their plans for sweeping wage reductions and a return to district

- BLACK FRIDAY 1921

agreements to operate from that very same day.

Lock-out notices were posted at the pits whilst the Westminster talking shop was still chewing over the Decontrol Bill. Miners' wages on average stood at 89/8d. The employers were asking for a 42/- cut in South Wales. Even the government's Minister of Labour was moved to describe the proposed wage reductions as "a bit thick".

The return to district agreements was, if anything, a worse threat since it would effectively destroy the hard-won unity of the MFGB. It would enable the employers to settle with the profitable sectors, drive down the wages of the less profitable and close unprofitable pits more or less at will. Moreover, as an attack on the largest, most militant union, it was clearly meant to set the example for a general employers' offensive. If the miners were defeated then the whole working class line of battle would disintegrate, leaving only bitter rearguard actions to be fought by isolated sectors.

The leaders who had feared to take on and defeat Lloyd George when the government was weak and ill-prepared were not likely to put up spirited resistance when he was on the offensive. As soon as the lock-out was announced, the government declared its "state of emergency". Royal Proclamations mobilised the armed forces and despatched them to "occupy" the mining areas. Machine gun posts were stationed at pit-heads. A Defence Force of some 80,000 "volunteers" - i.e. middle-class strike breakers - was called up. The mentality of this gang of would-be White Guards was summed up in a novel written in this period:

"Us ... meaning the Decent Crowd, Anybody with a stake in the country, including the unfortunate Middle Classes. All of us. Well, we accept the challenge. We're ready to knock hell out of them... This clash has got to come. We must get the working classes back to their Kennels. Back to cheap Labour. Back to discipline. Otherwise we're done". (Sir Philip Gibbs. "Middle of the Road" 1923).

The flush of triumph in this passage is undoubtedly the product of hindsight, but the vicious hatred of the working class is unmistakably genuine.

FRATERNISATION AND PANIC

The MFGB formally appealed to the Triple Alliance "to take strike action in order to assist the miners in the present crisis". On April 8th the full conference of the whole Triple Alliance assembled and as a result the Transport Workers and the Railwaymen issued strike orders. At a local level strike committees and often joint committees were created, in many cases on the initiative of Communist Party members.

Fraternisation was organised with the soldiers and with the many unemployed who had joined the Defence Force in desperation. Examples multiplied of military reservists refusing service. The London District of the Electricians Union and of ASLEF pledged themselves to take strike action and sent delegates to the Triple Alliance meetings.

The prospect of an imminent generalised conflict with the government threw the union leaders, especially Thomas, into near panic. Lloyd George remarked scornfully in Cabinet "I don't think J H Thomas knows where he is, or he would have been along to see me. He wants no revolution". And again he showed a shrewd assessment of his man: "Thomas is all for peace, he does not want a row to please Hodges. I have complete confidence in Thomas's selfishness" (Hodges was the MFGB's secretary).

Whilst the millionaire press kept up a propaganda barrage against miners for letting the pit-ponies suffer, Lloyd George fastened onto the issue of the safety men and pump operators, and demanded that the MFGB send them into the pits as a pre-condition for any further negotiations. The leaders of the Triple Alliance now began to show their fangs - against the miners. They demanded that the miners accede to Lloyd George's request and postponed the strike action to Friday April 15th.

CHAOS AT UNITY HOUSE

The miners unwillingly and fatally conceded the point. It is a law of the class struggle that a strike postponed is a strike half-way to being called off. A series of visits to Downing Street by the union secretaries began. Lloyd George held firm behind the employers' demands. On the night of April 14th, the miners' secretary Frank Hodges made an entirely unauthorised offer at a meeting of Liberal and Tory backbenchers in the House of Commons.

He proposed a temporary wages settlement that would leave over the other demands of the miners. Lloyd George saw his moment and pounced. Writing a letter to the MFGB, he pressed for a temporary settlement leaving aside all the miners demands, and specifically the demand for a National Pool of mine profits, out of which the miners should be paid by national agreement. This weak and utopian project nevertheless embodied the last defence of the national negotiations principle. To surrender it for another "temporary agreement" in deteriorating economic conditions would have spelled doom for the miners.

On the morning of the 15th, all was chaos at

Unity House where the Triple Alliance was in virtually permanent session. The MFGB Executive met separately and repudiated Hodges' position, but only by one vote, with two members absent. They decided to refuse Lloyd George's offer. Thereupon led by the wretched Thomas, the other sections of the alliance began to demand further talks. At this point Herbert Smith - President of the Yorkshire miners - uttered his famous remark to the clamorous NUR and TWF leaders: "Get on t'field. That's t'place".

Unity House became a scene of Bedlam. Miners, railwaymen's and transport workers' leaders paced the corridors shouting at one another. Miners' leader Hodges was slumped over a desk weeping uncontrollably. J H Thomas chased Smith across Euston Square pleading and begging for the miners to give in. The miners withdrew, and Thomas, Robert Williams, Bevin and Co., rushed to Downing Street for more private talks with Lloyd George, who now realised victory was within his grasp.

The Cabinet Secretary Jones' memoirs recall his cynicism. Whilst Thomas and Co were speaking, Lloyd George passed Jones a note saying "It is not enough to have a good cause", to which Jones scribbled the reply "You must have good leaders". Nodding, the premier replied again "I'm sorry for the miners. I'm not heartless enough for this sort of thing".

With the miners absent, the TWF proposed that they be asked to return and that the Triple Alliance announce that it was indeed finalising preparations for the strike. The NUR delegation voted this proposal down 28 to 12. Thomas then put forward a

resolution calling off the strike because of the miners' rejection of Lloyd George's offer. It was passed with only two votes against. At 3.00 pm a smiling Thomas trotted down the steps of Unity House to the waiting press and announced "It's all off, boys!".

THE INEVITABLE DEFEAT

The miners fought on alone until mid-summer, but their defeat was now inevitable. Miners' pay fell from its 89/9d level at the end of the first quarter of 1921, to 58/10d by the end of the following quarter. Dockers suffered a 25% reduction in pay in the year following. By the end of 1921, 6 million workers had received wage cuts of no less than 8/- a week. Union membership fell from 8.3 million to 6.6 million in one year, and unemployment topped the 2 million mark.

This stunning defeat was entirely the work of the wretched reformist leaders. The best of them were completely unable to see that past gains could only be defended by militant class struggle. When the class enemy faced them with the political consequences of militant tactics - i.e. when the political challenge to the state that is implicit in a general strike stared them in the face - they panicked and rushed to surrender. J H Thomas, the worst of them, was a bought and sold traitor who was consciously trying to sell his members and the working class to the highest bidder.

The real tragedy of Black Friday 1921 was

that the militant rank and file had no alternative general staff, no national organisation capable of challenging the leadership, preventing the betrayal and carrying the struggle forward. The syndicalist rank and file movements had never understood clearly the question of national leadership and cross-industry rank and file organisation. The newly-formed Communist Party, which repeatedly called "Watch Your Leaders!" and warned of betrayal throughout the dispute, had no alternative to offer. Worse still, Bob Williams of the TWF was a party member - although he was instantly expelled after Black Friday.

Only from 1921 onwards did the British CP with the invaluable advice of the Communist International and the Red International of Labour Unions (RILU) set about elaborating a policy for rank and file resistance in the unions. Only then did it start the fight for an alternative leadership and for root and branch reorganisation in a process that bore fruit in the creation of the National Minority Movement.

Indeed, perhaps the most vital lesson for us today is that without such an overcoming of syndicalist rank and file, without the building of a strong revolutionary party and a national rank and file movement, the trade union leaders will continue to snatch defeat out of the jaws of victory as they have done whenever key groups of workers have prepared to do battle with the government. ■

by Dave Stocking



Scargill

WHILE MURRAY AND his cohorts did their bit for Thatcher in the NGA dispute a handful of union leaders fumed. This group on the General Council - Moss Evans, Ken Gill, Alan Sapper, supported by prominent leaders outside the Council like Scargill - have been dubbed the "illegalists" by the Financial Times. The gutter press portray them all as "raving reds".

Many rank and file trade unionists undoubtedly regard these left-wingers as militant leaders worthy of support. But how does their role in the NGA dispute compare with their reputation? What was their record in the fateful days leading up to and beyond 'Black Wednesday'?

The NGA leaders, Wade and Dubbins, were themselves pushed to the left by the struggle of their own rank and file and the intransigence of the bosses. Yet at each stage their refusal to put pressure on the foot-dragging TUC by calling out the whole NGA, allowed the right-wing to retain the initiative. When the TUC refused to give the NGA one-day strike any support Wade got the national council of the union to abide by that decision and agree to keep future action within the law.

Instead of forming a common front with the miners who voted with the NGA to take action and appeal to the rank and file of the other unions, the NGA spoke only of a 'campaign' to reverse the TUC decision. This could take until next September. Moreover, the methods of this campaign are completely bureaucratic. Wade announced, "We will be having discussions with our highly influential friends in the trade unions." When the "left" friends met, on December 21st in a plush London hotel few shop stewards or father of chapels were to be found. The only action so far being called is a demonstration on Saturday January 28th. The NGA National Council is not meeting to discuss the resumption of picketing until January 18th. Eddie Shah must be delighted.

The non-NGA lefts were every bit as cowardly. Their support for the NGA in the first place was extremely limited. Moral support was pledged in abundance. Financial and physical support was offered by the T&GWU and NUPE. Yet not one of these lefts offered to campaign in their own unions for solidarity strike action. This meant that the police could deal with the mass pickets,

THE LEFTS: A BRAKE ON THE STRUGGLE

the courts could rob the coffers of an isolated union, and the Tories could ride the crisis out comfortably.

This balance of forces would have been shifted decisively if the Stockport strike had been spread throughout the print and into other industries. The call for a general strike against the laws could have been backed up by rolling strikes throughout Britain. The lefts were not prepared to take such a course. They deliberately limited their support to the NGA because they were not prepared for a real battle, up to and including breaking ranks with the dominant centre-right group in the TUC around Murray, Duffy, Hammond and Graham.

This was even more obvious after the 14th December TUC decision. Sure the lefts fumed, but they did nothing. The bosses' man Murray for once approached the truth when he said, "I have had criticism from unions before in situations where I have helped to extricate them from difficult, even impossible situations, and some of their people have been secretly delighted."

The lefts all queued up to deliver their own clichéd verdict on the betrayal. McGahey called it "shocking" while the poetic Scargill inevitably called it "the greatest sell-out since 1926." Promises of support were equally numerous and exaggerated. Jimmy Knapp of the NUR promised "100% support" - meaningless! Ken Gill stated "We fully support the NGA" - vacuous!

The course of action needed after the General Council's betrayal was clear to anyone seriously determined to win the NGA dispute and smash the Tory laws. A united front of the unions supporting the NGA should have been immediately formed. The NGA strike should have gone ahead, made indefinite and backed up by solidarity strike action by the unions committed to support. In every locality committees, initially based in the unions taking action, should have been formed to co-ordinate the action, the pickets and so on, and organise appeals to the rank and file of unions that did not vote to support the NGA.

The failure of the lefts to adopt this strategy has in all probability sealed the fate of the Stockport six. Scargill has merely called for ever bigger mass pickets at Warrington. Moss Evans has fallen silent. Clive Jenkins merely hurls impotent epithets at Murray.



Moss Evans

The difference between the different wings of the bureaucracy is one of style. Both the left and the right are tied together by their mutual membership of the trade union bureaucratic caste, and loyal to its outlook. This dispute is not the first time the lefts have acted in this way. When Scargill talks of 1926 he should be reminded that the then lefts - Hicks, Purcell and co - were complicit in that betrayal. It was Leon Trotsky who analysed their role and provided insights that are highly relevant for today. He explained that the left-wing leaders "constitute an expression of the forward move, (of the masses - WP), but also act as a brake on it." In other words they serve the interests of the right wing by controlling rank and file action while pretending to lead it. Moreover because they are neither accountable to, and therefore genuine representatives of, the rank and file nor disciplined by coherent ideas, a communist programme and strategy, they cannot break from the right-wing. Indeed, they depend on that right-wing and, at all crucial moments cede leadership to it. As Trotsky made clear, "The left faction of the General Council is distinguished by its complete ideological shapelessness and therefore is incapable of organisationally assuming the leadership of the trade union movement."

There was very little criticism of the "lefts" for their role in Black Wednesday 1983 from centrists like Socialist Organiser or Socialist Action. These days it is unfashionable to issue warnings about characters like Scargill who, after all, are occasionally prepared to grace the pages of one's paper. Workers Power regards such an approach as deceitful and disastrous for the working class. We are in business to build a revolutionary communist party. Such a party will be vitally interested in winning the support of the rank and file, but not the slightest bit interested in winning the approving smiles of whoever happens to be the current left faker. Our task as revolutionaries is to warn of the lefts. Of course we are in favour of demanding that left leaders make good their words. But we are dead against spreading illusions that they will. Of course, we are in favour of acting alongside left leaders when they do take action. But we will never preach reliance on them. Sadly, the NGA debacle shows exactly where failure to warn of, criticise and act independently of the lefts, leads to defeat. ■

by Mark Haskisson

CONFUSION REIGNS ON THE GENERAL STRIKE

DECEMBER'S BATTLES with Shah and the courts did more than show up the treachery of the Labour movement's official leaders. They also served to sharply test the politics of those left organisations that claim to be advancing a political alternative to class collaboration.

What exactly was at stake in the fight to defend the NGA? Ever since Thatcher's first election victory there has been a consistent thread at the very heart of the Tory policy. Through Prior and Tebbit's laws and various Codes of Practice they have been constructing a battery of laws restricting and outlawing effective trade unionism. In the aftermath of the defeat of the steel strike the Tories proceeded to put their anti-union laws into place while not relying on them immediately as the principal means of holding down the working class. They didn't really need to.

It was inevitable that any revival of militant trade unionism and organised defence against the employers' attack would trigger Prior and Tebbit's anti-union laws.

Faced with the first wave of attempts to make the anti-union laws work we in *Workers Power* had a clear and unequivocal position. We called for an all out indefinite general strike to smash the anti-union laws. While the TUC leaders were wriggling and squirming to lower themselves into their betrayal posture we were calling on the TUC to call that general strike and give full backing to the NGA. While the lefts were talking big and acting small we were warning of their inevitable treachery and urging workers to form action committees and organs of struggle to prevent the betrayals of the left and the right.

We argued for an all-out general strike because that was what was needed to defeat Shah, the judges and the Tory government. Sectional struggle, however militant, by the NGA and in the print would certainly have upped the heat of the conflict. But up against this general legal attack by the state, the central pillar of the employing class's anti-working class offensive, it could not have guaranteed victory. What was at stake was not a problem particular to one industry or one group of workers. Only one class or another could have won that round of conflict. Neither were 'one day' general strikes or similar such protest actions enough to budge a class conscious government and its hired legal lackeys. The issue was too crucial to Thatcher's entire strategy for restoring British capitalism's profitability at the expense of the working class.

Socialist ORGANISER

TUC: call 24-hour general strike!

Nor could effective mass picketing at Warrington alone have swung the balance against the employers. The unbridled savagery of the police on the Warrington picket line showed the enormous paramilitary weight that the ruling class have at their disposal. Only mass working class strike action, paralysing the wheels of industry and opening up countless battlegrounds could have rendered the anti-union snatch squads powerless. In 1972 at Saltley it was just such mass strike action alongside mass picketing that won the day.

We linked our call for a general strike specifically to breaking the anti-union laws and driving them off the statute books. We did this precisely because what was at stake was either the savage operation or the destruction of a central weapon in the capitalist class' armoury. More was at stake than simply defending the NGA. The Tory government and the Fleet Street press barons knew that all too well.

We raised our call for a general strike as a demand on the TUC leaders. We did not thereby counterpose a TUC called general strike to immediate solidarity action by groups of workers. Where we could we fought hard and long to win every possible form of solidarity support for the NGA. But we raised the call on the TUC and the trade union leaders because they remain the leadership that the organised workers look to, however sceptically. While the TUC was setting up its



Skirmish in the East End - the 1926 General Strike

betrayal it was necessary to focus the energy of militants on stopping that betrayal. This could have developed into a collision between the rank and file and the trade union leaders and become a crucial step in transforming the unions into genuine organs of class struggle. There was no way in which militants could avoid or ignore the existence of the massive conservative trade union apparatus without leaving the field wide open for the bureaucrats to stab the print workers in the back at will.

If we look at the positions adopted by those groups on the British left that call themselves revolutionary there were a series of consistent objections to our position. The oddest of bedfellows held these objections in common. Universally the British centrist left cut their cloth to fit what they thought was the prevalent mood of despondency and retreat in the ranks of the working class. This took its most crass form in the editorial manderings of *Socialist Organiser*. Their editorial on November 24th declared more or less correctly we think that there was only one answer to such attacks as were being meted out on the NGA, "Massive, generalised strike action - a general strike in solidarity with the NGA and against the legislation and the government that brought it in."

Having written these words the opportunist editorialist panicked. Was it not going to be difficult to persuade Labour Party activists and trade union militants that this was a real and immediate option? Not wanting to face imagined derision *Socialist Organiser* trimmed its sails, "Yet in 1983 the call for an all out general strike - no matter how correct and necessary (note the words 'correct and necessary' - *WP*) seems so wildly unrealistic that we have not been able to use it for our front page headline." The *Socialist Organiser* decided to boycott its own programme and not put itself out on a limb.

Anyone who inhabits the labour movement can see where these arguments come from. They are a pure reflection of the pessimism and cynicism that has affected militants and activists as the Tory government and the employers have won successive rounds of struggle. We are certainly not blind to the fact that when we call for a general strike the bureaucrats and time-servers snigger and many of the best militants shake their heads and say it cannot be done. These militants have in fact been demoralised and blighted by successive "unnecessary" and "incorrect" strategies generated within the rank and file of the trade union movement, hawked around by left careerists in search of a few quick votes or even at the hands of the centrist groups themselves. We do have to call for what is necessary and correct because it is a means of assembling a new working class leadership that can see what needs to be done, fight for it to be done and develop the tactics to win over the mass of workers.

What is so laughable about all the "new realists" on the British left is that their realism leads them either to simply drag along behind the struggle or to advance slogans that would not bear two moments of casual scrutiny as effective means of winning the December war with the Tories.

Once they had woken up to the fact that the dispute was on, *Socialist Action*, for example, could only issue appeals of the most anaemic sort. On November 25th they were declaring, "The NGA can only defeat Tebbit's laws with the support of the print and newspaper unions and the full backing of the labour movement as a whole." "Support" and "backing" was all these wiseacres could recommend to the embattled print workers. Only the next week - one week after the other left papers had raised the call - did *Socialist Action* call for stronger stuff.

"The TUC should be organising a 24 hour general strike in support of the NGA - as it did in 1972 over the five imprisoned Pentonville dockers." (SA 2.12.83) Meanwhile the *Socialist Action* could recommend no more than this one day action and a continuation of the picketing - tactics that were already in operation. "Mass picketing has the power to close the Stockport Messenger group".

Socialist Action was the last in the field with the call for a one-day general strike. *Militant* issued the call in its 25th November special. So too did *Socialist Organiser* in the same week. For the centrists the call for a 24 hour strike answered many needs. On the one hand it served to distance themselves from the TUC. On the other hand they hoped it would save them from derision and scorn. For *Militant* and *Socialist Action* it was prescribed as the remedy to the dispute. *Socialist Organiser* could not quite bring itself to say that. For them the demand for a one day general strike was a means of preparing the working class for an all-out general strike later on. The task was to find a way to the reserves of militancy in the working class, "The task is to find ways to tap this strength, and create conditions for the all-out general strike action that is needed to defend our unions." (SO 24.11.83) The call for a general strike was advanced as one means of achieving this. *Socialist Organiser* was tying itself in knots.

Militant

THE MARXIST PAPER FOR LABOUR
For a 24hr general strike

The real pre-condition for an all out general strike is that the argument for it has been won amongst sufficient numbers of militants, amongst the rank and file and forced on the union leaders. *Socialist Organiser* was not willing to do the elementary and preparatory work of fighting for an all-out strike. They may privately have seen their call as a road to an all-out strike but workers would judge it on its merits. And what the "realists" fail to understand is that to many organised workers faced with a ruthless and determined class enemy and who have seen and experienced many desultory and ultimately futile "Days of Action" the 24 hour general strike is neither realistic as a means of fighting the Tories nor any more likely to win the support of large numbers of workers.

Moreover if a one-day strike of the entire working class was achieved then revolutionaries would argue that workers should stay out. Yet *Socialist Organiser* and *Militant*'s call for a one-day strike gives the bureaucrats the perfect alibi to limit the action. And, having raised such a slogan *Socialist Organiser* and *Militant* would be in no position to explain to militants why a one-day strike is not enough and why they should stay out.

Socialist Organiser stuck to its contradictory guns. Its mood was pessimistic as it ruminated on

the prospect of a last stand by the labour movement.

"If the only alternative to such a confrontation is surrender, then militants throughout the labour movement will face up to their responsibilities. Even a defeated general strike would do less damage in the long run to the labour movement than would a peaceful surrender of our rights. But we could win a general strike." (SO 1.12.83)

so wrote the advocates of creating the preconditions for a successful all-out general strike!

The *Socialist Organiser* tried to resolve its own contradictions in its next issue but served to introduce yet another glaring error into its programme. On December 8th it advanced the call to, "Demand that the TUC calls a general strike and prepares for an all-out general strike if the government does not back down."

The general strike slogan must be handled with extreme care. It must be advanced in a manner that organises the rank and file to hold the leaders to account. Such calls as "prepare for an all-out general strike" do nothing of the sort. They let the leaders off the hook. Any bureaucrat can claim to be 'preparing' the general strike as he goes about his daily routine and functions. The *Socialist Organiser* may have wanted to look a little more left than *Socialist Action* and *Militant* but it did so by introducing evasive, ambiguous and therefore diversionary calls on the TUC.

If the major Labour orientated leftists flocked around the banner of the 24 hour general strike, *Socialist Worker* - true to form - was having nothing to do with demands on the TUC at all.

They did call for strike action in support of the NGA, "Other unions have to join its defiance of the law. Everywhere the argument has to begin now for strike action to defend the NGA." (SW 3.12.83) But the syndicalist *SWP* could offer no means of achieving this result other than via spontaneous unofficial action, through the development of a mass strike wave, behind the backs of the official leadership. The *Socialist Worker* raised no demands on the leaders of the TUC or the other unions, "What is needed is independent initiative from below" (SW 10.12.83) This may all have seemed very left and attractive to the minority who could already see through Murray. But it offered no way of organising militants to force the TUC to act in the interests of the workers, no means of stopping the betrayal. It actually turned militants' attention away from stopping it. All the *SWP* could offer was to win the dispute as an all-out sectional dispute of print workers and hope against hope that this would inspire rank and file workers to act in solidarity with them.

Socialist Worker

Strike to deal the Tory laws

The *SWP* raised the call for an all-out print strike from the moment the threat of sequestration loomed, "The only answer to that must be the same as the engineers - an all out strike. A strike that needs the solidarity and support of every single worker. A strike that could mark a decisive defeat for the Tories and their courts". (SW 26.11.83) That the dispute was about far more than the print industry the *SWP* just could not understand. The role it was supposed to play was outlined later, "An all out strike in the print would have struck a cord among militants in other unions who would love to see Thatcher broken". (SW 17.12.83) The hopeless spontaneists of the *SWP* in fact had no strategy whatsoever except to hope the ball would bounce their way. Given the "downturn" this was of course highly unlikely. It would have completely confounded everything the *SWP* has based itself on in the last few years. The *SWP* therefore could do little more than sign off after the dispute with a call for more people to join it so as to stop such betrayals happening again.

"Preparation for the next confrontation means, in every locality, drawing activists who are angry with the bureaucrats' betrayal into socialist organisation, ensuring that they take general, class politics back to the only place it really matters - the shop-floor." (SW 17.12.83) The truth is that militants who join the *SWP* will be looking the wrong way when the bureaucrats inevitably try to betray again.

In the inevitable struggles ahead the general strike slogan will remain a vital weapon in the armoury of revolutionaries and militants. It is of relevance at all moments when the plans of the employers and the depth of their crisis will no longer allow for lasting victory through sectional struggle. In all such situations the general strike becomes a means by which the working class both fights to defend and asserts its interests as a class and if necessary, poses the question of which class rules in society, of which class shall have the power. The intensified class war in December showed that only *Workers Power* on the British left had the strategy and tactics to defeat the employers' offensive and assemble a revolutionary vanguard capable of leading the working class to the revolutionary overthrow of capitalism. ■

by Dave Hughes



Putting-off all out action until it's too late

(acknowledgements to Steve Bell)

LATIN AMERICA

CHILE: The disintegration of the Dictatorship and the tasks of revolutionaries

"IF SOMOZA FELL Pinochet will fall as well" and "The People United will never be defeated!" are amongst the slogans that the workers and oppressed masses of Chile shout most frequently at present. Once again these masses are on the move. They have begun to re-occupy the popular tribunes that have traditionally been their own - the streets, the shanty towns, the squares, the schools, the workplaces and the university campuses.

The working class and the other exploited sectors of the population are the ones who have paid the cost in social, political and economic terms of Pinochet's military dictatorship which is the direct agent of Imperialism. Repression, torture, assassinations, exile, starvation wages, unemployment, have been unable to break the historic continuity of the organised proletariat of our country.

The heroic and selfless struggles of the last year were expressed initially in separate local actions but since May of this year it developed into nationwide strikes. This shows just how much indignation and hatred have accumulated amongst the working masses during the long years of brutal police repression. The last months have also demonstrated the sympathy felt by the petty bourgeoisie, the students and all the exploited and oppressed for the struggles that the workers have been carrying forward. These struggles are part of the political and organisational recomposition of the working class. They advance its centralisation as a class, they generalise the struggle and lead to the decisive final showdown with the beast of reaction.

In addition these struggles have demonstrated the deep crisis that is undermining the dictatorship. They have revealed its deep instability and the make-shift responses with which it is attempting to find a solution to the catastrophic economic, social and political situation confronting it. Deep divisions, confusion, corrupt opportunism and even panic have begun to seize the different factions of the bourgeoisie. Three of the conditions that we Marxists recognise as characterising the prelude to a revolutionary situation are beginning to unfold in the Chilean class struggle. An important section of the working class is willing to fight and to generalise their struggle. Large sections of the petty-bourgeoisie, of the students and oppressed non-proletarian strata are deeply dissatisfied with the regime and disarray and crisis have broken out in the bourgeois camp. Taken together these are the features of a social crisis which could be converted into a revolutionary crisis in the next period.

The militant offensive that the masses have launched in the past year, the political character of the strikes against the dictatorship, have opened up a period in which partial and general demands will be increasingly interlinked and in which vanguard militants can unify the whole of the working class behind them. The struggles developing in our country once again put to the test the theories and the programmes of the workers' traditional leaderships and those of the centrist organisations. The intensification of the class struggle is the test of fire for all those who seek to assume the leadership of the proletariat. It allows us to assess their policies and actions.

The working class and the exploited masses are the direct victims of the dictatorship's policies of hunger, repression and assassination. For more than ten years they have been waging a heroic and self-sacrificing struggle against the regime and are now concentrating all their forces on the task of putting a decisive end to the dictatorship. What slogans and tactics are the traditional leaderships of the Chilean proletariat calling upon the masses to adopt? Firstly they are attempting to divert the struggle away from the direct action of the workers, and onto the institutional, parliamentary and electoral terrain. Secondly they are doing their utmost to ensure that the bourgeoisie receives the whole benefit of the struggles that the working class has been waging - in other words that the Christian Democrats, the party of capital, should form the next government. They further stress that the working class must make

their share of sacrifices in the interests of national reconstruction - ie. that the proletariat must pay the price of the harsh austerity measures needed to create the basis for a new cycle of capital accumulation. What the toiling masses are fighting for is completely opposed to this. They instinctively wish to finish with the military dictatorship and with the capitalist system which gave birth to it.

THE ECONOMIC CATASTROPHY

The brutal bonapartist regime that Pinochet installed in 1973 was, in the first instance, a reflection of the historic weakness of the Chilean bourgeoisie which is unable to solve the problems of the poverty and backwardness of the country. The bourgeoisie abandoned attempts to represent itself politically and handed over power to Pinochet. The military junta acted and continues to act in the service of large-scale Finance Capital as the agent of Imperialism. The economic model that the military *camarrilla* adopted involved the dismantling of the structures of state supervision and control, the elimination of tariff barriers and the consequent opening up of the Chilean economy to indiscriminate penetration by foreign goods. It has led to the wholesale destruction of national industry and has submitted Chile completely to the full force of the crisis of the world capitalist market.

This economic model implemented by the monetarist disciples of Milton Friedman, known in Chile as the "Chicago Boys", has been totally discredited. It has suffered defeat at the hands of the renewed struggles of the working class. Now the government is obliged to face the ever increasing demands of the country's creditors and the international banks in a situation where the bourgeoisie is riven with factions which are each fighting for their own immediate survival regardless of the overall fate of their class. This occurs at a time when the exploited masses are re-gaining class cohesion and are putting forward class demands which aim at and lead to the destruction of the military regime.

The deep crisis into which the regime has fallen takes place within an international framework. The backward countries have entered into the longest economic crisis in their history as the direct result of the international capitalist crisis. Thirty-three million unemployed tramp the streets of capitalist Europe and America. One third of the world's population is suffering chronic malnutrition. One quarter live permanently below the so-called poverty line and one eighth face actual starvation. The policy that the IMF is now imposing on the backward countries in order to obtain "servicing" and repayment of these countries' external debts cannot be complied with except at the price of condemning millions more to death from starvation.

The economic recipe that the IMF has applied in the past and that they are now attempting yet again involves the drastic reduction of public expenditure, the reduction or elimination of tariff barriers against imports, the elimination of subsidies on exports, devaluation of the currency and punctual repayment of the external debt. These measures are supposed to make each country "more competitive on the international market." In fact they will simply increase their prostration before Imperialist capital whilst intensifying the sufferings of the masses. In fact these measures clash head on with the advancing resistance struggles of the masses throughout Latin America in general, and in Chile in particular. The present situation in Central America and the Caribbean clearly indicates that Imperialism is prepared to impose its exploitative policies with blood and fire if need be. The United States has shown itself willing to intervene militarily whenever the march of social revolution threatens its interests.

The monetarist model, carried out to the limits in Chile, has been a total fiasco. The government and the various factions of the bourgeoisie are now dreaming longingly of the past and seeking, with short-term and empirical methods, to

grope their way back to the "mixed economy". They are attempting to reconstruct the state capitalist apparatus which in the past provided services, credits and a source of speculation and shady deals. Today practically every sector of the Chilean economy is weighed down by the massive debts and practically the whole financial system faces bankruptcy. The Chilean external debt is the largest in the world in per capita terms. It is practically impossible for any of its 18 billion dollar debt to be repaid and the American banks are unwilling to consider cancellation, deferment or facilitating new loans.

The sheer scale of the crisis is reflected in the fact that in 1982 industrial production dropped by 14%, the construction industry declined by 28.3%, and commerce shrank by 14%. In agriculture cereal production declined from 1.3 million tonnes per annum to 690,000 tonnes and production this year is not expected to exceed 350,000 tonnes.

Unemployment stands at about 30% of the working population. In 1982, according to official figures, the purchasing power of wages declined by 15%. In the last year alone more than eight hundred enterprises have gone bankrupt. At the beginning of the year the Chilean banking system collapsed. The government was obliged to take control of the nine key banks and finance houses. Chile has been turned into a paradise for speculators. Many finance houses acquired huge loans in dollars which they had no real capital to cover, and with which they had no genuine economic activities to conduct. With the devaluation of the peso by one hundred per cent the majority of the companies went into bankruptcy.

In the sphere of agriculture the military Junta followed the advice of the "Chicago Boys" to the letter. They eliminated all state intervention in the countryside following on the reprivatisation of the land. The government opened the door wide to full market forces allowing the elimination of inefficient producers supposedly to "take advantage of international competition." To facilitate this they removed all import and export restrictions on agricultural goods. This produced an ever accelerating polarisation in the countryside. At one extreme were a number of landowners who produced for the internal and international market - at the other the poor who produced for the poor. Of the latter some 300,000 families were deprived of their land and simultaneously denied the right to organise in their own defence. The state denied any technical, credit or mutual insurance facilities to these small proprietors, owners of tiny plots of land (*minifundistas*). This led to a situation where they had to engage in a fierce competitive struggle with one another for economic survival.



Demonstrators try to block troops approach by setting fire to tyres.

Even on the large estates (*latifundias*), those owners who possessed little capital or whose land had a low yield or output were left without protection to compete with imported agricultural products. These imports were often subsidised in their country of origin thus enabling them to undercut Chilean produce. At the opposite extreme to the impoverished peasantry stood a tiny number of *latifundistas* in whose hands are concentrated the rich lands of the central valley and a plentiful supply of capital. They produce only beef, wines, poultry, fruit for the tables of the Chilean bourgeoisie and for the North American and European market. Production of the staple items that make up the diet of the poor dropped dramatically. Thus the production of the fourteen traditional Chilean agricultural products - wheat, barley, rice, beans, lentils, peas, potatoes, sugar beet, sunflower seed oil etc. has dropped in some cases by 50% because the lands on which they were grown have been taken over for wine production, for fruit, onions, garlic and other products for "out of season" sale in the northern hemisphere. The "Chicago Boys" free market doctrine led directly to a sharp deterioration in the already meagre diet of the popular masses and to the destruction of the agrarian economy in order to feed the insatiable metropolitan capitalist octopus.

The military regime has acutely accentuated all the features of backwardness, poverty and submission to the dictates of Imperialism. The semi-colonial character of the country has been intensified to a barbaric degree. The present stage of the development of the class struggle in Chile, the central role that the proletariat plays will again put on the agenda all the democratic and national independence problems that the country faces. Once again we see demonstrated in the clearest

THEORETICAL SUPPLEMENT

fashion the historic inability of the bourgeoisie to resolve the whole question of backwardness. The economic programme of the military junta has ended in the most complete debacle imaginable. The working class is again intervening in political life with their own class methods of struggle. The prime condition for success is that the proletariat's vanguard develops a programme for power and embodies it in the construction of a revolutionary party.

The tasks of national independence, agrarian revolution, the expulsion of Imperialism, are all questions central to propelling forward the masses. Every one poses the urgent necessity of changing the political, economic and social order. Agitation around anti-imperialist slogans - the renunciation of the foreign debt, the breaking off of all counter-revolutionary military pacts, the expropriation of all imperialist property and holdings, the slogan of the United Socialist States of Latin America, all help unify the Latin American revolution. Furthermore they mercilessly expose the illusion that the Latin American bourgeoisie, already in its dotage, can break with the system of barbaric backwardness that imperialism has subjected the whole continent to.

THE BOURGEOIS OPPOSITION

At the beginning of the junta's life all fractions of the bourgeoisie approved of this new system of domination and its essential features - savage repression against the workers' movement, the utilisation of fascist methods and the restructuring of the economy. The deep crisis which has befallen both the economy and the regime no longer allow the junta to aggregate and represent all the fractions of the bourgeoisie.

As the economic and social plans of the junta were carried out contradictions began to develop within the bourgeoisie itself. To the extent that the junta served as an essential defence of their interests as a class they continued to support it. Its policies soon began to adversely effect the immediate interests of certain sections of the bourgeoisie. However the leading sections of the bourgeoisie at that time considered that the dictatorship satisfied and reproduced the conditions essential for their businesses and alone secured a base for super-exploitation. The so-called period of shock-treatment of the economy led to serious protests against the "excessive and rapid liberalisation" of the economy. The critical bourgeois factions showed their concern from two positions. From inside the regime itself the military bureaucracy and technocracy tried to create pressure groups and camarillas aimed at shifting the balance of policy in their favour. Another faction outside the regime, the Frei-led Christian Democrats, played the role of a critical conscience. Frei made certain criticisms of the regime's policies but was opposed to any action which might destabilise it. During the period of Pinochet's plebiscite, the Christian Democracy's renewed oppositional activity corresponded to a situation where the workers' movement had begun to re-organise itself. At that time the Christian Democrats came forward as an opposition bourgeois party. It became the rallying point for discontented sections of the business community, for the disaffection of the petit-bourgeoisie and indeed for the popular masses. That the latter looked to the CD was largely thanks to the good offices of the traditional bureaucracies of the workers' movement.

From the outset the CD offered itself as the card of change which the bourgeoisie could play the moment the dictatorship showed that it was finished. In this role they had the support of some sectors of US Imperialism, the favour of the Church, international connections via other Christian Democratic parties and above all the miserable subordination of the apparatuses of the workers' parties.

The oppositional role that the CD plays today corresponds to the needs of the bourgeoisie to re-establish their coherence as a class, to regain control of the state apparatus from the military caste.

The Christian Democracy has attempted to build a political framework for the bourgeoisie to conduct discussion amongst themselves in an efficient and centralised manner. The problem that faces them now is how to construct that framework so as to exclude the popular mass movement. The Christian Democrats have been obliged to carry on a demagogic campaign around democratic slogans in order to prevent the workers' movement intervening in an independent manner. We can see in the recent "days of struggle" the limitations and difficulties that the CD encounters when trying to smother

ther the independent expression of the masses, despite the fact that in this task they have the full support of the union and party apparatuses of the working class.

From the moment of its birth the Democratic Alliance had the collaboration of the socialists and the Stalinists' apparatuses even though they did not participate directly in it as organisations. The DA put forward a programme which concentrated on demanding the resignation of Pinochet, the creation of a Civil-Military government to last for eighteen months and the convocation within that period of a Constituent Assembly with strictly limited powers - namely to draw up a new constitution.

The DA's self appointed task is to separate Pinochet from the Armed Forces, in other words to achieve the collaboration of the armed forces in excluding only the person of Pinochet himself. Any change in the political situation is thus predicated on the willingness of the military to sacrifice Pinochet. Thus we can see that in the last period the bourgeois opposition keeps the junta alive. Their method is discussions and conversations with government representatives. This is "responsible opposition" and as such receives the support of the Church which has declared that "It is necessary to distinguish between legitimate peaceful protest on the one hand and vandalism and violence on the other."

THE ROLE OF THE REFORMIST BUREAUCRACIES

The class collaborationist policy of the Popular Front, which politically and organisationally disarmed the proletariat, culminated in the bloody counterrevolution carried out by the bourgeoisie and imperialism in 1973. Because in Chile there existed no revolutionary party the proletariat was unable to resolve the revolutionary situation in its own favour.

After the military coup, the proletariat was likewise unable owing precisely to its lack of such a party, to draw up a balance sheet of the experience of the Popular Unity period. This made it impossible to settle accounts with the organisers of the most colossal defeat the Chilean proletariat has ever experienced. Different attempts to draw the lessons of this period by class militants of the traditional parties were subjected to the concerted attack of the Stalinists and the fragments of the Socialist Party. Other militants drew ultra-left conclusions or, via the medium of centrist organisations, capitulated to the policy of the apparatus. On the other hand those International formations that claim continuity with Trotsky's Fourth International such as the Organising Committee for the Reconstruction of the Fourth International (OCRFI) and the United Secretariat (USec) contributed to the fragmentation, the confusion and to the liquidation of the class conscious elements that existed in the mass organisations. They exhausted these forces in diplomatic and opportunist manoeuvres.

The non-existence of a revolutionary party in Chile is partly the result of the liquidationist activity of these centrist organisations which claim to be Trotskyist - both within Chile and on an international level. The lack of a revolutionary party hampered the proletariat from bringing their traditional leaders and their policies to account.

Contrary to the claims of the centrist MIR and centrist currents inside the Socialist Party that the coup would force the reformists to miraculously understand their errors and be transformed into revolutionaries, the CP leaders and the different fractions of the SP have not changed their counter-revolutionary political nature in the slightest. On the contrary their opportunist, bureaucratic, repressive and class-collaborationist features have become accentuated. These parties did not put themselves forward as the focus for the re-composition and reorganisation of the workers' movement in the combat against the dictatorship. Indeed they ceded the political initiative to the Church and the Christian Democracy.

Four years after the military coup - and what years! - the first meeting of the Central Committee of the Chilean Communist Party took place. One of its primary conclusions was to advance the slogan of a government of the Armed Forces and the Christian Democrats. In other words they stubbornly refused to advance independent working class and democratic demands. Corvalan in his report to the Central Committee said: "We must keep in mind that in the heart of the armed forces there are and always will be truly patriotic soldiers and because of this the CP considers that in a government which expresses the fullest unity - one which we wish to aid the construction of - there must be a place for the demo-

cratic sector of the armed forces. The Communist Party puts unity foremost today and with respect to the past record of the military it calls into question or will call into question in the future only those who were personally responsible for massacres, executions or torture. Thus we extend our hand to the Christian Democracy - with those exceptions that every body knows who participated in the preparation of the coup. We extend our hand to the anti-fascist military men, - not to the fascists, as long as their hands are not stained with blood."

From the outset of the dictatorship the leaders of the traditional parties began to practice what Trotsky described so well in the Transitional Programme: "The emigre People's Front is the most malignant and perfidious variety of all possible People's Fronts. Essentially, it signifies the impotent longing for coalition with a non-existent liberal bourgeoisie."

This "impotent longing" is not confined to the Stalinists. Clodmiro Almeida in the document convoking the XXIV Congress of the Partido Socialista de Chile, dated March 1983 expressed the self-same policy under the slogans "Towards a Democratic Coalition formed in struggle - For a Democratic Coalition Government." He continued: "For us the enterprise of unity is not exhausted at the boundaries of the Left. On the basis of the development of the Left's own forces we see this unity extending to other trends and parties that are consistently anti-dictatorship, in particular the Christian Democratic Circles. Our objective is to bring together the widest and strongest democratic coalition, able on a pluralist basis to unite the whole Chilean People thus progressively isolating the military-plutocratic minority that oppresses the country."

We can observe that from a programmatic viewpoint no significant differences separate the Democratic Alliance and the leaders of the "Left" who have in turn created the "Popular Democratic Movement". The Bourgeois Opposition, the Stalinists, the Socialist Convergence and the Social Democracy, all, in different ways of course, strive to strangle the masses' offensive against the dictatorship. They try to prevent the generalisation, extension and deepening of the workers' struggle, fearing above all that this will crystallise around revolutionary slogans for national and democratic liberation which put in question the very social system that gave birth to the dictatorship. Corvalan is actually horror-struck by such a perspective. He has used all his political ability in an attempt to liquidate the workers' class initiative, including playing suppliant to the bourgeoisie, begging for their assistance in avoiding a revolutionary crisis when the dictatorship falls. His ruling passion is hatred and fear of the revolution. Thus in his article "The Bankruptcy of Imperialist Policy in Chile" dated May 1983 he observes: "We communists consider that it is necessary and possible to avoid an interregnum and to work from the first days after removing the dictatorship to overcome the principal difficulties. Certain members of the bourgeois opposition carefully test the ground before taking a further step. They rightly consider that Pinochet will leave ruins behind him and so they would like someone else to assume the initial burden of the struggle against economic dislocations. We think this attitude is wrong to say the least. The country must not be left to the mercy of fate, which threatens chaos. Selfish calculations should not override ones patriotic duty..... This calls for agreement among all opposition groups, left and right alike. Such an agreement whilst not easy, is feasible. The communists are willing to devote all their energies to bringing it about."

Thus it is possible to confirm yet again that the reformist workers' parties are carrying out to the full their counter-revolutionary functions. Precisely in a period of the developing mobilisation of the working classes and indeed of all the oppressed and exploited masses they advance a grand national accord. They offer a negotiated exit for Pinochet and try by every means available to avoid any explosion of the mass movement and a confrontation with the bourgeois state.

THE TASKS OF THE MOMENT

A crisis of a revolutionary character is maturing in Chile. The fruition of that crisis depends, first and foremost, on the degree of class independence of the proletariat.

The task of building a revolutionary party in Chile, is alas in the earliest stage. This is itself a product of the crisis of leadership of the proletariat but it is made worse by the legacy of the political and organisational destruction of the Fourth International at the hands of renegades from Trotskyism. The building of the party is in its artisan stage. But this does not mean that we can avoid the revolutionary task of elaborating a programme. In the present period this assumes a precise meaning. It entails a ceaseless fight against the programmatic positions of the reformists and centrists through propaganda oriented primarily to the vanguard of the working class. This task is an essential component in the preliminary stage of party construction. From such consistent and regular work it will be possible to establish organisational and political links with groups of advanced workers as the first step towards the construction of a solid revolutionary nucleus in the heart of the proletariat. Only on that basis can we advance steadily towards the consolidation of a revolutionary party in Chile.

The developing class struggle not only exposes the counter-revolutionary operations of the reformist leaders. It also reveals the rotten opportunism of certain groups that claim to be Trotskyist. In the 11th July 1983 copy of the magazine *International Viewpoint* which is published under the auspices of the United Secretariat, two points are raised which we cannot let pass. They reflect this organisation's opportunism, political confusion and adaptation to forces alien to Marxism.

Detainees being released after being questioned by police at a Santiago soccer field.



LATIN AMERICA



Riot police clash with students at the University of Chile in Santiago.

Firstly they characterise the June 23rd General Strike in Chile as a semi-failure. These gentlemen thus demonstrate their inability to understand the long march of the Chilean proletariat under the repression of one of the most brutal of all military dictatorships. They cannot understand these struggles as a vital and necessary part of the political and organisational recomposition of the proletariat. The strike was carried out against the will of the traditional leaderships and of the union bureaucracy.

These "leaders" called for the cancellation or suspension of the strike to facilitate a dialogue with the government, yet despite this, working class militants carried on with the strike. In the conditions operating in Chile, the organisation of a strike, however modest, is a political triumph because it constitutes a direct confrontation with the whole regime.

The second major error of the USec is its failure to comprehend that when the mass base of the workers' movement enters into contradiction with its traditional leadership, this represents a step forward in the process of political clarification for the proletariat. The lesson that we draw from this is diametrically opposed to that drawn by the United Secretariat.

In late 1983 the USec became more frank about the programme of its Chilean section - the Revolutionary Socialist Party. True to form it is advancing a "radical democratic programme" which it urges the proletariat to mobilise around. For them the permanent revolution means that the struggle for key democratic demands has an objectively anti-capitalist logic. Thus their programme contains no demands for the building of the organs of struggle with which the proletariat could seize power. We consider that the construction of a revolutionary party in Chile requires a vigorous fight against the USEC's centrism and its programmatic capitulation to Stalinism via Castroism.

The break in the continuity of the construction of a revolutionary party in Chile has produced a situation where certain groups that claim adherence to the Transitional Programme on the one hand ignore a number of tactics and slogans fundamental to this period of struggle to overthrow the dictatorship and on the other pass over in silence the collaborationist policies of the bureaucracy.

In a period of mass upsurge tremendous pressure exists to seek short cuts to the creation of a party. This opens the road for centrist tendencies to concentrate entirely on "activism" and to push into the background the task of developing and fighting for a programme. The reorganisation of the workers' movement commenced its development within the framework of the unions and in such organisations as democratic struggle committees. Here the tactic of United Front retains all its validity - this means fighting to develop the independent activity of the proletariat through the unions and other ad hoc organs of struggle. It means fighting to unite the militants of various political parties and even intervening within the traditional parties for a class independent fight for democratic rights. This must be sharply counterposed to the Anti-Fascist Front- which is no more than a variant of the Popular Front- and against the hopelessly sectarian "Revolutionary Front". Our policy must be the workers' United Front.

The slogan of the reconstruction of the C.U.T. (the Chilean Trades Union Congress) is fundamental in this period. It is vital from the point of view of centralising and unifying the workers' movement. It is also a step forward in developing the independence of the workers' movement. The bureaucracy obstinately refuses to raise this slogan because it is an obstacle in their negotiations with the bourgeoisie who want either "non-political" unions or to split up and seize control of a section of the union movement. Some centrist organisations likewise refuse to raise this slogan and raise instead the call for "genuine revolutionary unions". They fail to realise that in a period of upsurge the workers will flood into their traditional unions and indeed, in the absence of a revolutionary alternative, into their old parties in order to utilize them for struggle. Certainly they will have illusions that the apparatus of these bodies will lead that struggle. In such periods of sud-

den mass growth, in the tumult of struggle, the workers can shake the conservative apparatus to its foundations and create the conditions favourable to the building of a conscious revolutionary leadership that can challenge the apparatus and fight to transform the unions into organisations of revolutionary struggle.

Revolutionaries who are not able to carry out systematic work in existing unions will never be able to create their own "revolutionary unions" either.

While we must fight to centralise the unions we must also fight to totally transform them. We must fight to take them into the hands of the mass of the workers and to build factory committees and strike committees that can begin to challenge the capitalists for power at every level of society. Our programme is a programme of fighting systematically within the existing unions to win militants to the construction of soviet-type bodies with which the workers can take power. Of course they will not spring forth as fully formed soviets according to some abstract model. They will be built out of the strike committees and struggle organisations of today's and tomorrow's battles. Indeed in the "cordones industriales" of the early 70s we see the first phase of development of such bodies. Revolutionaries will have to draw the lessons, positive and negative of the experience of these in the last year of the Popular Unity Government.

In preparing the proletariat for power, revolutionists must also advance a programme that will enable the proletariat to lead all the oppressed and exploited layers by taking up their causes as its own.

* It must fight for the right of the middle and poor peasants and rural proletarians to form their own unions and to seize and administer the big farms and estates. It must demand the nationalisation of all land and guarantees of credit to the rural poor.

* It must take up the cause of the urban poor in the shanty towns. It must support their neighbourhood committees which have been created in struggle against the dictatorship and fight to centralise them. We must fight for a massive programme of public works in these areas of urban squalor which shall be administered by committees of the inhabitants themselves.

* In the army Revolutionaries must fight to break up the army as a force upon which imperialism and the bourgeoisie can depend. By this we do not mean - as the Stalinists and Social Democrats do- searching out "democratic" friends in the highest ranks. We mean fighting to forge an alliance between the working class and the rank and file soldiers by struggling for the soldiers' right to organise and the building of soldiers' committees in every barracks.

In this context the Anti-Imperialist United Front tactic is applicable for the developing revolutionary party which must fight for the political and organisational independence of the proletariat. Transitory agreements struck



General
Augusto
Pinochet

between the working class and other strata oppressed by Imperialism and the bourgeoisie in the struggle against the existing order- a struggle in which the proletariat can rise up as a leader of all the oppressed of the nation- does not imply strategic or programmatic agreement. The fight for the Anti-Imperialist United Front today means most crucially a struggle against the bloc that the Stalinist and Social Democratic reformists want to build with the bourgeoisie, a struggle to prevent the developing organisations of the proletariat and oppressed masses becoming subordinated to the bourgeoisie.

This new Popular Front is a brake on the proletarian revolution and a safety valve for Imperialism. The radicalisation taking place within the petit-bourgeoisie and the possibility of turning it to an alliance with the proletariat can only be accomplished if the workers pursue a resolute revolutionary strategy, based on united action against the exploiters and the military camarrilla. In this context a determined fight for the cancellation of Chile's crippling foreign debts, for the expropriation of imperialist assets, for the annulment of the concessions that have placed Chile's natural resources in the hands of the imperialists will enable the proletariat to offer a decisive lead to all those strata of Chilean society who suffer under Imperialism's yoke.

The slogan of a Constituent Assembly that the Bourgeois Opposition advances as a means of preserving its class rule and in which the workers' leaders are willing accomplices could become the basis for integrating the working class, allowing for a new cycle of capitalist accumulation with all the costs of reconstruction being discharged onto the backs of the workers and oppressed masses. It is for this reason that some centrist groups fear to raise the slogan of the Constituent Assembly, giving as their excuse the claim that to do so would create bourgeois-democratic illusions. They thereby show their inability to utilise the slogan in a revolutionary manner - ie. to challenge and help overcome existing democratic illusions. The appeal for a Constituent Assembly gains its strength from the existence of unsolved democratic problems. We must utilise tactics to expose the fact that the root of these problems lies in the system of exploitation and in Imperialism's stranglehold. The revolutionary tasks that are associated with the Constituent Assembly slogan by Trotsky in the Transitional Programme are agrarian revolution and national liberation. Launching revolutionary agitation around these questions, mobilising the masses to demand thoroughgoing measures on these questions as well as on those of political liberty and the demands of workers, peasants, the urban poor, women etc. permits the revelation of the limits of bourgeois democracy. It will unmask the bourgeois oppositionists and the treacherous "workers' leaders". Further it allows revolutionaries to expound their programme and to rally around them the forces necessary to put an end to exploitation and misery - to pose the need to reorganise the country on a new basis - both economic and social.

This agitation does not run counter to agitation to build soviets or an armed workers' militia. Such agitation is linked to that of building and centralising factory committees, soldiers committees, peasant committees and shanty town committees. In no way do we or should we argue that they should restrain their actions against the old order until the Constituent Assembly has been convened. On the contrary we fight for them to establish workers' control in the plants for example. We fight for the workers and peasants councils themselves to expose the spinelessness of the bourgeoisie by being prepared to convene the Constituent Assembly itself - by revolutionary means. To this extent the call for a Constituent Assembly therefore can assist in opening the road to the dictatorship of the proletariat.

The political situation in which the Constituent Assembly is resolved is necessarily linked to the intervention of revolutionaries and the task of constructing a party. Our country is a backward one, subject to Imperialist domination and the struggle around democratic demands is unavoidably on the agenda. The effects of combined and uneven development on the economy dictate that the demands for political democracy, for transitional demands and the tasks of social revolution do not occupy separate historical stages as the Stalinists and those who accommodate to them claim. The steps in which they are presented, the order of the slogans are determined by the concrete conditions of the class struggle.

The masses are themselves instinctively advancing towards a general strike with the aim of definitively putting an end to the military dictatorship. There has been no defeat and no important modification of this tendency. The working class' combativity is increasing. It is rising on a national scale at the head of the exploited against the political regime of the bourgeoisie. Against the reformist leaders Revolutionaries must fight for an unlimited general strike to destroy the military dictatorship. They must not flinch from the task of agitation and fraternisation aimed at promoting the disintegration of the armed forces thereby creating the conditions for mass armed insurrection.

As we have indicated, the military regime has brutally aggravated all the features of backwardness in the semi-colonial character of the country. Revolutionaries must systematically agitate for revolutionary-democratic demands and expose how both the bourgeoisie and the apparatuses betray these goals. They must intransigently advocate the necessity for the proletariat to rise as the leader of the whole oppressed nation in the fight for a Workers' and Peasants' Government, for the Dictatorship of the Proletariat. ■

by Diego Mocar - a Chilean Trotskyist Militant

'ARGENTINE TROTSKYISM': Opportunism and missed opportunities

AN AUDIBLE SIGH of relief emanated from bourgeois commentators all over the world at the results of the Argentine elections. Even so recent a foe of Argentina as Margaret Thatcher was moved to send a congratulatory message to Raul Alfonsín, victor in the Presidential elections of October 30th. Such enthusiasm was understandable. Alfonsín, leader of the "not very radical Radical Party", as *The Economist* accurately described it, had not only given the Peronists a good drubbing but, because of his "popular mandate", offered the best prospects for an extended period of bourgeois stability in Argentina.

The imperialists had further reasons to be pleased with events in Argentina. The Argentine bourgeoisie had managed to defuse the serious revolutionary crisis which had threatened to engulf the discredited military regime as a result of its miserable economic failure, compounded with a military disaster in the Malvinas.

The military dictatorship - like its counterpart in Chile - had followed a twin-pronged policy since the 1976 coup. Vicious attacks on the working class and its organisations were combined with a ferociously "monetarist" economic policy. In the short term the repression of the workers benefited all sections of the bourgeoisie. In the two years after Videla's coup, labour costs fell by 20%. In the longer term, however, the "monetarist" policy of opening the country to unfettered imperialist exploitation - by removing all protectionist tariff barriers for example - was a disaster for important sections of the industrial bourgeoisie.

By 1980 the economy was wracked by a number of bank collapses and bankruptcies of industrial groups. In 1981, the economy as a whole shrunk by 6%. In the same year, per capita income had declined to its 1970 level. The economy was kept afloat only by massive loans. Between 1975 and 1980, industrial production per capita fell by 10% while foreign debt tripled. Today it stands at 40 billion dollars or more. The only sectors of the Argentine ruling class who prospered in this period were those most closely tied to imperialism - the financial interests, the large farmers and the military, which shamelessly lined its pockets from the state coffers.

The growing discontent of key sections of the bourgeoisie with these policies and their organisation within the opposition "multipartidaria" began to undermine the dictatorship's grip on the country. The explosion of working class militancy at the end of 1981, and in particular the massive general strike of March 30th 1982, threatened its very existence. The desperate attempt of the regime to win support through its seizure of the Malvinas in April, quickly turned sour when it became clear that, contrary to their expectations, US imperialism refused them benevolent neutrality and instead facilitated the operations of its fellow imperialist power.

Even before the defeat, the Argentine workers had demonstrated that, while they supported the justified ousting of British imperialism from the islands, they were far from extending this support to Galtieri. Popular slogans on the huge demonstrations were "The Malvinas are Argentina's, so are the disappeared", "No to the government, yes to the Malvinas". With the defeat of Argentina's armed forces by Britain, and the exposure of the incompetence of the officer caste during the campaign, the military's fate was sealed.

After a short lull in opposition activity after the defeat and the fall of Galtieri, the working class resumed the offensive. General Bignone's "transitional government", promising elections sometime in 1984 to "approved" political parties, found itself struggling with a massive working class upsurge. In September, 20-40,000 marched in the capital for "bread and jobs", and similar demonstrations took place in other main towns. October saw several demonstrations called separately by the Radicals, Peronists and CP, each attended by 15-30,000 people. The popular slogan of this period, "The military dictatorship is going to end", summed up the mood of the working class. The heroic defiance of the military's goon squads on the streets indicated clearly that the working class and a wide strata of youth were determined to destroy the hated junta.

At La Plata on December 4th, a ceremony designed to pay homage to Malvinas war veterans turned into a demonstration as 300 ex-soldiers jeered their officers and chanted slogans. Two days later a one-day general strike called by both CGT trade union federations paralysed the country. On December 16th a "March for democracy and national reconstruction" called by the Multipartidaria mobilised 100,000 in the capital and ended in street fighting as police attacked stone-throwing marchers.

Neither was there any let-up in 1983. As Bignone and the military negotiated with the bourgeois opposition - particularly the Radicals and Peronists - attempting to get them to control the mass movement in return for electoral concessions, rank and file actions continued unabated. A further one-day general strike was called on March 28th

1983 and from the summer, a wave of strikes developed which involved over 2.5 million workers. These included textile, rail, cement, telephone, health and postal workers as well as school teachers, civil servants and bank employees. This movement culminated in yet another massive one-day general strike on October 4th - the third in under a year - barely a month before the elections. So desperate had the situation become for the military that they willingly handed over the government to Alfonsín immediately after the elections, instead of waiting until March as they had originally announced.

This strike movement, while centred around economic demands, for wage increases, against price increases (Argentina clocked over 400% inflation in 1983), fed into the struggle against the military, with political slogans to the fore in the mass demonstrations. It also collided head on with the entrenched Peronist trade union bureaucracy. In the period of severest repression, shortly after the Videla coup, many unions had been placed under military control, with local leaders jailed or murdered. Later "Normalisation Commissions" were set up, in which the military, together with the Peronist union bureaucracy, controlled the unions. These "leaders" did everything in their power to stifle the strike movement, as they searched for an accommodation with the military.

THE CRISIS IN PERONISM

At a national level, Isabel Peron had ensured the continuing domination of the right wing of the movement with the selection of Italo Luder as the presidential candidate. Luder and Lorenzo Miguel, leader of the Peronist "verticalista" unions, made no bones about their desire to gain support from sections of the military. Thus the struggle against the dictatorship by rank and file trade unionists went hand in hand with the struggle for democratic control of their unions. As a result, many of the Peronist trade union bureaucrats became completely discredited. When Miguel attempted to speak at a rally celebrating the unification of Peronist unions, on October 17th in Velez, he was howled down and pelted with coins and bottles by the rank and file unionists.

It was this crisis in Peronism which in the end allowed the Radical Party, the traditional party of the industrialists and agribusiness interests, to win the elections. While the influence of Peronism within the working class by no means evaporated - the final Peronist election rally drew a million people, mostly workers and trade unionists - their support slumped dramatically. In 1983, Peron obtained 7,358,252 votes (62% of the total) compared with Luder's 4,462,432 (40%) in the October elections. Most importantly, the Radicals won in the traditional Peronist stronghold of Buenos Aires, including in the industrial belt of Avellaneda Lanus and San Martin, where particularly hated Peronist trade union bosses stood.

Alfonsín has been quick to attempt to consolidate his hold over sections of the Argentine working class. On December 10th he granted an across-the-board wage increase and, as part of his attempt to undermine the grip of the Peronist bureaucracy, he is busy posing as the champion of trade union democracy, with proposals for the re-election of all trade union officials, and for enshrining the rights of minority representation on trade union executives.

The crisis of the military dictatorship in Argentina, the divisions within the ruling class and the wave of strikes and working class mobilisations against the regime, confronted the Argentine bourgeoisie with a serious pre-revolutionary situation.

The Peronists and their Stalinist acolytes exhausted themselves in the task of containing, fragmenting and dissipating every forward move of the masses. It is scarcely surprising that the masses punished Peronism at the polls. Alfonsín was able to achieve a "Spanish" rather than a "Portuguese" resolution to the crisis of the dictatorship. The Argentine bourgeoisie now have a democratic mandate for its inevitable austerity drive, and for its attacks on the union organisations of the proletariat. The pre-revolutionary situation has, for a period at least, given way to a mild form of the "democratic counter-revolution".

However, there can be no doubt that in the past two years, a period of enormous opportunities existed for Argentine revolutionaries - the opportunity to play a conspicuous role in directing the spontaneous militancy of the proletariat towards the overthrow of the military; the opportunity to play a key role in leading the organised proletariat towards a break with Peronism; the opportunity to win a substantial section of the vanguard to a real revolutionary communist party.

Revolutionary communists could and should have posed centrally the need for working class independence from the multipartidaria and its endless discussions with the military butchers. They could and should have posed the need to

transcend the limits of one-day protest strikes, to an indefinite general strike to smash the dictatorship. They should have taken up the fight for democratic rights within the disaffected armed forces.

The fight to build revolutionary minorities within the unions and workplaces would have found fertile ground in a situation where unofficial trade union "groupings" were mushrooming in opposition to the Peronist bureaucrats. Only such a movement could have linked up the struggles of the unemployed, the small farmers and human rights campaigners, to pose the question of working class power as an alternative to the crumbling military dictatorship or the bourgeois alternatives of Peronism and Radicalism.

Measured against this strategy, the Argentine Communist Party, with its claimed 300,000 members, proved once again its counterrevolutionary nature. Its slavish tailing of the Peronists led it quickly to withdraw its presidential ticket in favour of giving unconditional support to Luder. Two other groups, standing to the left of the CP, and claiming to be Trotskyist, also contested the elections. Nahuel Moreno dissolved his organisation, the Socialist Workers' Party (PST), and fought in the elections under the banner of the "Movement Towards Socialism" (MAS), originally a small social democratic current¹. Política Obrera (PO), a section of the Fourth Internationalist Tendency (FIT), fought in the elections as the major force within the Partido Obrero - Workers' Party (PO)².

Moreno's justification for fighting the elections under a reformist banner rested on the claimed "specific situation" in Argentina. There existed, according to Moreno, a revolutionary situation of a "special type" - whereby the ruling class was in crisis, but the working class organisations were at a low ebb. There was therefore no drive from the working class organisations to build a revolutionary or even a centrist party. Rather, as the experience in Southern Europe had shown (Spain, Portugal, Greece), transitions from reactionary regimes give rise to mass socialist parties of a reformist type. Therefore, Moreno argued, it was necessary in Argentina to adapt to an electoralist period, to build or find a non-revolutionary reformist party, the socialism of which was vague enough to act as a receptacle for the expected burgeoning mass reformist current.

As a result the PST "fused" with MAS, an existing small social democratic current. There was no attempt to "foist" a revolutionary programme on it. Indeed, this would have been self-defeating from Moreno's point of view. Thus the previous slogans raised by the Morenoites - "Down with the military junta", and the vacuous "Prepare the general strike to end the dictatorship and win our demands", were unceremoniously dropped in favour of a central slogan for the MAS of "for a socialist Argentina without bosses or generals". This was justified by the fact that "legality" meant that the objective of a "socialist Argentina" could be achieved, through the electoral process. And even though the call for a "socialist Argentina" might be given a social democratic content, even this would be a great advance for the Argentine working class over Peronism! (Yes, believe it or not, this is the same Moreno who broke with Pierre Lambert of the French PCI because Lambert was not critical enough of the French Socialist Party!)

The MAS even managed to give the demand for non-payment of the foreign debt a completely reformist content. In a semi-colonial country like Argentina, the question of the stranglehold of imperialism over the economy, particularly through indebtedness to the international banking conglomerates, assumes a vital importance. In Argentina the 40 billion dollar debt costs 4 billion dollars a year to service, an amount equal to almost 8% of the country's Gross Domestic Product. Every time this crippling debt is "restructured" - i.e. loans are given to pay back interest on other loans - the creditor banks demand higher interest rates. In Argentina's case this averages at 14% (3 to 4% above the US prime rates!) on new loans. Such crippling interest rates are paid in the end by the Argentine workers and small farmers, through IMF demands to squeeze more surplus out of the working population. Revolutionaries raise the demand for an end to this super-exploitation by imperialism, through cancelling the debts and the interest payments. They raise this in the context of the fight for a workers' government, committed to defending the interests of the workers and small farmers, and link the demand to working class action to occupy and force the expropriation of all imperialist holdings in Argentina.

For the MAS the demand to "vote against the payment of the foreign debt" was instead linked to the establishment of "a front of debtor countries to suspend the payment of their debts" - i.e. a front of bourgeois governments, a demand presumably aimed at sections of the nationalist-minded bourgeoisie, who have been threatening the imperialists with a "Debtor's OPEC" to gain better terms on their repayments. Was it these "allies" that the MAS wanted to tie the working class to when it declared its willingness to "struggle for a government of all workers' and peoples' organisations which break with imperialism and do not pay the debt"?

Moreno's adventure with the MAS is only the latest in a long line of deeply opportunist manoeuvres aimed at "building the party". Always the "get-rich-quick merchant" - both politically and financially - Moreno has a persistent history of gross opportunist accommodation to any mass movement, actual or perceived. Whether this takes the form of publishing a paper "under the discipline of General Peron" as he did in 1955 with Palabra Obrera, or working under the discipline of Visconti's social democratic MAS as he is doing today, the results remain the same.

Trotsky himself knew this method and attacked it unrelentingly: "One of the psychological sources of

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opportunism is a superficial impatience, a lack of confidence in the gradual growth of the party's influence, the desire to win the masses by organisational manoeuvres or personal diplomacy. Out of this springs the policy of combinations behind the scenes, the policy of silence, of hushing up, of self-renunciation, of adaptation to the ideas and slogans of others; and finally the complete passage to the positions of opportunism".³ Moreno promised his deluded followers half a million votes! The MAS garnered only just over 40,000, compared to the PST's 181,000 votes in 1973. Even in the short term, Moreno's opportunism no longer pays.

Moreno's closest rival, *Política Obrera*, was more circumspect in its methods. Nevertheless, it also failed to put before the Argentine workers either a revolutionary programme or the opportunity to build a revolutionary party. Like Moreno, they started out from the problem of Peronism's mass hold on the Argentine proletariat and the historic need to create a mass workers' party.

In 1980, *Política Obrera* appeared to be advocating the use of Trotsky's tactic of calling for a Labor Party: "No revolutionary party may exist without defining a strategy. This is undoubtedly the dictatorship of the proletariat, the workers' and peasants' government. In the situation of Argentina's political development, the key question of this strategy is that of the workers' party, as the concrete and positive form of the break with bourgeois nationalism and for complete class independence".⁴

At this level of abstraction, the proposed tactic appears to coincide with Trotsky's slogan. However, a later concretisation already begins to pose it in a different fashion: "The historic regroupment which is taking shape and towards which the proletariat is pushing, can only have the form of a Workers' Party... the struggle for the Workers' Party involves calling on all tendencies which really base themselves on the proletariat and upon all of its organisations to form the working class's own party".⁵

THE WORKERS' PARTY TACTIC

Posed not as a demand on the union organisations, but as a proposal to multivarious political tendencies, such a proposal can amount to little more than a call for a confused centrist swamp. Unsure of its own mind, however, *Política Obrera* had an alternative perspective, that they themselves might turn out to be the "workers' party": "In this sense, the task of constructing the workers' party has two alternatives. Firstly that with the upturn of the working class there develops a powerful class movement. In this case the task of the Workers' Party will be to set up this movement and give it a revolutionary political perspective. The second is that the workers' party is only the expression of the growth of our own organisation".⁶

Thus PO's workers' party slogan can also simply become a disguise for the growth of PO itself. The latter course turned out to be the one PO followed, initially under the alleged necessity of legalisation. Of course, "legal fronts" are necessary under a weakened dictatorial regime, nor do we underestimate the importance of re-conquering legality. However, PO - as we shall show - went beyond this and enthusiastically adopted the disguise, offering this to the Argentine proletariat in the elections.

But first let us return to basics and look at what Trotsky's Labor Party tactic really meant. The tactic as developed and refined by Trotsky in the 1930s was a variant of the united front tactic, adapted to the task of breaking the unions or other mass proletarian organisations from their political servitude to the bourgeoisie, and posing the need for a revolutionary party. It was a means of relating to situations where even reformist leaders were pushed, because of the class struggle and the pressure of the rank and file, to consider forming a separate party based on the workers' organisations. It allowed the possibility of revolutionaries uniting with millions of reformist-led workers in demanding their leaders break with the bourgeoisie, and put revolutionaries in a favourable position to advance the revolutionary programme as the content of the political break. This was the key to the tactic. Far from being in favour of promoting a reformist party, all the efforts of revolutionaries had to be directed at preventing this outcome. Thus Trotsky argued in discussing the question with leaders of the American SWP: "Are we in favour of the creation of a reformist Labor Party? No. Are we in favour of a policy which can give to the trade unions the possibility to put its weight upon the balance of forces? Yes. It can become a reformist party - it depends upon the development. Here the question of programme comes in...we must have a programme of transitional demands, the most complete of them being a workers' and peasants' government".⁷

What Trotsky was arguing was that the slogan had an "algebraic" character. Revolutionaries fought for a revolutionary transitional programme to be the basis of this new workers' party. The reformist leaders would, of course, fight tooth and nail for a reformist party and programme. The actual outcome would only be determined in the struggle between these two forces. Thus Trotsky never favoured "building a reformist party", or constructing some sort of "half-way house", a party which was built on a "not quite revolutionary" programme - i.e. a centrist one.

In Argentina such a tactic certainly has applicability. Even though there was no powerful, organised movement within the trade unions for a break with Peronism and towards forming a Workers' Party, rank and file workers certainly would have been receptive to agitation

for such a party. Revolutionaries could have posed their programme and solutions to the crisis against those of the Peronists and Radical Party through this tactic. This was not, however, the policy that *Política Obrera* followed. Drawing more on the experience of the development of a centrist grouping, the Workers' Party of Brazil, than on Trotsky's tactic, PO proceeded to ditch its formal programme. The Workers' Party in Argentina was built as a "half-way house", with PO arguing for a centrist programme which rarely rose above a mish-mash of democratic and reformist demands. The first issue of *Prensa Obrera*, the paper of the Workers' Party, put forward the following "Action Programme":

- for a minimum wage of 10 million, to keep pace with inflation.
- for a 100% wage increase.
- for the hiring of all the unemployed. Occupation of all idle factories.
- against speculation and inflation, workers' control of production.
- suspension of payment of the foreign debt. Investigation of its origin and use.
- full satisfaction of the demands of the Mothers and Families.
- non-recognition of all of the treaties which condition national sovereignty throughout the territory and on its continental platform.
- full freedom of trade union and political organisation.
- down with the military dictatorship, liquidation of militarism, for a Constituent Assembly".

This is not a revolutionary programme of transitional demands. Its "crowning piece" is not the demand for a workers' and peasants' government, but a democratic demand for the constituent assembly. Now, while a revolutionary party would certainly have fought for restoration of full democratic rights (and this would have been particularly important in the context of the fight against the military dictatorship), communists do not limit themselves to the slogans of *bourgeois* democracy. To do so is to bolster the masses' democratic illusions, not to help them outgrow them. For a so-called revolutionary grouping to limit itself to the demand for a constituent assembly, especially in Argentina where it does not have the enormous revolutionary democratic mobilising force that the land or national questions gave it, say, in China in the 1920s or in India or Spain in the 1930s, is the most crass form of opportunism.

The Workers' Party's "Statement of Principles" (published in January 1983) contains the same programme but in an expanded version. It continues the same method, offering outright reformist solutions on certain questions. Thus on the military budget, the communist position of "Not a man, not a penny for this system" is abandoned in favour of the openly reformist demand for "The reduction of the military budget and increase in the health and education budgets".

On the foreign debt the Workers' Party had if anything a weaker position than that of the Morenoites. The Statement of Principle demands "suspension of the foreign debt, until its origin, composition and aim is investigated". Investigated by whom? By the workers forcing open the books of the capitalists and speculators and their corrupt military backers? No - *Prensa Obrera* informs us it should be investigated by "a committee of parliamentarians and direct representatives of the working class". A parliamentary committee to expropriate the imperialists? A committee of all parties? Parliamentarians representing which classes and forming what sort of government? All is left vague for precisely the same reason that Moreno adopts the slogan of a "Socialist Argentina". Reformist workers can interpret it in a reformist way, while *Política Obrera* remains content with its hidden "revolutionary" meaning.

Neither was PO's intervention in the trade union struggle any more revolutionary during this period. Its use of the general strike slogan was both inconsistent and in the political situation obtaining, grossly economic. In March 1982, when the dictatorship was under serious threat from the rising class struggle, PO raised only the vague demand for "mass demonstrations and active strikes to do away with poverty and the dictatorship".⁸ By September, when it was raising the demand for a general strike by both CGTs, it was focusing it around a series of economic demands - especially the minimum wage.

Prensa Obrera, with the Workers' Party's eyes by now firmly fixed on the electoral arena, continued to raise the general strike only in the context of the demand for a 3000 dollar (sic) minimum wage. *Política Obrera* / Workers' Party showed no understanding of the vital importance of the general strike weapon. The necessity of posing the indefinite strike against the bureaucracy's one day protests, and the importance of propagandising and organising for a general strike, were not grasped by PO.

The forcing of the military from power by such a strike, even after the electoral process was set in motion, was a vital necessity to really remove the military threat and to make an accounting of their crimes possible. It alone could decisively alter the balance of class forces in Argentina. It would not only have been a massive blow to the armed forces, but also to the bourgeoisie's plans for a stable transition to bourgeois democracy. Such a strike would undoubtedly have led to the mushrooming of rank and file workers' organisations and put the question of working class power on the agenda. Revolutionaries had a duty to raise this perspective and these slogans even if the masses had powerful electoralist illusions. PO's failure to raise the slogan in this way was a reflection of its inability to put

forward a revolutionary strategy for the Argentine working class.

It is little wonder that, given this perspective, in July 1983 the Workers' Party invited various other reformist, Stalinist and centrist groupings to join with it in establishing "an anti-imperialist front of all the left".⁹ While this front was to present a joint presidential ticket in the elections, it was not just to be an "electoral episode but a movement of political organisation". According to the Workers' Party, there was sufficient programmatic agreement between these groups for "principled agreement to be reached" to "found a unified political movement of the left - a movement of an anti-imperialist nature". Only the programmes of these parties could "open a way out" of the crisis in Argentina as opposed to those of Radicalism and Peronism. Here was the real content of *Política Obrera*'s oft-called-for "anti-imperialist front".

CENTRIST DECEIT

This has nothing to do with the communist use of the united front tactic in the semi-colonial world. The Communist International recognised that his tactic could allow revolutionaries to episodically unite with petit-bourgeois and even bourgeois forces in actions against imperialism. PO's "anti-imperialist front" is rather a permanent cross-class political alliance on a joint programme.

The programme of course had to be based on the most vague "left" statements of the likes of the Argentine CP and Oscar Alende's reformist/nationalist Partido Intransigente. According to the Workers' Party, these parties have programmes that distinguish them from the "traditional" parties. According to the Workers' Party they stand against a compromise with imperialism, for the nationalisation of the banks and foreign trade, they have "in general" declared for a struggle against imperialism, etc. etc. This scandalous painting up of nationalists and Stalinists as genuine anti-imperialists and as offering a way out of the crisis for the Argentine masses was the necessary price that the Workers' Party was willing to pay to enter a bloc with these gentlemen. Here *Política Obrera* only repeats the opportunist tactics of the USFI in Latin America, with its history of proudly presenting itself before the masses in electoral blocs with Stalinists and nationalists as with FOCEP in Peru or more recently in Mexico. Again, it is ironic (to put it mildly) that PO characterises the USFI as "counter-revolutionary".

It is no surprise that the only group to enter discussions with the Workers' Party was Moreno's MAS. (The "anti-imperialist" CP had bigger fish to fry - or rather be fried by - the Peronists). Although the negotiations broke down over the candidates to be put forward, politically the Workers' Party and the MAS stood on the same terrain. Neither had any use for a revolutionary transitional programme to enable their organisations to intervene in the class struggle. Both preferred to appear before the masses at the head of non-revolutionary, democratic/reformist parties.

Moreno's intervention in the recent prerevolutionary crisis in Argentina merely confirmed his tendency's long history of opportunism. The Morenoites stand squarely in the tradition of "Pabloite" centrism. This thrives on liquidation within petit-bourgeois and bourgeois nationalist currents. The *Política Obrera* group (now Partido Obrera), despite its claims to the "anti-Pabloite" heritage, adopted a position not qualitatively different from that of Moreno or the USFI. Like the other major group of the FIT - the POR of Bolivia - PO shows no sign of having made any political break with the politics of the Lambert tendency from which it originated. Like the Lambertists, they remain chronic pedlars of democratic programmes as a substitute for developing and using a genuinely communist transitional programme. It is the tragedy of the Argentine proletariat that for all the numerical strength of the groups claiming to be Trotskyist, in recent history they have in fact offered only a centrist imitation of Trotskyism. The task of building a revolutionary Trotskyist party in Argentina lies ahead. ■

by Stuart King

FOOTNOTES

1. Up to 1979, the PST was the sympathising section of the United Secretariat of the Fourth International (USFI). As the Bolshevik Faction, it split before the 11th World Congress in November 1979 over differences on Nicaragua. (See Workers Power 11 for an analysis of the split). Moreno's tendency then fused with Pierre Lambert's OCFI, forming the Fourth International (International Committee), an international tendency which fell apart within a year. Moreno then proceeded to reform his international tendency, which now exists as the International Workers' League (IWL), of which the PST is the largest section.

2. *Política Obrera* is one of the principal organisations within the Fourth Internationalist Tendency (FIT). The other is the POR (Lora) of Bolivia. The FIT was formed after a split in Pierre Lambert's OCFI in 1979, but appears to no longer function on an international basis.

3. "The mistakes of the rightist elements of the Communist League on the trade union question" January 1931.

4. Julio Magri *Internacionalismo* 2 December 1980.

5. *Política Obrera* 17/8/82

6. *Política Obrera* 28/12/82

7. "How to fight for a Labor Party in the US" March 1938

8. *Política Obrera* No. 327

9. *Prensa Obrera* No 24 July 14th 1983.

1984 - TRADE UNIONISM IN CHAINS?

MOST effective trade union action was made illegal by the Employment Acts of 1980 and 1982. The full implications of these laws are only now becoming widely recognised. Until the judgements against the POEU, NGA, SOGAT '82 and the NUJ were handed down, the Tory anti-union laws were untried and untested.

These judgements have demonstrated that the bosses are now eager and willing to use the anti-union laws and the state is equally ready to enforce them. The anti-union laws have not only achieved the purpose for which the Tories intended them, they have been seen to be effective.

The betrayal of the POEU strike by its Broad Left dominated Executive was a signal for the bosses to act. Eddie Shah, with the assistance of Len Murray and Co., David Dimbleby and Robert Maxwell all went to the courts to get strikes, picketing and blacking - the most basic and most crucial forms of trade union activity - declared illegal. When the NGA threatened a one-day national strike, some 200 separate injunctions were sought by printers and publishers throughout the country.

THE NAME GAME

Under the 1982 Act (Tebbit's Law), all such solidarity strikes are illegal - even though the outcome of the dispute directly affects every member of the NGA.

The judgements against the NUJ in its dispute with T. Bailey Foreman of Nottingham also has implications of fundamental importance. The union was prevented from blacking material to the non-union TBF printers because their dispute was held to be solely with TBF publishers - the same company but registered under a different name!

The scene is, therefore, set for employers to establish separate trading, manufacturing, book-keeping and transport companies, go to court in the name of these companies and thereby gain state support to prevent their workers from ever going on strike.

This gambit will, no doubt, be used not only by the cheapskate small-time employers such as Shah and Dimbleby, but also by the bigger corporations. Increasingly, especially in the state-owned and nationalised industries, separate divisions are being created in advance of privatisation.

The spreading of strikes into these supposedly "independent" divisions will be illegal. This is clearly designed to prevent the escalation of disputes in combines like BL or British Telecom.

The other underlying aim of these laws is to weaken the position of shop floor leaders, and to prevent the rank and file taking any independent initiatives. The tactics of picketing out other sections of workers, crucial to the rank and file when faced with the need to take unofficial action, is now illegal.

The banning of pickets except at their own place of work (and it is yet to be seen if that will mean a whole plant or, literally, a picket's own shop or department) will place even more power in the hands of the spineless national leaders. National disputes will only be legal if they begin as national disputes.

It should not be forgotten that the mass pickets at Warrington were illegal on two counts. The first, the one that was activated, was because the Stockport 6 did not work at the Warrington plant. The second, however, would have been effective even if they had once been employed there. The mass picket was a solidarity picket and, therefore, by definition illegal under "Prior's Law" of 1980.

In fact the state was content to bring into play an earlier part of the long-term anti-union strategy - the specialised police squads - to prevent the mass picket doing anything more than demonstrating.

The dispute at Warrington began around one of the Tories' main objects of hate - the closed shop. It is testimony to the continued resilience and union loyalty of millions of workers, despite their treacherous leaders, that the



Para-military thugs in action

Tories have found it necessary to introduce their measures to break up closed shops gradually.

The first round was via a "Code of Practice" in 1980. The present government is very fond of such "codes". Like "The Highway Code", they are not themselves law, but they are expected to be the basis upon which tribunals and, no doubt, courts will formulate decisions.

Having met no opposition to their "Code", the Tories introduced specific legislation in the Tebbit Law of 1982, to turn the "suggestions" of the

Code into actual law. Now at least 80% of a workforce must vote for a closed shop in a five-yearly ballot before any such agreement is legally effective.

In 1983 another "Code of Practice" was published, which further tightened up the restrictions on the operation of the closed shop. It stated: "notwithstanding any period of notice specified in the agreement, the closed shop will cease to have effect immediately if it is not approved in a secret ballot in accordance with the requirements set out..." (Labour Research August 1983).

Moreover, in an overt threat to the unions that they should consider alternatives to the closed shop before opting for one, the code states: "High union membership among those to be covered by the proposed closed shop agreement is not in itself a sufficient indication of their views in this question and indeed some employees might decide to leave their union if a closed shop was in prospect. A union should always consider carefully whether an agreement allowing them sole recognition or bargaining rights might not be a more satisfactory arrangement" (Labour Research August 1983).

As Labour Research points out: "failure to consider alternatives to the closed shop may be used as evidence against the trade union and the closed shop in the courts".

In addition, the unions' rights to discipline scab members are removed i) if there were "reasonable grounds" for the scab to think an industrial action might be illegal or a threat to public safety, health or property; ii) where the scabs felt their "code of ethics" was infringed; iii) where a dispute was in breach of procedure; iv) where there had been no secret ballot to decide on the action.

A LEGAL ARMOURY

In his 1983 Code, Tebbit also took the opportunity to point out that employers do not have to accept a closed shop anyway, no matter how many people voted for it!

The final element of the 1982 Law with regard to closed shops will not come into force until next autumn. From then on, employers will be liable to claims for damages if they dismiss or take any action against workers who will not join a closed shop, unless it has received the 80% ballot support.

The bosses, thanks to the Tories, now have a legal armoury to use against the working class. As each major judgement over the last period has shown, the laws are aimed primarily at the rank and file and their right to

take effective action.

The working class were ill prepared by their leaders to meet this legal onslaught. The actions of these leaders last December reveal that they have, in fact, accepted the anti-union laws as a *fait accompli*. Their intention now is to negotiate "fairer" laws, not to fight.

For the Stockport 6, the workers at Maxwell's Park Royal printing press, the journalists at Dimbleby newspapers and, no doubt, many other workers, such compliance with the bosses and their laws spells disaster.

WHOSE LAWS?

For what is at stake is not some abstract right or lofty ideal. What is at stake for the rank and file is the right to a livelihood. The bosses' laws rob us of the right to fight - to defend our jobs, our services, improve our wages. We cannot and must not comply with laws that do this.

The implications of not complying are far reaching. To many workers the "law of the land" is sacred, a guarantor of order and so on. This myth is reinforced every day by the TV, the gutter press and the cowardly trade union tops. But a law that gives one class the right to deprive another of its right to defend its livelihood cannot be neutral in anyone's book. It is a law for the bosses against the workers.

It guarantees their order - their right to carry on exploiting us and disposing of us as they please. For these reasons workers must be rallied now and in the months ahead to fight these laws and the ones being framed by Tom King at the moment.

Union funds must be protected from the bewigged robbers in the courts. Secret accounts either overseas or in the names of trusted union members must be established so that no repetition of the seizure of the NGA's £11 million occurs.

All strikes must be made automatically official and enforced by mass pickets in defiance of the laws on picketing. This means organising the defence of these pickets against the highly trained squads of police picket-busters. It means building our own defence groups.

Above all it is no good waiting for the laws to be called upon before acting to get rid of them. The recent judgements have shown the class-wide significance of the laws. We need a class-wide response to them - an indefinite general strike to wipe them off the statute book. Unless that is done, the Tories will succeed in making trade unions appear irrelevant, and effective trade unionism totally illegal. ■

by Steve McSweeney

MORE SHACKLES ON THE WAY

THE BETRAYAL OF the NGA has not only led to a toughening of approach by employers but by the Tories themselves. The Employment Secretary, Tom King, has floated the possibility of adding new clauses to the Trade Union Bill which he took over from Tebbit. In particular, he has highlighted the possibility of postal ballots for elections and disputes and the removal of the "right to strike" from workers in "essential industries and services".

At present the Bill involves three major changes in the law. The first of these is to make secret ballots for the election of union executives a statutory requirement. For such an election to be legal every member must have the opportunity to vote by secret ballot at a time and place convenient to them. Any member would have the right to apply to the courts for redress if they felt they had not been given this opportunity. It would then be up to a judge to decide if the election was valid and to instruct the union to take whatever action the judge thought necessary if he upheld the complaint. The purpose of this proposed law would be to strengthen the right in the election by increasing the influence of the Press and TV upon the individual union member. Instead of union elections being a collective decision they would become an entirely private affair. Naturally, if the left still managed to win, bodies like the Freedom Association would no doubt quickly find some discontented member to drag the union through an expensive law case to try to

reverse the decision. Despite all the prattle about democracy the Bill also would legalise the disenfranchisement of sections of the union membership, a measure designed, for example, to deny trade union rights to members of particular political groups.

The second major proposal is aimed directly at the right to strike. Unions would lose all legal immunities if industrial action were not preceded by a secret ballot of those taking the action. In other words, an employer could sue for damages where a strike or any other action was not called after a protracted voting procedure along the same lines as that for elections. It would become effectively illegal for a group of workers to decide at a meeting to take strike action. Given that this is how many strikes begin such a law would be a very serious attack on the ability of workers to take strike action at all. Inevitably, the time required to hold a ballot would be used not only by the employer and media but also by the TU officials to persuade workers not to take strike action. This will especially be the case where the new electoral procedures have created a right-wing leadership.

If all the Tories proposals to date had been aimed at limiting the unions as effective economic organisations, the third of their current proposals begins the attack on the ability of workers to influence social and government policy in general.

All unions which have "political" links will be required to hold a secret ballot of their members to decide

whether or not to keep them. This must be done within 14 months of the enactment of the Bill. That means 14 months of steadily intensifying government and press propaganda against such links.

On top of that they plan to redefine what constitutes "political" activity. In addition to any payment or loan to a political organisation this will also include any activity that would influence voting behaviour. This would clearly include leaflets or newspaper articles against, for example, privatisation of the nationalised industries, public sector cuts or even support for a large claim that broke government policy. All such activities would have to be financed from a political fund. Since many unions, especially in the public sector, do not have such funds they would not be allowed to undertake any activity designed to influence policy at all.

On each of these proposals the Tories have stuck to their proven formula; not to initiate legal action themselves but to make it possible for employers and scabs to take action in the courts. If the current Bill becomes law the Tories would have succeeded in a major weakening of the working class' organisational strength. That is their aim and no amount of debate or negotiation, as proposed by the Judas Murray, will turn them from their path. As WP has argued consistently since the first Prior Bill in 1980, only an all-out counter-attack, an indefinite general strike, could wipe all these laws off the statute book. ■