

# Workers power

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LEBANON



## & RANK AND FILE

# LABOUR COUNCILS - NOW IS THE TIME TO FIGHT

THE END OF March is crunch time for Liverpool City Council. On the 29th the 51 strong ruling Labour Group will vote on a proposed £255 million budget that exceeds Thatcher's government spending plans for the City by £29 million.

The clash comes because the Tories have slashed their Rate Support Grant to Liverpool from £80 million to £36 million while the Council is committed to lowering rents and pegging rates at the present level. Liverpool is a classic victim of Thatcherism. 20% are on the dole and 9 out of 10 youth jobless. With the worst housing conditions in Europe and the highest rents outside London, Liverpool is on the front line.

The Council is in the centre of the political struggle because they have little room to manoeuvre. The alternative to a fight is a massive round of cuts. To meet Tory targets would mean a 200% rate increase or 5,500 job losses or a mixture of these. Other Labour councils, like Sheffield have been able to avoid such a drastic choice because Labour have been in power many years and in David Blunkett's words, "have built up resources and accounting methods which have stashed money away to survive this year."

Liverpool only saw the back of a ten year Liberal/Tory coalition council after last May's local elections. No amount of 'creative accounting' can help them.

Liverpool is not the only council in the Tories' sights. The Rates Bill, currently in Committee stage in the Commons is aimed at each and every council - mainly Labour - which aims to spend money patching up inner city decay. The Bill seeks to set limits to the amount each council can raise by rates. The Tories also plan to abolish the GLC and the 6 Metropolitan Counties - all Labour controlled. The Environment Minister - Patrick Jenkin - says that this is because money can be saved by getting rid of this tier of council administration. This is a lie. Every independent study since the proposal was made shows abolition and the dispersal of their present functions will be more expensive. The real reason is that the existence of these councils in areas where the working class forms an electoral majority can prove an obstacle to even more massive cuts in, and privatisation of, council service. The government's February White Paper on government spending shows what's ahead - a further 13% cut in real terms in local government expenditure over the next three years.

Despite widespread opposition even amongst some Tory councillors, Thatcher's cabinet will not budge. During the next month they will guillotine debate on the Rates Bill to make sure it is pushed through by July.

Scandalously, Tory ruthlessness is not being marked by an equal determination on the side of



John Sturrock (Network)

Liverpool City Council shop stewards lead a demonstration in defence of the City Council

Labour councils. Between 1978-1981 a series of councils caved in to Tory pressure rather than defy the law. The climbdown of Lothian after much verbal defiance was the most dramatic about face. More recently, Wakefield's Labour council have decided to do the job for the Tories by slashing spending by £4½ million.

The national response of the Labour Party leadership has been a disgrace. Kinnock has warned against breaking the law arguing that Labour councillors should stay in office and blame the Tories for the cuts. Labour's Environment spokesperson, John Cunningham, has said the law must be obeyed "even if it means cutting services". Other Labour council leaders have told Liverpool they won't get any support from them. Blunkett has promised a fight "in 1985" when the new legislation will affect all Labour councils. Until then he threatened, "we try not to have individual authorities out on their own." In shamefaced style, he warned Liverpool that "We are not going to stab them in the back...but we don't want to pretend we can be of help if we can't" (Tribune 3.2.84)

'Live to fight another day' has

been the cry to mask every retreat these councillors have made since 1976. Meanwhile, they have rewarded the patience of their own working class supporters with huge rate rises. Well over 100% in the case of Sheffield in the last four years, bringing a big reduction in disposable incomes.

In the face of this sabotage, the task facing Liverpool Council is even more difficult. This provides a real test for the politics of the *Militant* who have several key supporters in leading committee positions. This includes Derek Hatton, the architect of resistance and Deputy Leader of the Council. Overall, their strategy is seriously flawed. The campaign began last September with a big rally of Council shop stewards, followed by a well-supported march on November 19th. Further workplace meetings and petitions have followed and more are planned in March. The aim has been to get the council workers in particular to identify with their Council's struggle. This has several flaws. First, it has meant that since last May workers struggles against the Council have been stubbornly resisted. Labour promised to pay the NALGO typists their full claim if elected. They have since refused. They attacked

the residential social workers pay claim in the autumn as divisive. In short, the real felt needs of workers have been sacrificed to a financial strategy controlled by a few councillors. Secondly, little has been done to involve private sector workers and get their active support. This is decisive since Council workers strikes on their own are limited in that they do not strike at the profits of the bosses but only at revenue which is what the Tories are trying to save anyway.

Any long struggle involving serious disruption of council services will need the support of the whole working class in the area. The absolute centrality of preventing the Joint Shop Steward Committee identifying its struggle with that of the Council is crucial in the month ahead because it is now more than possible that the Council Labour Group will split on March 29th and some form of Tory budget will eventually succeed. Ex-Mayor Paul Orr has said he will not vote for the budget arguing, "I don't think anything will be achieved by being disqualified from office and made bankrupt by this action." Margaret Delaney has said she'd rather be expelled from the Party than vote for the budget. The

Tories and Liberals only need 3 defections from Labour to vote the budget down. Opposition isn't confined to the councillors. NUPE and NUT have said they won't support the strike called to coincide with the budget debate.

Despite loud threats Derek Hatton has already indicated they will retreat, "particularly if it becomes clear that the movement was not prepared to support the Council" (Militant 3.2.84)

The only perspective that Hatton then offers is electoralist ones, to go to the May 1985 council elections on the programme of non-implementation of another budget. This is useless. The Council workers need to prepare themselves now for Hatton et al 'reluctantly' implementing cuts, a new Tory/Liberal coalition being elected in to do it, or for commissioners put in over the heads of a defiant Council. In each case independent strike action of the workforce in defence of their interests, not simply the Council's will be necessary.

Whatever happens Liverpool must not be left to fight or go down alone. Maximum solidarity with Liverpool and against the Government must be organised so as to foil the Tories' plans. ■

# LEBANON: Militias fracture Maronite state

FEBRUARY 1984 HAS seen the biggest political and military reverse for US imperialism since the fall of the Shah of Iran exactly five years ago. Ironically the enforced retreat of 1,100 US marines from Beirut in the wake of the collapse of the Lebanese government has been largely the work of the same Shi'ite Muslim fundamentalist forces that led the Iranian revolution.

This defeat is not, as yet, as far-reaching as that of 1979. Its significance, however, is that it has occurred not to a weak US in global retreat after Vietnam, but to an aggressive administration bent on re-asserting its world dominance. Since 1980 Reagan has committed the US ruling class to a reversal of that retreat in Central America and the Middle East. In the Caribbean and Central America this policy is having limited success. In the Lebanon however, the same approach has delivered up only 264 dead marines. The US had invested enormous political capital in the Israeli-Lebanon agreement of May 1983. Now this is in ruins abrogated by what's left of the Lebanese government. Worse still, the US's strategic aim of reducing the political weight of Syria (ally of the Soviet Union) in Lebanese affairs has backfired. Syria's ability to determine the governmental make-up of Lebanon is greater now than at any time since 1975.

The Lebanese state effectively disintegrated in the first week of February. The fragile coalition of confessional interests (Christian, Muslim) fell apart when President Gemayel ordered a major attack on the Shi'ite stronghold in Southern Beirut. The Shi'ite militia - the 15,000 strong Amal - counter attacked. The 37,000 strong Lebanese army (30% Shi'ite, 25% Sunni, 45% Christian) fell apart. Mass desertions strengthened the Amal, who took West Beirut. The conservative Sunni Prime Minister Wazzan resigned, stripping Gemayel's government of its last vestige of confessional unity. The Greater Republic of Lebanon is effectively reduced to an area half the size of London. The rest is balkanised with different areas ruled by Israel, Syria, the Druze and Shi'ites.

The most favoured response to events in Lebanon by bourgeois commentators is to portray each episode as part of a barely understandable struggle between religious groupings, the result of irrational confessional mistrust. The fact is, however, that the origins of the conflict in Lebanon cannot be understood - except on the basis of a class analysis.

Decisive class differences between the confessional groupings explain such things as the Maronites' fierce defence of their political privileges, the conservatism of the Sunni, the mass resistance of the Shi'ites. They are class, not confessional reasons which can explain the conciliationism of the Druze, Shi'ite and Sunni leaders and the power-broking role of Syria. Moreover only the sharpening of the class divisions within the communal groupings holds out the hope for a progressive outcome to Lebanon's present turmoil.

The state of Lebanon is a drawing board creation of French imperialism, dating from 1920. As one liberal journalist has put it: "the borders drawn up by the French were completely artificial and had no basis in history." (D. Gilmour, *The Dispossessed*, p.181).

Before 1917, the area of Mount Lebanon was a semi-autonomous part of the declining Ottoman Empire in the region of Greater Syria. The region was overwhelmingly Sunni Muslim but the Maronite Catholic and Druze Muslim sects had lived in peaceful co-existence in the mountains on the basis of a feudal economy for over three hundred years. From the 1840s on, however, class forces operated to divide the Druze from the Maronites. As a result of British, French and Austrian intervention, a Christian middle-class was distilled out of the Maronite community linked to Western Capitalism through trade and soon dominating the provision of finance for the agricultural economy. Sharp battles erupted within the Maronites between peasants and this new class, but also between the Maronites and Druze. French imperialism soon sponsored the Maronite Catholics and guaranteed their protection. In 1918 France occupied Lebanon under the pretext of "defending the Maronites" but in fact to secure its commercial predominance in this area of the Middle East through preferential trading and investment rights.

In 1920 France was offered the mandate for the Lebanon and Syria by that "thieves kitchen" the League of Nations. The artificial borders were so drawn that Muslim areas to the north, including Tripoli and the Bek'aa valley in the east were annexed from Greater Syria and included in the areas which is now the Greater Republic of Lebanon. This increased the agricultural belt and the number of trading ports but it imprisoned huge numbers of Muslims and reduced the traditional Maronite population to less than a third of the total in "its own" state.

Up to the Second World War the Muslim leaders resisted any recognition of or participation in, the new state and demanded a return to Greater Syria. But the economic evolution of Lebanon and the place of the various communities within it have drastically altered that original source of conflict only to replace it with others.

The Lebanese economy is unique within the

Middle East. It is predominantly an urban economy with over 60% of the population living in the towns and cities. Yet industry is very weakly developed. Historically this is due to the crushing of Lebanon's productive capacity by western trade in the late nineteenth century. The industry that does exist consists of a small consumer goods sector: textiles, garments, leather, shoes and furniture. But even these have been severely curtailed since the 1975/6 Civil War and much was physically destroyed with the Israeli invasion of 1982. This has created a huge sub-proletariat in the shanty towns around Beirut.

Agriculture is very backward, having been deprived of essential investment which was directed into commerce. Between them industry and agriculture account for probably less than 15% and 20% respectively of the GNP. In fact the Lebanese economy is dominated by its 91 banks. These provide essential banking services for the whole of the Middle East, re-cycling oil revenues. Although Lebanon's national income has dropped by 20% in the last ten years it would have been much worse if Lebanon had depended more on manufacturing and but for the success of OPEC after 1973 the country would have faced complete bankruptcy. It is really only in the last six months that a real collapse in confidence in the Lebanese economy has begun to occur.

One of the most significant factors of the evolution of Lebanon's economy has been that of the growth of a Lebanese urban proletariat which has taken place largely outside the country. Over 300,000 workers live and work in the Gulf sending back between 1 and 2 billion dollars per annum in recent years. This has inevitably meant a distinctive and independent Lebanese working-class politics has largely been absent from the scene.

In the Lebanese economy each of the main confessional groupings have had a more or less distinct place over the last sixty years. Within the Maronite community economic power shifted away from the mountain villages where small-holdings and the existence of a rural petty bourgeoisie is the norm, towards the urban commercial centres. Here, in the cities like Beirut, banking and the import-export trade provide the bedrock of Maronite privileges. A small Christian working class exists but it is largely white-collar and very privileged in comparison with its Muslim equivalent. The deprived sectors of the Christian community exist mainly in the mountains and look overwhelmingly to the Phalangists for the protection of their marginal privileges.

The Sunnis possessed a significant landowning class before 1920 and this together with their preponderance in retail trade was the basis of their wealth and conservatism. The Shi'ites, on the other hand, have experienced a different history. In 1920 they were but a tenth of Lebanon's population. They were overwhelmingly a poor peasantry exploited by Maronite and Sunni landlords and merchants. Since the Second World War the numbers of Shi'ites has dramatically increased so that they now form about 1.1 million of Lebanon's 3.5 million population. With the building boom of the 1960s and



A nation state in ruins



Lebanese army defends the basis of Maronite power

1970s they became the mainstay of what urban proletariat there is in the Lebanon. The invasion of Israeli troops in 1978 and 1982 created a further exodus to the cities from South Lebanon. With the disintegration of Lebanon's small industrial and construction sector since the 1975/6 Civil War they now form one huge mass of sub-proletarians in the Southern suburbs of Beirut and the main base of resistance to the Maronite regime.

Within this urban Shi'ite community, emerged a small but significant Shi'ite bourgeoisie which, deprived of landownership has invested its emigre fortunes in property. It is from its ranks, and for it, that figures such as Nabhir Berri speak today.

It is in this context that the minority Christian community has had to evolve a strategy to protect its power and privileges. Within it the Maronite Catholics dominate and lead the Christian sects. Two main responses have occurred since 1970. The one that currently holds the reins of power, though tenuously, disavows any meaningful concessions to the Muslims in political life. Its leading figures have been Emile Edde, Camille Chamoun and the Gemayel family. These represent an alliance between the urban commercial class (Edde, Chamoun) and the landowning Maronites of the mountains. The Gemayel-led Phalange party leans heavily on the rural population for its fascist militia. Given the minority status of the Maronite community, they have had to rely heavily on dividing the other communities against one another and accepting massive support from at different times, Syria, Israel, US and European imperialism.

The axis of the divide and rule policy has been to share political power with the Sunni Muslim community relying on a basic unity of class interests between their respective bourgeoisie to fashion a Lebanese "national identity". Bishara Khoury was the architect of this strategy and with it the National Pact of 1953. This was the unwritten agreement to divide political power along confessional lines. The basis of the Pact was the common struggle for independence against French imperialism in 1941. Places were reserved in Parliament and government for each of the confessional groups on a six to five basis in favour of the Christians. Key government posts were to be the property of the Sunnis (Prime Minister) and the Shi'ites (Speaker). But the decisive posts of President, Chief of the Armed Forces and Director-General of Internal Security were not only Christian but Maronite posts.

For twenty-five years this arrangement generally suited the Christians and Sunni Muslims. Both the bourgeoisies prospered in the post-war boom. Yet by the late 1960s economic and social developments within Lebanese society had rendered this arrangement patently undemocratic and too brittle to survive. The continued discrimination against the Druze was part of it but the massive growth of the urban Shi'ite masses was the main factor. The poor were exploited and oppressed. Excluded from office or confined to the lowest level of the state administration the Shi'ite middle class rebelled against the political arrangements of the Maronites and Sunnis. The religious leader Imam Musa Sadr founded the "Movement of the Deprived" in 1969. In the same year Kemal Jumblat - Druze leader - formed the bourgeois nationalist Progressive Socialist Party (PSP). The leadership of the Muslims slipped from the discredited Sunni politicians towards these forces. But the respective programmes of these forces remained conservative and aimed only at a mild reform of the confessional state. The aims of the PSP are well stated in Kemal Jumblat's statement that: "the goal of the (PSP) is not to exacerbate class attitudes, nor to adopt them as a method or an object, but rather to eliminate class affiliation by the way we formulate our constitution."

This is the natural response of large landowners fearful of the radicalisation in the villages. Under the leadership of Jumblat the Muslim oppressed and the Lebanese left were brought together in the National Movement. The intransigence of the Maronites and the repeated attacks of their militia and Israeli troops across the border against the Shi'ites and PLO in the South, forced Musa Sadr to form Amal - the Shi'ite militia in 1974.

In the six years from 1969 to the Civil War in 1975 the presence of about 400,000 Palestinians acted as a radical catalyst in Lebanese political life. While they did not create the tensions between the Maronites and the rest, they became the focus for Maronite fear and anger. After Jordan's expulsion of the PLO in 1970 Lebanon became the main base for their operations. As a result Israel's attacks became more frequent and savage. The Maronite leaders saw with dismay the increasing involvement of "their" state in clashes with US imperialism's agent and the radicalising effect of the huge refugee camps upon the Muslim poor. In the South, however, Amal was very antagonistic to the Palestinians since they blamed them for the Israeli invasions and the forced exodus of over 250,000 Shi'ites to Beirut after 1978. The predominant Sunni character of the Palestinian masses was another factor. This enmity seriously weakened joint resistance to the Maronites and Zionism. Paradoxically, it was the final defeat of the PLO after 1982 which led to Shi'ite grievances being focused unconditionally upon the Maronites.

The spark that ignited the Civil War was an attack by the Phalange on Palestinians in April 1975, killing 27 of them on a bus. However the Palestinian were not the cause of the Civil War. The rapid disaffection of the Muslims had its roots in the Presidency of Sulayman Franjeh who had embarked on a purge of the state machinery and the appointment of many of his closest Maronite kinsmen. When the army crushed Muslim demonstrators in a completely partisan way after the Phalangists assassinated the Mayor of Sidon, open conflict was inevitable. When the Sunni demand for army reform and equal representation amongst the army command was refused, all that was missing was the spark.

The Civil War was essentially a Lebanese conflict representing the final breakdown of the confessional coalition. Up to 1970 the role of the PLO and Syria was peripheral. In fact, despite the attacks on the Palestinian refugees Fatah refused to enter the conflict, preferring with Saiga (the pro-Syrian militia in the PLO) to mediate. Only in January 1976 did Arafat enter on the side of the Muslims. Immediately the Maronites stood facing total defeat. The Syrians sent in their own Palestinian Liberation Army (PLA) to save the Maronites and enforce a ceasefire. This broke down and finally Assad sent in his own troops to defeat the Muslims. This was enshrined in the November 1976 agreement when Syria forced the Sunni, Shi'ite and PLO alike to accept "moderate" Maronite Sarkis as President. No reforms were given to the Muslims of any significance.

The outcome of the Civil War left Syria as the chief power-broker in Lebanon. Over 30,000 troops permanently stationed in the Bek'aa valley underpin this role. Although in any clash with US imperialism and its Zionist agents, Syria has to be supported, its general policy in the Lebanon has been and remains reactionary. It seeks to preserve a "moderate" pro-Syrian Christian dominance in the country with enough concessions to the Druze, Shi'ite and Sunni to create stability. Above all else, President Assad fears the radicalising effect of any signal victory over imperialism on his own repressed working class and peasantry. Militarily, he seeks a buffer between Syria and further Israeli expansionism.

In the event Assad enforced compromise in Lebanon which pleased no-one. American imperialism after 1980 under Reagan determined to strengthen Israel and destroy Syria's hegemony since this gave the USSR some small leverage in the Middle East. The USSR arms Syria and provides 5,000 technicians in the Bek'aa. Although Assad is an unreliable ally of the Kremlin, American imperialism sought to eliminate Moscow's potential influence in the region as the basis for a grand "Pax Americana" that would reduce all the Arab states to the present state of Egypt. On the other hand, Israel itself had long set itself the goal of destroying the PLO presence in the Lebanon. Assad's 1976 solution had only led to an ineffective de-militarisation plan for the camps. Within Lebanon itself, the Franjeh wing of the Maronites pulled out of the Lebanese Front - the united front of Maronites in the Civil War - as the necessary price of seeking to "unify the nation". Meanwhile the Gemayel family prepared its resistance to this project by first destroying Camille Chamoun's rival Maronite militia - Ahrar, by 1980. Out of this was constructed the Lebanese forces - the fascist militia which today acts as pretorian guard for Gemayel and surrogate for a disintegrating national army.

The Israeli invasion of 1982 drastically altered the balance of forces. They removed the mildly pro-Syrian President Franjeh and placed Bashir Gemayel in the post. By the US-designed Israeli-Lebanon accord of May 1983 it was hoped - having already crushed the PLO - to break the influence of Syria (and the USSR) on Lebanese affairs and cow the Muslim population into the re-establishment of Maronite dominance and the conversion of Lebanon into a client state of US imperialism and its Zionist agents.

To have achieved its objectives the US and Israel would have had to have inflicted a massive defeat upon Syria. The odds were always against this. Crucially, internal opposition in Israel to the war was considerable. For the US to substitute itself militarily for the Israelis in this role was not possible either logistically or politically. A full-scale US assault on Syria would have united the Arab bourgeoisies in total opposition to Israel and the US and probably involved Soviet troops - with all the potential for world war this involved. European imperialism which has important interests in Lebanon was opposed to such a course of action and internal US morale was certainly not ready for a full-scale war. European imperialists urged a different policy namely, to deal directly with Syria. To recognise its preponderant influence and then encourage the exercise of this power in imperialism's interests, finally leading to a break with the USSR. Assad was more than willing to consider such a role, but apart from a brief period between September and November 1983 the US refused to take this line. Syria dropped its demands for a return of the Golan Heights. Assad only insis-

ted on the abrogation of the May 1983 Israel-Lebanon agreement. The US still refused. The bombing of the US base in November sealed the fate of the initiative. However the scrapping of that agreement fell like a ripe plum into Assad's hands with the collapse of Gemayel's army.

The feverish diplomacy since early February by Saudi Arabia, mediating between Gemayel and Syria poses sharply the question - what progressive outcome can there be from the present impasse for the Lebanese Muslim workers and peasants?

The militias of the oppressed Shi'ite and Druze hold military power in Beirut. The chance exists for a far-reaching defeat of imperialism and its Maronite agents. But the Shi'ite and Druze leaders are determined to waste the opportunity and hand back the initiative to Gemayel and the Phalange. The bour-



Amin Gemayel - isolated President

geois nationalists - Berri (Shi'ite) and Walid Jumblat (Druze) have been forced against their class instincts into opposition. They do not question the confessional nature of Lebanon nor the continued dominance of the Maronites and imperialism. Berri said recently: "all the Maronites have to do is pick another President...we haven't yet come to the point of questioning the National Agreement of 1943." (Guardian 20.2.84)

Jumblat echoes this when he called for Gemayel's resignation and asked for another Maronite President: "There are many other Christians - Raymond Edde, Sulayman Franjeh, for instance..." (Guardian 16.2.84). These bankrupt nationalists recognise that their class interests - landlordism and commercial property - are best served by a continuing alliance with imperialism. A thoroughgoing democratic programme would run the risk for these playboys of the battlefield of bringing the class grievances of the workers and peasants to the fore.

Syria does not even wish to see Gemayel go, believing he can be brought to heel, once the special pact with Israel is cast aside.

These "conciliation talks" present a deadly danger to the Sunni, Shi'ite and Druze masses. If Maronite and imperialist dominance is not broken up then in the period ahead the Maronites and Phalange will regain the initiative and claw back every single concession and more. Lebanon's economy is set to nosedive in the next period, and every Maronite privilege will be ruthlessly defended in that context.

In place of this class collaboration what is needed is first of all a thoroughgoing defeat of imperialism. Every last imperialist force must be kicked out. Jumblat's concern to protect the US embassy and marine base must be challenged. No "advisors" to remain behind! Nabhir Berri's desire that "an attempt must now be made to replace (the multinational force) by UN troops" should be treated with derision in the Amal ranks. Was it Amal or UN troops that fought the Israelis when they invaded in 1982? They will only be permitted to enter Lebanon as agents of US imperialism, to contain, not defend the Muslim ghettos. In this context, the Amal must do everything to facilitate the return of the Palestinian fighters - forcibly excluded from Beirut and Tripoli in 1982 and 1983. They must be allowed to return to their families in the camps and to take their place in an anti-imperialist united front.

In this task the Syrians and all the Palestinian and Lebanese forces which are subordinated to them will play a reactionary role. The mass base of the Amal is certainly the most socially explosive and anti-imperialist. The small urban proletariat and the impoverished urban and rural masses hold the potential for a progressive orientation. Yet their present leadership and ideology is reactionary. On the one hand, Berri's Bani-Sadr type constitutional nationalism leads to a cul-de-sac. The rest look for leader-

ship to Hussein Moussawi - the Khomeini fundamentalist whose base is in Baalbek. A "victory" for the Shi'ites under his leadership would bring in its wake reactionary anti-working class and anti-democratic measures such as have been witnessed in Iran.

Difficult as the raising and fighting for a revolutionary communist programme in the Lebanon is, there is no alternative. None of the existing forces are "roughly adequate" or can be entrusted with leading any stage of the revolution. The immediate tasks lie around the driving out of the imperialist and Zionist forces that prop up the rotten Phalange regime. Yet even if this were to be achieved tomorrow the forces of Syria and the leaderships of the communities would attempt - indeed are already attempting to - strike a new deal with imperialism and build a new confessional state structure to hold down the oppressed masses. Against constitutional conferences which attempt to stitch together a new accord of bankers, landowners and the militia chiefs, revolutionaries counterpose a sovereign freely elected and secular Constituent Assembly. Against attempts to recreate the Lebanese Army they should fight for a democratic People's Militia with elected officers and commanders from the suburbs and camps.

Revolutionaries should raise the central demands which meet the desperate need of Lebanon's poor - an agrarian revolution that expropriates Sunni, Maronite and Druze landlords. Linked to this is the breaking of the hold of the Maronite and Sunni moneylenders and bankers. This can only be accomplished by their expropriation and by workers control and inspection of the large banks and finance houses. The enormous scale of misery and destruction necessitates a huge programme of public works that will absorb the urban sub-proletariat in productive labour. To do this requires nationalisation of industry and the building trade. The proletariat must win the right to strike and organise. Democratic councils of workers, the urban poor and the poor peasantry alone can carry through these tasks and in doing so the terrible communal divisions and antagonisms can be overcome. Based on this a Workers' and Peasants' government could alone resolve these antagonisms.

However the framework of the Lebanese statelet is completely inadequate for a fully progressive (ie, socialist) outcome. The construction of the nation under the leadership of the working class in Lebanon has to confront the fact that large parts of it are de facto annexed by Israel and Syria. This ties the fate of Lebanon to the fate of the revolution in Syria, and the whole of Palestine (Israel and Jordan). Therefore, in fighting for a secular workers' republic revolutionaries must link this immediately to the call for a Socialist Federation of the Middle East.

by Keith Hassell

# SOUTH AFRICA HUMBLER FRONT-LINE STATES

SOUTH AFRICAN PRIME Minister Pieter Botha and his backers in the West are no doubt congratulating themselves on a good month's work. In February they have come close to achieving pacts with Mozambique and Angola which, if effective, will seriously undermine the military effectiveness of both the ANC in South Africa and SWAPO in Namibia. As Botha gloatingly remarked at the end of this process, "A pattern is now developing in terms of which the governments and leaders of Southern Africa seem to realise that they all stand to gain from co-operation..." In Apartheid-speak, "co-operation" means subservience.

The agreements, if confirmed, will represent a major success for South Africa's policy of "Swaardmag" (swordpower) which it openly adopted from the start of 1980. This policy involved training and providing military aid for guerrilla insurgents fighting against the Angolan and Mozambique regimes, alongside direct intervention by South African armed forces. Combined with the promise of economic aid to mend the economies they had helped to shatter, South African set out to re-assert its strategic dominance over Southern Africa which had been seemingly shattered in the second half of the 1970s following the collapse and defeat of the Portuguese imperialists in Africa. In this it was aided and abetted by the imperialist powers - in particular Britain and the USA.

South Africa, a colonial settler state like Israel, plays the same role for Western imperialism in Southern Africa as the Zionist state does in the Middle East. Its existence divides and weakens the 'independent' states surrounding it. It plays the role of "gendarme" for imperialism against liberation movements which threaten the whole system in Southern Africa. Despite having its own separate interests which give rise to the occasional conflict with the imperialists, South African and Western aims in general run parallel. Thus South Africa, with its massive pool of cheap labour and police state regime, remains the site of nearly 50% of all imperialist investment in sub-Saharan Africa, a level which allows it to remain the largest economy in Africa producing 40% of all industrial output in the continent. Throughout Southern Africa Western and South African capital are enmeshed in enterprises like the Rossing Uranium

Mine in Namibia, where the British based multinational Rito-Tinto Zinc and South Africa's industrial Department Corporation are the major shareholders. It is little wonder then, that while in public the Western powers have tut-tutted about South Africa's military interventions, in fact they have welcomed them as a weapon against regimes which they perceive as threatening their interests.

On South Africa's eastern flank it has been concerned to neutralise the African National Congress. Both Lesotho and Swaziland were quickly brought to heel by raids and economic pressure. But its main target has been Mozambique. South Africa has battered it with raids, strategic bombing and its puppet guerrilla force, the MNR. As a result, Mozambique has been unable to strengthen its desperately weak economy which suffers from the after effects of colonialism and war. Attempts at state control of distribution and pricing have been hamstrung because the state is without the resources to either develop collectivised farms or pay peasants adequate prices. The attempt to develop trade between the black African states in Southern Africa - the Southern Africa Development Co-ordination Conference (SADSS) - has been unsuccessful in lessening dependence on South Africa itself. Indeed, South Africa trade to the rest of black Africa has doubled since 1979. Mozambique gains crucial foreign exchange from South Africa's use of Maputo port, the export of Mozambican labour to the South African mines and the purchase of power from the Cabora Bassa dam.

Trying to escape dependence on South Africa and the West, Mozambique went knocking on the door of Moscow and Comecon. But the Stalinists have kept the door firmly shut, supplying only arms and limited technical help. So in 1983, President Machel had to increase his pleas for Western aid. In London he lunched with Lord's Tiny Rolands and Margaret Thatcher ("If I had a daughter, I would call her Margaret", he said afterwards) and was decorated by the Queen. He addressed the Overseas Trade Board urging further investment and discussed their 'legitimate concerns about private investment'; By February this year, the combination of the ravages of the South African backed MNR and the prolonged drought followed by massive flooding had brought the economy near to collapse. The result was a virtual capitulation by



South African troops return from another raid into Angola

Maputo to South Africa's demands. Admittedly, Machel declared that he would not abandon "political, moral and diplomatic support for the ANC" it rapidly became clear that support would be limited to precisely that and the ANC would be banned from launching operations against South Africa from Mozambique. In return Botha promised economic aid, a return of the South African tourist to the Mozambique beaches and restrictions on support to the MNR.

For South Africa and Western imperialism Angola has been a tougher nut to crack. Angola was particularly important for imperialism because of its potential wealth and strategic importance to the South Atlantic. During the last years of the liberation struggle, US imperialism tried to take advantage of the ethnic divisions and other hostilities within the Angolan movement. Along with South Africa, it threw its weight behind the forces of Unita and the FNLA in the civil war. However, it could not prevent the MPLA consolidating its power: first, because of the mass support the MPLA enjoyed, secondly, because US imperialism was significantly weakened after its defeat in Vietnam. A war-weary country refused another entanglement -

and Gulf Oil, which wanted to continue extraction in Cabinda, pressed for an end to attempts to subvert the MPLA government. From this point, the West's aim has been to tame the regime and ensure Angola is firmly entangled in the imperialist web of contracts and investments. But it's faced problems with this strategy.

In its struggle with the imperialists and South African backed guerrillas, and in the face of a South African invasion, the MPLA turned to the Soviet Union and Cuba for support. The 20,000 Cuban troops which presently aid the Angolan army are the result of this aid. This has allowed the Angolan government a degree of bargaining strength in its dealings with South Africa and the imperialists which both have been determined to end. It has also provided the SWAPO guerrilla movement a relatively safe base from which to organise its struggle to liberate Namibia from South Africa's control.

South Africa has been determined to prevent yet another neighbouring country falling into the hands of forces hostile to Apartheid. Thus it has sabotaged every potential agreement over the

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# Socialist Organiser junks more Trotskyism

THE SIGNS ARE multiplying that the editors of *Socialist Organiser* are moving ever closer to rejecting the view that the USSR is a 'degenerated workers' state' and the commitment to 'defence of the USSR' that flows from it. This was made abundantly clear in a recent polemic against the US Revolutionary Workers League (RWL) in which Chris Reynolds weighed the USSR on the scales of British labourism and declared, "In many ways the USSR is much further from socialism than those capitalist societies with strong labour movements and relatively developed welfare services and civil liberties". (*Socialist Organiser* 164 2.2.84)

Much of Reynolds's case is based on clumsy sleight of hand, "There is unemployment in the USSR" says Reynolds and proceeds to point to Yugoslavia as evidence. Of course, there are unemployed persons in the USSR. Some are the victims of bureaucratic persecution, others choose to change their jobs which - believe it or not - Soviet workers are free to do. A study of workers in Lithuania (which is in the USSR) showed that only 11.3% of workers change their jobs without some form of break in employment. 9% were unemployed for a year (DE Powell, Labour Turnover in the Soviet Union, *Slavic Review* June 1977). The important point has completely escaped Reynolds however. In the USSR, unlike the capita-

list economies, there is no permanent reserve army of the unemployed as an inbuilt and necessary feature of the system. It is overmanning and labour shortage that have proved endemic features of the Soviet economy.

Reynolds turns his fire on welfare services in the USSR, "Health care? Minimal provision for the workers, luxury clinics for the bureaucrats." Of the existence of luxury clinics there can be no doubt. Neither do we need to prettify the Soviet health service. Life expectancy has recently *dropped* to 61 years for Soviet men. An unofficial fee system operates to the advantage of doctors and surgeons (see M Kaser, *Health Care in the Soviet Union and East Europe*, 1976). However all the evidence suggests that the Soviet health service cannot be dismissed as lightly as Reynolds would like. Research undertaken in 1974 showed that the number of hospital beds and doctors per 10,000 population was considerably higher in the USSR than in the US or even in 'welfare state' Britain.

	Doctors	Beds
USSR	29.6	115.8
USA	16.0	82.0
UK	13.0	87.0

(V George & V Manning, *Socialism, Social Welfare and the Soviet Union* p116)

This really can hardly be shrugged off as 'minimal provision'.

Not to be held back by an investigation of reality Reynolds warns to his theme - "The distribution of income is at least as unequal as in the West." Again he gets it wrong and misses the key point of difference between income distribution in the West and in the USSR. Officially salaries of state ministers and enterprise managers stand at between 2.7 and 4.0 times the average wage of the Soviet industrial worker. In the late 1960s, for example, workers were receiving 104 rubles a month, factory directors and colonels 400 rubles and government officials 600. According to David Lane a top Soviet minister was receiving just over 1,000 rubles a month in 1969 (see *The End of Inequality?* p74). That there is inequality therefore, there can be no doubt. Official statistics tend to obscure the scale of income inequality as well. Political power gives the Soviet bureaucrat access to special shops, holiday homes and money bribes.

Yet two points need to be made about the differences between inequality in the West and in the USSR. Firstly, it is not the case that income distribution is as unequal as in the West. In 1970 the Presidents of ITT, of Xerox and Atlantic Richfield were earning 115 times the average wage of a US production worker (figures from Szymanski, *Is the Red Flag Flying?*) This far outstrips the most cold-war inspired claims for Soviet inequality. There is another vital difference that flows from the non-capitalist nature of the USSR. Extra perks and bonuses in the USSR are often officially illegal, and usually secretly appropriated and disguised from the masses as much as possible.



Leon Trotsky

## SOUTH AFRICA continued from page 3

Nambian question which ran the possibility of a SWAPO government emerging in the country. While this has annoyed the major imperialist powers of the "Contact Group" - France, Britain, Canada - who yearn for a black semi-colonial regime in Namibia and Angola which will enable them to pursue their exploitation in peace. In this policy South Africa has had the connivance of the Reagan administration. The US has backed Botha in linking a Namibia settlement to the withdrawal of Cuban troops from Angola - taking the long term view of the necessity to remove Soviet support if it is to force the Angolan regime into compliance.

A number of factors appear to have forced both sides to the negotiating table. The Angolan army, despite the support of Cuban troops has been losing ground to the forces of UNITA. On the other hand there is growing pressure in South Africa to seek a settlement in Namibia and to try and rationalise the expensive involvement on their western flank. With inflation running at 11% and prime interest rates reaching 20% the South Africans are increasingly conscious of the mounting costs to the economy as well as the military costs - (21 soldiers died in their last invasion of Angola). For the Americans, after the debacle in the Lebanon, progress towards agreement on Namibia would be welcome in election year. The result has been the tentative agreement, masterminded by Chester Crocher, Reagan's Under Secretary of State for Africa, between South Africa and Angola. If the agreement is confirmed and made effective, it will be a major blow to the SWAPO forces. "Pik" Botha was clear about what had been achieved when he declared, "There is now a ceasefire in Southern Angola and a no-go area for guerrillas" (*Guardian*) Under the threat of further invasions and aid to UNITA South Africa intends to hold Angola

to its pact through the monitoring commission already set up. Thus it hopes that SWAPO, seriously weakened at a military level, will be less of a threat politically.

The events of last month have confirmed, alas negatively, the correctness of the perspective and strategy of Permanent Revolution in Southern Africa. Despite the victory of mass anti-imperialist movements in Angola and Mozambique and in Zimbabwe, the fact that their petit-bourgeois nationalist leaderships stopped short at the creation of bourgeois states condemned them to remain in the final analysis within the orbit of imperialism, their economies dominated by the international monopolies. The concessions made to imperialism this month represent a major set back to the liberation struggles in Namibia and South Africa. The strengthening of South Africa and the hold of imperialism in the region can only mean further onslaughts on the gains made by the workers and peasants in the course of their liberation struggles. The only strategy which promises to both to defend and extend these gains is one which bases itself on the mobilisation of the workers and peasants to seize power, to break the hold of imperialism by overthrowing capitalism throughout the region, but especially in the South African heartland itself where a powerful and militant proletariat exists. It is to this end that revolutionary militants in Southern Africa should fight to build Trotskyist parties committed to fighting the betrayals of the Machel's, Mugabe's and Santo's.

- Hands off Angola and Mozambique!
- Support the liberation forces in Namibia and South Africa.
- For a socialist federation of Southern Africa.

by Sue Thomas



Soviet workers sign-up for the Red Army, 1918

In his zeal to prove the USSR to be the same, or worse, than the West Reynolds claims that the Soviet economy "does suffer crises. Its growth, especially since the 1970s, has not been especially fast in comparison to capitalist economies." What is the reality here?

There has certainly been a tendency for growth rates to become slower ever since the early 1950s. This was particularly marked in the late 1970s and early 1980s as we show elsewhere in this paper. However, the Soviet economy has never experienced a recession of the sort experienced by capitalist economies - in 1983 the economies of West Germany, Italy, France and Belgium all actually shrank. Since 1950 the Soviet economy has consistently grown faster than capitalist Western Europe taken as a whole. More importantly the Soviet economic system has historically transformed a backward country comparable to India or Turkey in its technological and material level at the turn of the century into the second strongest industrial power in the world despite the parasitic corruption of the bureaucracy, its international isolation and the enormous destruction suffered in the Second World War.

What then is Reynolds driving at? Ostensibly he's attacking a low grade childish piece of Stalinophilia that took all the claims of the Stalinists as good coin. (For the RWL's argument see *Fighting Worker* December 1983). In reality he is clearing the way to ditching the Trotskyist characterisation of the USSR and embracing one or other of the 'new class', 'new Barbarism' or 'state capitalist' theories that pass muster as 'analyses' on the labourite left. He measures the USSR against an imperialist labourite welfare state, twists the figures for good measure and concludes there is little to defend in the USSR.

Trotskyists have never needed to paint up the reality of the USSR. We know that the bureaucratic tyranny restricts the development of the productive forces and stifles the working class which is the only force that can carry through a genuine transition to socialism. But despite all of this advances have been made in the USSR because of the abolition of capitalism.

Defence of the USSR does not mean underwriting the consistently counter-revolutionary policy of the Kremlin. Nor does it require us to present rosy pictures of the life of the Soviet workers. It does however require us to fight to win the proletariat of the imperialist powers to the defence by class struggle means of the degenerate workers states. One cannot defend nationalised property relations abstracted from the states which defend them. Nor does such defence begin only when a war breaks out. Defencism means opposing 'our own' government's political, economic and military manoeuvres against them now. Reynolds on the other hand, quite unscrupulously, joins in the anti-Russian chorus to prove there's no difference between the West and the USSR.

Perhaps Reynolds is turning into a 'state capitalist'. He does not come clean on the nature of the USSR throughout the article. That West and East are both the same is normal stuff from the state capitalist school. On the other hand he might be toying with 'bureaucratic collectivism' theory which just like the labourites sees totalitarian Russia as a reactionary form of society compared with the West because of the West's possession of political democracy.

Reynolds has this to say about political repression in the USSR compared with the West, "The working class is enslaved more brutally and totally,

The savage, systematic and relentless repression of any stirrings of an independent labour movement in the Stalinist states means that the workers there are shackled as they have not been shackled anywhere under advanced non-fascist capitalism.

In respect of free speech, free assembly, freedom to organise - in other words, freedom to think and live as a class - the workers in the USSR are infinitely worse off even than workers in PACTO-busting Reagan's USA". (SO's emphasis)

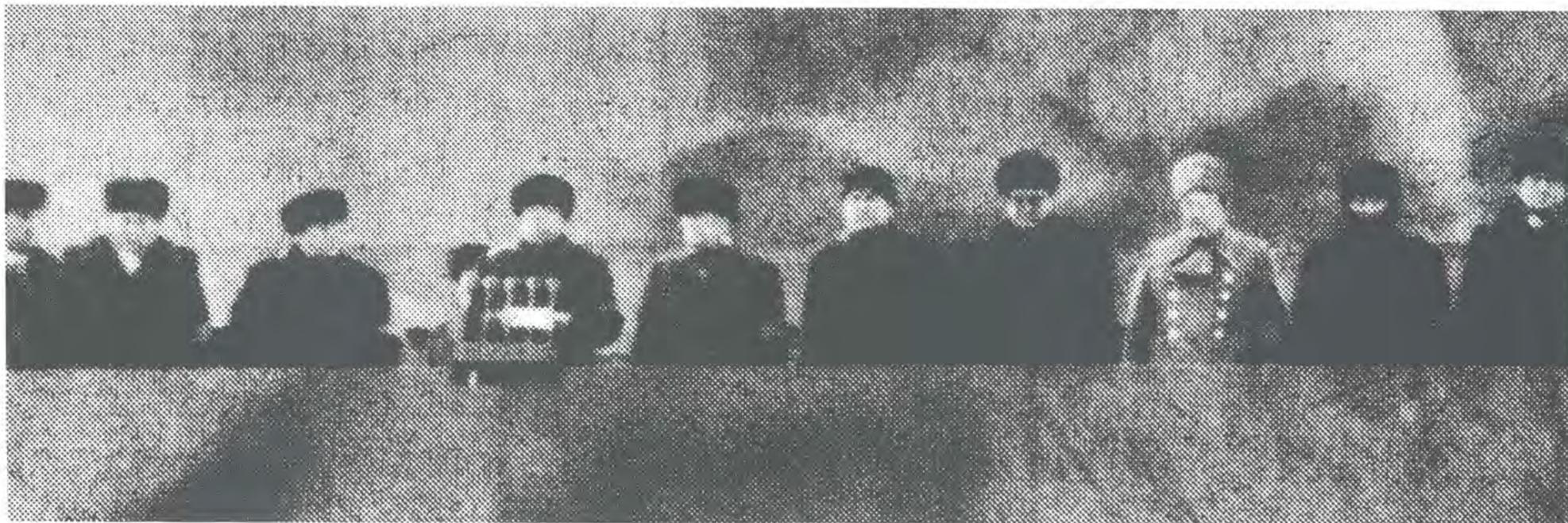
Reynolds can see only good in imperialist democracy and only evil in Stalinist totalitarianism. The struggle to win democratic rights and their defence once achieved are important tasks for the working class and create conditions favourable to the development of its class consciousness. But to identify the possession of democracy with nearness to Socialism is the purest Kautskyism. The dominant and successful imperialist powers can afford democracy for just so long as the working class does not 'think and live as a class' ie for as long as the US, British, European and Japanese proletariats do not undertake a struggle for power. In Italy and Germany and in countless semi-colonial countries when and to the extent that the proletariat organised itself as a revolutionary class the bourgeoisie resorted to the most barbarous forms of dictatorship.

Reynolds is equally wrong in regarding the proletariat of the USSR and the other degenerate workers states as somehow de-classed or incapable of class consciousness. Indeed the absence of capitalism and capitalists, the existence of nationalised property relations are all historic conquests of the working class. Indeed so weak are its bureaucratic oppressions that their only claim to legitimacy is that they exercise political power on its behalf. Class consciousness exists for the proletariat in the form of the contrast between these ideals and the reality of bureaucratic police rule. Wherever the proletariat has - temporarily - shattered the police regime, in Hungary, in Czechoslovakia, in Poland, it has demonstrated that its class consciousness is more than equal to that of the British or American proletariat. The Soviet workers do not need the blessings of bourgeois democracy - which are inseparable from the restoration of capitalism. What they need is proletarian democracy - obtainable only through a political revolution.

To talk about an imperialist country as being 'closer to socialism' because of its democracy or its welfare state is a massive capitulation to social democracy. It ignores the only real and important fact - that in the USSR the bourgeoisie has been overthrown and capitalism replaced with the planned state property of a workers state, a task the workers of Britain and the USA will never achieve as long as they possess Comrade Reynolds reverence for bourgeois democracy.

Reynolds's eagerness to get rid of the embarrassing inheritance of Soviet Defencism is shown in his preference for the equivocal (and transient!) slogan of some post-war Trotskyists, 'Defend what remains of the conquests of the 1917 revolution'. This is a pretty small fig-leaf to cover Reynolds' otherwise naked attempt to junk defencism. This process will undoubtedly be completed in the not too distant future. *Socialist Organiser* having adopted the position of Kautskyites on the role of democracy in the class struggle in Britain - having done likewise on the Malvinas war and on the Irish struggle, should now have the courage to appear as what in fact they are. They would thus perform a real (and last) service to Trotskyism.

by Dave Hughes



Kremlin's faceless bureaucrats

# BUGGINS' TURN IN THE KREMLIN

STATE FUNERALS ARE becoming an increasingly regular fixture in the calendar of the Soviet bureaucracy. In 1982 they buried Suslov and Brezhnev with all the Byzantine pomp and bureaucratic bad taste that the Kremlin could muster. In February 1984 they did the same for Yuri Andropov. By all appearances Konstantin Chernenko - the new General Secretary of the CPSU - has not long to go until he too takes his place beside Stalin, Brezhnev and Andropov at the foot of the Kremlin wall.

The choice of Chernenko indicates the inability of the bureaucracy to find any new course for dealing with the problems of economic stagnation and the renewed offensive of US imperialism. Growth rates have steadily declined throughout the 1970s and early 1980s. Between 1950 and 1960 the Soviet economy grew at an average annual rate of 6%. Between 1970 and 1979 growth rates averaged 4%. In 1982 industrial production in the USSR rose by only 2.9%. Despite considerable investment the Soviet bureaucracy has manifestly failed to solve the problems of increasing agricultural production sufficiently to guarantee the regular provision of staple foodstuffs to any but the very largest cities of the USSR. The annual rate of meat production, for example, fell during the last half of the 1970s. Over the last 20 years agricultural productivity in the Soviet Union has grown less than the costs of production of major agricultural products. Bureaucratic rule serves increasingly to hinder the development of the productive forces of the USSR's planned economy.

To an extent the crisis of the world capitalist economy and the USSR's ability to export key raw materials such as gold and gas has cushioned the bureaucracy from the full effects of the stagnation of bureaucratic planning during the 1970s. But the massive increase in imperialism's military spending from the late 1970s has served to increase pressure on the Soviet bureaucracy to concentrate investment and research resources in the military sector at the expense of its already underdeveloped and historically neglected agricultural and consumer goods sectors. In turn, just as Carter and Reagan intended, this will serve to place mounting strain on the whole economy.

Shortcomings in the Soviet economy do not directly affect the material well being of the bureaucracy as a whole. Its privileges are the result of its monopoly on political power and its ability to use that power to syphon off for its private consumption luxury products and scarce resources. That will remain the case until its political power is broken. They do, however, seriously weaken the ability of the Soviet bureaucracy to drive a hard bargain with imperialism and stave off inevitable working class protest against consumer shortages and bureaucratic tyranny. This was a mounting concern of the Soviet bureaucracy towards the end of the Brezhnev era.

Contrary to Cold War propaganda and social democratic mythology the Soviet working class is not a slave class totally incapable of expressing its opposition to bureaucratic rule because of the irresistible weight of the state security agency. The late 1970s and early 1980s saw an increased degree of assertiveness on the part of the Soviet working class despite the all-pervasive functioning of the bureaucracy's security organs. That assertiveness has been evident in the large plants, in prestige projects within the plan and in the Baltic republics. There was a strike on the Baikal-Amur railway project during 1975. Riga dockworkers walked out over food shortages in 1976. Togliatti bus drivers struck in 1979 and 1980. In the latter year they were joined by 70,000 car workers from the Togliatti Zhituli assembly plant in a joint struggle against the rescheduling of bus services. In 1980 car workers at the Gorky car plant struck against food shortages. Major improvements in medical facilities and food supply were secured as a result of the Togliatti and Gorky strikes. If the bureaucracy cannot maintain a gradual improvement in the living standards of the Soviet workers it risks serious struggle against its privileges and against its monopoly of political power. The tranquility of

the 'Brezhnev era' was increasingly disrupted by the working class in the USSR as well as in Poland.

The Stalinist bureaucracy has proved ever more incapable of dealing with the mounting problems which confront its rule. It cannot legitimise its rule or its privileges in the eyes of the working population of the USSR. Any sign of division or weakness in its ranks would be taken as a cue for the masses to begin to settle accounts with the bureaucracy. Hence the, at times bizarre, secrecy that surrounds its every move - until his death was announced Yuri Andropov had officially been suffering from a cold for six months and continuing to attend to his office work! Such charades testify vividly to the fact that the bureaucracy has not fundamentally changed its spots since Trotsky analysed its nature in the 1930s. His description of them then still applies to their behavior in the Brezhnev and Andropov era, "The omnipotence of the Soviet bureaucracy, its privileges, its lavish mode of life, are not cloaked by any tradition, any ideology, any legal norms. The Soviet bureaucracy is a caste of upstarts trembling for their power, for their revenues, standing in fear of the masses, and ready to punish by fire and sword not only every attempt upon their rights but even the slightest doubt about their infallibility". (A New Moscow Amalgam 1936-37)

Contrary to 'new class' and 'state capitalist' theorists the Soviet bureaucracy has not gelled into a ruling class that is capable of living with relative harmony in its ranks or of developing stable political structures that would make possible the discussion of its common affairs. Neither does the non-capitalist economy of the USSR by its own inner laws compel the bureaucracy to maximise and dynamise economic production so as to, ensure its survival. The bureaucracy is, in fact, a brake on the development of the planned economy. Historically therefore, the bureaucracy has had to subject itself to a bonapartist tyranny.

Under Stalin this amounted to full scale terror in the late 30s and the later 40s. After Stalin's death a relaxation ensued with differences erupting which had in turn to be subjected to Khrushchev's one man rule. When his economic and foreign policy failures became manifest, his shake-ups and purges became unendurable and after a brief interregnum of 'collective leadership' Brezhnev assumed the full Bonaparte role. The rule of an inner clique around a supreme arbiter is essential to the bureaucracy, forcing it to minimally direct the planned productive forces of the USSR. To the extent that Bonapartist tyranny over the bureaucracy relaxes so it becomes increasingly riven with clique warfare as rival groups struggle for power. Without this tyranny over itself the parasitical bureaucracy tends to indulge itself in the corrupt consumption of its ill-gotten gains and consequently the bureaucracy's own grip on the planned economy tends to slacken. This is precisely what happened during the Brezhnev era.

Brezhnev seized power from Khrushchev in 1964. The eighteen years of his rule were marked by stagnation and ossification at every level of official Soviet society.

Brezhnev's circle consisted largely of those who had worked with him in Dnepropetrovsk at the end of the Second World War - the so-called Dnepropetrovsk mafia that included police chief Shchelokov and aging Prime Minister Tikhonov. Others had worked alongside Brezhnev in 'Sovietising' Moldavia where Konstantin Chernenko joined Brezhnev's clique. The bureaucratic apparatus throughout the USSR was left relatively free from interference from the central apparatus in Moscow. The result was not only economic stagnation but a staggering degree of corruption which periodically reached proportions threatening the stability of

bureaucratic rule. In 1969 the entire leadership of the Central Committee of the Azerbaidzhan party was dismissed for corruption and replaced by Azerbaidzhan KGB chief Aliyev. In 1972 the top Georgian Party leader and Politburo member Mshavandze was removed after evidence was produced that he and other were involved in drug trafficking and illicit economic dealings. At the very end of his reign the corruption of Brezhnev's clique in Moscow was increasingly made public. In his own bid for power Yuri Andropov used his KGB connections to point the finger at the corrupt practices of the Brezhnev clique itself. Brezhnev's daughter Galina was a close associate of the notorious Boris the Gypsy who hanged himself when the KGB closed in on his diamond smuggling and foreign currency dealings. Galina's husband was himself a deputy interior minister in charge of supervising the police force! KGB deputy head - General Semyon Tsvigun - shot himself in early 1982 when he too came under suspicion for corruption. Tsvigun was Brezhnev's brother-in-law! That the bureaucracy is historically illegitimate and can play only a parasitical role in Soviet society is starkly proved by evidence that its highest ranks embezzle and steal hoping that their monopoly of political power will guarantee their immunity. Unlike a capitalist ruling class, it cannot legitimise the means by which it augments its official earnings.

Andropov came to power as the head of a coalition of forces committed to breaking the Brezhnev clique's stranglehold, attempting to revitalise the economy. In particular his support came from the military and security forces. Andropov was aware that unless significant sections of the bureaucracy could be forced to get their snouts out of the trough then there was little hope of realising this project. In his first months, a series of Brezhnev's cronies were sacked including Interior Minister Shchelokov after allegations of wholesale corruption in the police force, and even Chernenko lost his post as head of the Central Committee's General Department which is in charge of issuing party membership cards. Andropov tried to break bureaucratic lethargy in the state and party apparatus by a campaign to shake out time servers and the corrupt. In one year new chiefs were appointed to head nine of the twenty three Central Committee departments, and 20% of regional party bosses sacked. In Moscow, for example, 33% of neighbourhood level party chiefs were replaced as the lower levels of the bureaucracy were purged in local, district and regional elections held throughout the USSR during the last months of 1983.

While working to shake the bureaucracy out of its corrupt lethargy Andropov also moved to

*Brezhnev and Chernenko in Vienna in 1979*



tighten work discipline in the factories in a public clamp down on absenteeism. Shopping queues and public baths were raided in regular checks on credentials proving that workers were not supposed to be at work. The press launched a campaign against 'indiscipline' alongside its attacks on corruption and inefficiency in the lower ranks of the bureaucracy. But the problems facing are more fundamental than the application of cosmetic policing measures can deal with. Andropov had no answer to the problems of stagnation in the Soviet economy besides the appointment of two committees to study proposals for economic reform under planning chiefs Baibakov and Ryzhkov. For years now the bureaucracy has been toying with the introduction of market mechanisms and managerial autonomy as its solution to the stagnation in the centrally directed plan. Andropov himself established target factories which would serve as experiments by giving managers greater freedom to allocate funds and set production goals. Yet the bureaucracy is deeply fearful that the widescale application of such a model would further threaten its cohesion and its grip over Soviet society as a whole - hence its hesitation, its endless experiments and its recourse to police methods.

In the short term andropov had his successes. January 1983 production was 6.3% up on the January 1982 figure. Worker productivity rose 3.9% in the first three months of 1983 compared with 1.5% for the previous year. In 1983 industrial production increased by 4%, an improvement of 1% on 1982 figures. He was able to promote key new figures up the bureaucratic hierarchy at the expense of the old Dnepropetrovsk mafia. However his economic reform committees bore no fruit and despite a feverish campaign for discipline the pace of police surveillance slackened. Andropov's illness gave the conservative bureaucracy the chance to regroup its forces and assert its will to restore order and stability in its ranks.

There was no shortage of younger ambitious functionaries vying to step into Andropov's shoes. Gorbachev - Brezhnev's agricultural chief in the late 1970s - presided over Andropov's party shake out and was widely named as Andropov's chosen heir. Romanov - Leningrad Party boss for thirteen years moved to Moscow in 1983 and started to ferry his own supporters into key posts. Azerbaidzhan KGB chief Aliyev was made a full member of the Politburo after Brezhnev's death and possessed the right credentials to pursue Andropov's intended crack down on workers and lower sections of the bureaucracy. But if any one of these 'new men' were to have replaced Andropov they would have further upset the cohesion and stability of a bureaucratic caste that grew older in the Brezhnev era. Hence the enormous conservative inertia of the bureaucratic caste found its candidate to replace Andropov in the decrepit figure of Konstantin Chernenko.

Chernenko was known as 'Brezhnev's valet' for the role he played as Brezhnev's aid. He worked as official prompter and assistant to Brezhnev in his dotage. Brezhnev himself said, in an attempt to praise Chernenko on the occasion of his receiving the Order of Lenin, "I can think of no case in which you have ever forgotten anything, even when it dealt with things that seemed negligible at first glance" - Chernenko is a bureaucrat through and through. He has worked in the party apparatus for forty years and he is already stricken with serious illness. That the Kremlin bureaucracy chose such a man to lead it shows just how decayed and immobile the bureaucracy itself is.

The bureaucratic caste that rules the Soviet Union has no answer to the stagnation of the Soviet planned economy. Its resort to police methods, its attempts to re-instill and recapture the enthusiasm and dynamism of the early 1930s cannot fundamentally reverse the course of the Soviet economy. Any tinkering with market mechanisms will serve only to create further imbalances in the economy and conflicts with the Soviet workers as prices rise and employment rights come under attack. There is only one alternative to decay and stagnation at the hands of the bureaucracy. The working class must overthrow the bureaucracy and take the planned economy directly into its own hands. Only in this way - through political revolution - can the productive forces of the USSR be put at the service of building a socialist society.

by John Hunt

# U.S.F.I. SPLIT - FROM CENTRISM TO STALINISM

TWO YEARS AFTER the start of a wave of expulsions in the Socialist Workers' Party (USA) and five months after these expelled members had formed a new organisation, the "United Secretariat of the Fourth International" has finally broken its silence on the purge among its American sympathisers. The February 13th issue of "International Viewpoint" declared the expelled members around the paper "Socialist Action" to be "within the framework of the Fourth International" and called on the SWP(US) to "reverse its organisational course."

The origins of this further schism in the crisis-racked USEC lies in the campaign by the leadership of the SWP(US) to dump its few remaining links with Trotskyism and seek a "political convergence" with Stalinism. Since 1981 this organisation, which supposedly represents the "Fourth International" in the USA, has concentrated its efforts on attacking Trotsky's theory of Permanent Revolution. In the SWP(US)'s new theoretical journal, significantly named *New International*, Jack Barnes, a leading member of the party, takes furthest yet his attacks on Trotskyism and reveals clearly his party's political trajectory. Trotsky we are informed was wrong against Lenin in arguing the theory of Permanent Revolution before 1917. His "leftist bias" was only overcome when he joined the Bolshevik team in mid-1917. Again by 1928, Barnes tells us, Trotsky had returned to his previous positions and introduced "leftist errors" in his polemics with Stalin over China. So for the SWP(US) Trotsky can only be considered to have put forward a really communist position for a little over ten years! Above all, Trotsky's fundamental error lay in the advocacy of Permanent Revolution. This theory according to Barnes "does not contribute today to arming either ourselves or other revolutionaries to lead the working class and its allies to take power" (*Their Trotsky and Ours*, p.13) It ...is not a correct generalisation of the historic programme and strategy of communism." (p.80)

With what does Barnes and his ally in this theoretical endeavour - Doug Jeness - wish to replace Trotsky's theory of Permanent Revolution? They want to revive Lenin's theory of the Democratic Dictatorship of the Proletariat and Peasantry. In doing so they prove in practice the truth of Trotsky's assertion that this slogan, after the experience of 1917, could only be a bridge to Menshevism. While we intend to go into these arguments in more detail in

our next theoretical journal, it is clear that what the SWP(US) wants to be able to do, is to justify theoretically its support for the Stalinist conception of "stages". It wants to dress up a governmental form that Lenin clearly recognised as bourgeois as "socialist" and to characterise popular front governments, where openly bourgeois parties share power with petit-bourgeois nationalist and Stalinist parties, as "workers and peasants governments". Thus the GRN of Nicaragua and the PRG of Grenada, both of which committed themselves on coming to power to preserving capitalist property relations, were dubbed "workers and peasants governments" and their leaders "proletarian revolutionists" practicing "genuine communism". Because, in practice their political programme is now indistinguishable from Stalinism they can see and openly advocate a "political convergence" with these movements and the communist parties. At the moment they have limited their hosannas to the Cuban CP and various Latin American Stalinist parties such as the El Salvadorean CP. But no doubt they will discover in the future other Stalinist parties with "proletarian revolutionists" at their head.

The SWP's open flight towards Stalinism has brought forth a response from Ernest Mandel in which he puts himself forward as the defender of "Trotskyist orthodoxy" ("In Defence of the Permanent Revolution", *International Viewpoint*, 13 June 1983). His reply however, only brings into sharp relief the common political method and analysis which underlies both Mandel and Barnes with regard to Stalinism.

While Mandel balks at calling various Stalinist leaderships "proletarian revolutionists", he reminds the SWP of their previously "sectarian" position of "falsely" labelling the Yugoslav, Chinese and Vietnamese CPs as "Stalinist parties". For Mandel it would be "the height of sectarianism to call them 'counter-revolutionaries'....They are pragmatic revolutionaries we would say 'left-centrists' from a theoretical point of view without giving the slightest pejorative coloration to that term." (*International Viewpoint*, June 13 p.17). Heaven forbid the majority of the USEC to use "pejorative" terms for parties which have deprived the workers and peasants of political power, imprisoned and murdered Trotskyists and other oppositionists, and joined hands with the most open counter-revolutionaries, as the Chinese

CP did when it aligned itself with Bandaranaike in crushing the JVP youth in Sri Lanka! Unlike their American supporters the USEC majority is willing to tentatively suggest that these parties do not have "a theory and programme that was adequate neither to their own revolution nor especially to the world revolution." In practice, however, in every crucial revolutionary situation where these parties have been challenging for power (and at the same time bureaucratically stifling and crushing every independent organisation of the workers and peasants) the Mandelites have "forgotten" these "inadequacies" and marched behind these leaders as uncritical cheer leaders. In every one of these countries - in China, Vietnam, Cuba- and in Nicaragua, the USEC to its eternal shame has ditched not only the programme of permanent revolution but the cadres of the "Fourth International" who thought they were fighting for this programme.

The Mandelites may bridle at declaring the Nicaraguan government to be a "workers and peasants government", but their alternative - "a special situation of dual power at the level of the state" - gives rise to the same programmatic conclusions. They refuse to characterise the government as a popular front, justify the FSLN's preservation of capitalism by calling this a necessary "breathing space". They refuse to call for a break with the bourgeoisie and its policies, and join hands with the FSLN and the SWP(US) in condemning the "ultra-left Trotskyists" of the Bolivar Brigade. Little wonder then that the 1979 World Congress resolution on Nicaragua which represented the position of the Mandelite majority, could declare: "In setting forth its progress and conceptions the FI places itself firmly on the side of the FSLN's fight to ensure the victory of the socialist revolution." (*1979 World Congress Report*, p. 165)

Mandel's "defence" of permanent revolution rings hollow indeed. If John Barnes has decided to follow Bernstein's dictum "What we are we should dare to appear" then Mandel has eagerly cast himself in the role of the openly revisionist social democrat Volmar who responded to Bernstein with the famous advice "One does not say such things my dear Ede, one does them."

Not for the first time the USEC, having unravelled Trotsky's programme in the direction of Stalinism, finds itself moving organisationally in that direction as well. In Australia the USEC's section

has travelled even further down this road. The SWP(A) stopped calling itself "Trotskyist" in 1982 on the basis that it "did not adequately convey what the SWP(A) stands for" (*Direct Action* Nov. 1983) This at least has the merit of being an honest statement. The SWP(A) which now styles itself "marxist-leninist", holds many common positions with the SWP(US) particularly on permanent revolution. It recently fused with the Australian section of the Turkish Maoist group "Dev Yol" and has been moving ever closer to the Socialist Party of Australia, a pro-Moscow split from the largely Euro-communist Communist Party of Australia. In the 1983 state elections in Queensland for instance, it gave its support to candidates of the SPA in preference to the Australian Labour Party on the basis that: "The overall thrust of the election programme of the SPA is for class struggle policies in the interests of working people." The USEC has yet to make any public criticism of the political direction of their Australian section, and such a criticism is unlikely given the SWP(A) has just summarily expelled all the supporters of the SWP(US) from its organisation.

The USEC has never been a democratic centralist organisation held together by a principled programmatic agreement - it has rather been a rotten cobbling together of centrist groups, linked by non-aggression pacts with their "spheres of influence". We are now witnessing a period of organisational realignment and political musical chairs which precedes all "world congresses" of the USEC. Persistent rumours of secret negotiations between Moreno's "International Workers' League" (itself wracked by dissension over the PST's opportunism in Argentina) and the Mandelites only confirm the cynical disregard these leaders have for political principles.

For revolutionary militants sickened by the cynical, apolitical manoeuvrings that characterise the politics of the 'Unified Secretariat of the Fourth International' there are only two alternatives. They can watch passively while Barnes' prediction, that "most of us will not call our movement 'Trotskyist' before this decade is out..." comes true. Or they can join the struggle to refound a genuine Leninist Trotskyist international, a new world party of socialist revolution. It is to this struggle that Workers Power, the Irish Workers Group and the Gruppe Arbeitermacht have committed themselves. Join us.

## POLICE BILL SET TO BECOME CLASS LAW

THE TREND TOWARDS an ever more powerful police force has existed for decades. Both Tory and Labour governments have overseen the creation of special militarised squads, given powers to, and increased the numbers (and pay) of the police. The Police Bill, currently before Parliament and expected to become law by the middle of this year, will give the police sweeping new powers of arrest, interrogation and detention without trial.

Like previous measures to "strengthen Law and Order" the new law is not designed to improve the safety or protect the property of ordinary people. Its purpose is to improve the ability of that state to hold down the victims and opponents of government policy.

Building on the militarisation of the police, which, as the onslaught on the Warrington picket showed, has been underway for some time, the new Bill will introduce to the mainland elements of the "blanket policing" pioneered in Northern Ireland.

The new bill contains some 300 amendments to the 1983 one designed to placate legal and medical opposition without for a moment altering the general tenor of the legislation. The ability to deny the rights of the working class and to harass militants, youth and immigrant communities remains.

### What the Bill means

\* Detention without charge. Every year tens of thousands of people "voluntarily" spend time in police stations "helping police with their enquiries". This period of isolation, interrogation, threats and even beatings is often crucial in obtaining confessions from the suspects or in tricking them into giving evidence against themselves or others. Under the new Bill things will become a lot tougher. The police will be able to hold anybody for 24 hours without charge. Moreover, if anyone is suspected of a "serious offence" they can be detained for 48 hours without charge and for a further 48 hours on application to a magistrate's court. Such draconian powers can and will be used both to disrupt militant activities (after all virtually all effective trade union action is now illegal) and to intimidate individuals and communities.

On top of this four solid days of interrogation and threats will often be enough to "persuade" innocent victims that they would be better off confessing to some crime just to bring the ordeal to an end.

\* No access to legal advice. Once detained, a suspect can only see a solicitor "as soon as it is practicable" with an overall time limit of 48 hours. In

practice this will mean seeing a solicitor only after questioning. In the case of a "serious arrestable offence" the delay can be longer than 48 hours.

\* Internal searches by force. The Bill will make legal "intimate body searches" i.e. searches of the mouth, vagina and anus, to be carried out, if necessary, by force and without the presence of a doctor. This will apply to any person arrested. The recent report commissioned by the Metropolitan Police showed that force to be largely made up of racist, sexist and thuggish characters. Giving them these new powers will give full rein to them to translate their prejudices against women, gays and blacks into practice.

\* New powers to stop and search. At present the police can only legally stop and search if they suspect someone of carrying drugs or an offensive weapon and, in London, stolen goods. The new Bill extends this last provision to the whole country and adds the right to search where possession of equipment for burglary or fraud is suspected. Given that a plastic cheque or credit card, for example, could be used in both activities and that anyone could reasonably be suspected of carrying one, this power basically legalises random stopping and searching. It is in fact a new "SUS" law with which the police will be able to harass whole communities as they did with Operation 'Swamp 81' in Brixton.

In addition the new Bill will allow the establishment for up to seven days, of road blocks around whole areas. Apart from isolating industrial disputes this will also allow police to make random searches of the houses and premises within the areas no matter whether the owners/occupiers are suspected of anything or not. This was exactly what happened after the riots provoked by Swamp'81 in Brixton.

\* New powers of arrest. The Bill allows the police to arrest anyone who has committed a non-arrestable offence if they suspect that a false name or address has been given.

### Who will suffer?

In many respects the new Bill only extends to the whole country powers that are already in use (legally or not) by special squads such as the Instant Response Units who spend most of their time patrolling the inner city areas intimidating youth. We can be sure that in legalising current police practice the Bill will open the door to a yet worse practice.

As in the Six counties, where such methods as these were developed, the new powers of the police apply, in principle, to everyone but in practice they will be used against quite specific sections of the

population. In Northern Ireland it is the Nationalist community, in Britain it will be, in particular, the working class and immigrant communities of the run-down inner city centres.

The content of the Police Bill is class law. It is a law for the government, for the comfortably housed bosses, in general for the wealthy and against anyone who poses a threat to them and their wealth. As such the Bill is an attack on the right of black youth to walk the streets in peace, against the right of workers to hold demonstrations and pickets.

No road blocks will be set up in Mayfair to trap the illegal gamblers, the high class prostitutes and pimps, the tax evaders or their professional advisers. Even well-organised crime will go unscathed as long as it can afford to pay fat bribes to the top cops.

### How to fight the Bill

The campaign to defeat the Bill must begin by mobilising and organising those who are going to be affected by it. It must be based on the organised working class, the unemployed or YTS/college youth, the black and immigrant communities. The National Campaign Against the Police Bill which organised the January 21st demonstration is a mainly London based organisation dominated by Labour MPs and some black community groups. If it is to play a role in really fighting the Bill it must turn outwards towards those who can, if mobilised, defeat the Bill.

Instead of only advising activists to "Contact your local MP and local councillors to get them to oppose the Bill" the real need is for activities in every locality which mobilise and organise; demonstrations, pickets of police stations and street meetings to publicise both the real meaning of the Bill and the campaign against it.

Special emphasis must be put on activity within the organised labour movement. Resolutions opposing the Bill, must be raised and acted upon. Strikes, pickets and occupations all come up against the police and the connection between the vicious police attacks at Warrington and the continuous harassment of the immigrant communities must be made clear. The Labour movement cannot afford to be complacent about the Bill. Every Labour MP should be called on not only to oppose the Bill but to take an active part in defeating it; publicising the campaign, campaigning in support of its activities. Local Labour Parties and Young Socialists should make opposition to the Bill a high priority. That opposition must be based on patiently and consistently arguing the need for strike action against the Bill. Difficult as this will be in the end it is the best weapon for

fighting Parliamentary Bills. At every level of the Labour Movement the connection between the anti-union laws and the new police powers must be made and the conclusions drawn.

Fighting the Police Bill must go hand in hand with organising the physical, day to day, defence of pickets and communities. Organised defence against the attacks of the Old Bill is an excellent starting point for the campaign against the New Bill! ■

by Paul Mason

Arrest - Taxteth, Liverpool, July 1981



John Sturrock, Network.

Despite the emergence of the largest anti-nuclear campaign ever seen, Cruise and Pershing IIs have been sited in Western Europe. Three years of massive demonstrations, petitions and peace camps have failed to prevent the deployment of those weapons.

In the aftermath of their failure CND's leaders are now set on working for more "realistic" and "achievable" aims. Bruce Kent wants to distance CND from the Labour Party. The CND leadership are now out to ape the US Democratic Party and campaign for no more than a "nuclear freeze." At CND's December conference they narrowly failed to ditch CND's commitment to unilateral nuclear disarmament.

Faced with CND's passivity and retreat many activists have looked to the Women's Peace Movement for an alternative lead. The women's camp outside Greenham Common has proved far more successful in capturing media attention. Their tactics of non-violent direct action (NVDA) such as cutting down the fence, occupying the control tower and "surrounding the base with sound" have won many supporters from within the ranks of CND. While they did not prevent the siting of Cruise they have interfered with the smooth running of the base. The launchers were due to go out on practice runs to deploy their loads around the local countryside. At the moment the women's presence makes this extremely difficult. But this success is limited because in a situation of increased tension the missiles could be positioned within the camp or the women could be "removed". Heseltine has clearly stated that unarmed women could be shot if they interfered with the security of the base. Western Imperialism's need for these weapons means that in any crisis a group of women campers or CND protesters lying in the road will not stand in NATO's way. Non-violence will not always be met in kind.

The belief of the Women's Peace Movement

# N.V.D.A. - THE LIMITS OF PACIFISM

that tactics of protest and civil disobedience can successfully disarm the warmongers is shared by the supporters of Action 84, a group within CND which is organising action against Reagan's visit to London this summer. The failure of CND's passive protest has turned them towards more active and imaginative tactics such as a mass sit-down in Parliament Square with a "People's Parliament" debating nuclear weapons.

The tactics of these groups may differ from those of Kent and Ruddock but the conception of how to win and their overall strategy remain identical. Pressure of public opinion is considered by both these groups to be sufficient to force the government to give up nuclear weapons. All they argue about is the best way of mobilising that opinion - do you move towards the centre ground and capture

the SDP support as Kent would argue, or do you inspire the masses through imaginative civil disobedience?

The whole strategy is flawed. The military apparatus of the imperialist powers has never been under any degree of democratic control. The decisions on Cruise and Trident were not taken by parliament or even the Cabinet but by the highest military and political executive. They recognise the need for these weapons in order to maintain their power and influence in world politics and internal security. Such matters are not the subject of open debate. Whilst democratic methods may influence certain decisions of government, when "national security" and the military power of the state is at stake democracy is pushed aside. The attempted banning of trade unions at Cheltenham GCHQ is testimony to that.

Therefore when it comes to challenging the weapons of NATO in Britain the use of normal democratic methods, however imaginative, is quite simply not enough.

But the Greenham women argue that NVDA is more than just a tactic: "Non-violence is not just the absence of violence or simply a tactic, but a total approach to living, both an ideal to aim for and a strategy for change." (*Greenham Women Everywhere* p.76). The Women's Peace Movement (WPM) regards violence and war as essentially masculine characteristics and their strategy for change is to live in ways that are both "feminist and non-violent." The method of influencing events by NVDA is explained by the women: "When taking non-violent action, your very vulnerability is your strength. For example, having put yourself in a position of apparent weakness by lying in the road, you trust that the motorist in the city, or the truck drivers at Greenham, will not run you over, and that the police will not beat you or kick you." (*GWE* p.68) They believe that passive protest will bring about a crisis in the organs of power of the state by appeals to the conscience of individual police and army officers.

This was the rationale behind last December's protest where mirrors were directed at individual policemen to "make him confront his own aggression." NVDA may indeed tug at the heartstrings of individual police and soldiers who have some sympathy with the cause of saving the world, but the state military forces are trained to perform a task which may, as Heseltine pointed out, lead to responding to non-violence with a bullet. Any individual officers who fail this test would be replaced by SPG thugs who have no such finer feelings.

The vulnerability which capitalism forces upon women and children may permit it a show of condescending chivalry in times of peace. But the slaughter of unarmed Palestinians in the Lebanese refugee camps last year did not restrict itself to men; nor does the killing of innocent civilians by British army plastic bullets in Northern Ireland exclude children.

The rejection by the WPM of a realistic strategy for averting nuclear war has led many of them to ever more mystical notions. Some women reject informed debate and bemoan that in a man's world "...reason" and "science" are glorified and slavishly followed at the expense of feeling, intuition and spiritual insight." (Gwyn Kirk, *GWE*, p.87) The concept of "women's intuition", once rejected by the Women's Liberation Movement as sexist nonsense has thus been resurrected in order to save the



Pic: Claire Hershman.

world. The attraction of NVDA and the peace camp for militant youth demonstrates the lack of an alternative leadership.

The left has largely tailed behind these movements and called for workers to troop along as well. But the working class is not an optional extra in this struggle. Imperialism will not be disarmed by persuasion or protest, the need to control its armed forces is fundamental to the very existence of capitalism. Take away the arms of the state and the ability to maintain the ruling power of the bourgeoisie will be destroyed. So for the imperialists this is not a matter of policy but survival, and that is how we must also approach it.

In order to remove the nuclear and conventional arsenals from the control of Thatcher and Reagan their whole rotten system of exploitation and oppression must be challenged and overthrown. In this battle the power lies with those who produce the profits and manufacture the weapons - the workers and oppressed groups will not disarm imperialism by living in peace camps and communes. They will have to challenge the state, combat the violence they are subjected to with their own organised power, including armed militias.

Certain forms of non-violent direct action will necessarily be one of the tactics used by a militant anti-militarist campaign through strikes, occupations and demonstrations. But tactics have to be assessed as part of an overall strategy and workers have no interest in following the clerics and libertarians along the road of democratic illusions.

The Women's Peace Camp at Greenham is a thorn in the side of the Ministry of Defence, in spite of their inability to fundamentally challenge the state from their encampment. The postponement of the testing of the launchers is clearly a situation which the government do not want repeated. They have therefore decided to try and crush the Peace Camp finally, and are using arrests, fines and imprisonment combined with continual harassment to demoralize the women. Hired thugs experienced in evictions have now been brought in to assist this campaign. Whatever our disagreements with the WPM we still defend the camps from these attacks and demand that the courts and council leave them to continue their protest. We defend all those who take action against the government and its arms, but will continue to argue that this particular strategy is wrong. Militants who think seriously about the fight against Cruise will see through the hopeless directions of CND and the WPM. We urge those militants to join with us in the fight to build an anti-militarist movement which can disarm the imperialists and smash the rotten system which creates the conditions for war and nuclear destruction. ■

by Helen Ward

Above & below: Non violent blockade of Greenham Common base, December 13th, 1982.



## LETTERS

### Bloody Sunday ban

Dear Comrades,  
Sheffield City Council's socialist image was well and truly tarnished in January when it not only banned the annual Bloody Sunday rally from taking place in the City Hall, but Labour leader of the Council, David Blunkett also called upon the police to ban the march itself. The "excuse" for such a reactionary outburst was that some of the organisers of the march on the Bloody Sunday Mobilising Committee had issued statements to the press in the wake of the Harrod's bomb, defending the right of the IRA to carry on their war in England, albeit regretting civilian casualties. According to Blunkett "The meeting would have gone on if the matter of violence and killing had not been raised." Just before Xmas he approached the LCI and TOM who had planned a joint public meeting on British legal injustices in Northern Ireland, in order to ask them to call off the meeting until a more "appropriate" time! Fortunately, his request was turned down.

Not content with the initial ban on the use of the City Hall on Bloody Sunday, the Council went even further in passing a ruling that "Council agrees not to allow the hire or use of its premises by any individuals or organisation a) who advocate, support or are involved in the taking of life of civilians and members of Her Majesty's Armed Forces operating in Great Britain or b) who are involved in promoting racist attitudes and activities."

The second part of this permanent ban, aimed at the NF is completely hypocritical and a diversion. Blunkett's ban caused Irish solidarity activists to be isolated in the local labour movement. LCI Honorary President Joan Maynard's constituency backed the Council. Campus unions at the university threatened to refuse to serve those at an IFM day school. This isolation emboldened the NF, who hounded activists on the Friday before the planned march.

The loyalist tone of the Council's ban contrasts starkly with the Council's own (if timid) actions in supporting the violent activities of the Sandinistas in Nicaragua or the FMLN in El Salvador. But then they are a respectable distance from Britain's shores and their target is the USA.

These labour leaders have by their action played straight into the hands of both the government and the fascists. It was a victory for repressive legislation - the new PTA is now law! Blunkett wants "democracy" brought to the Six Counties but takes away the democratic rights of those firmly opposed to the Government's rule in the North.

Such a ban must be vigorously opposed in the labour movement and demands must be made on Sheffield City Council, through resolutions in trade unions and Labour Party wards to reverse the present ban, defend free speech and activities over Ireland, and affirm the need for troops out of Northern Ireland now and for the Irish People as a whole to decide their own future. For this reason we should support the march called by the IFM in Sheffield on Saturday 3rd March.

Yours in comradeship,  
Chris Allen (Sheffield).

### Sinn Fein's left turn

Dear Comrades,  
Your article on the left turn of Sinn Fein left a great deal to be desired. We are informed of an inevitable "swing back to the methods of guerrilla warfare" if the turn is defeated. There is nothing inevitable about the present stage of Sinn Fein's development being reversed. Parallels can be drawn with the short lived and illfated Republican Congress of the 1930s and the lurch to the right in the 1940s.

The proletarian character of the forces involved in the 1930s were very unclear, even though they had on paper a better programme than SF has today! Today the leftward moving forces in Sinn Fein are attempting an organic change in the organisation as a whole. Leaders of Sinn Fein began to study Marxism whilst they were in prison and their insights are now being developed inside the organisation. If Marxists outside of Sinn Fein are to be listened to with respect they must prove themselves by building a mass solidarity movement for withdrawal based on the labour movement in this country and fight for unity with the Republicans in Ireland. If that is not done comrades are hindering the development of Marxism in Ireland and not intervening decisively in the debates now going on inside Sinn Fein.

The comrade from the IWG seems to have a rigid, deterministic and mechanical view of Sinn Fein and seems to be misunderstanding that a Communist programme will only be adopted by SF if Marxism is seen as valid to the struggle. It is true that in the H-Block Campaign the Irish far left (including the Irish Workers' Group) was able to teach SF a thing or two about how to build mass movements - it would be a shame if these gains were now lost by an abstract sterile approach to the growing ferment in SF. Marxists are supposed to base themselves on changes in the real world, not selectively quote to give a one-sided view of the Irish Revolutionary inheritance. We must fight for the day when SF characterises the working class as the force to lead the revolution and not just one amongst many. It is true that there is no "automatic process that will convert revolutionary nationalists into revolutionary communists". It is the subjective intervention of conscious revolutionaries in oppressed Ireland and the Imperialist heartland that can aid the evolution of SF towards Marxism and thus hasten our own revolution.

Yours fraternally,  
Paul Winstone (Leicester)

Reply to Paul Winstone

The main point of the article was to show that the essence of SF's "left turn" is, in fact, a turn to bourgeois politics (ie. parliamentarianism). We accept there is a ferment in SF's ranks, and that some republican activists are opening their minds to Marxism without any prejudices about what that involves. But Gerry Adams, Martin McGuinness and the leaders are not, and their ideas, far from being in ferment, are solidly petty bourgeois nationalist.

One does not have to "selectively quote" to prove that Adams et al believe heart and soul in a "democratic" stage to the Irish revolution in which "Labour must wait!" They openly embrace this programme. For our part we think this dooms the Irish Revolution to defeat.

There is a parallel between the "Left turn" of the Republican Congress in the 1930s and SF today: the influence of Stalinism. The odour of Third Period (ie. Ultra-Left) Stalinism hangs around many of the earlier declarations just as Popular Frontism (ie. alliance with national bourgeoisies) informed Stalinism after 1934/5. This is the "Marxism" learned in Long Kesh by the "officials." It has clearly influenced the thinking of Adams and the rest.

The comrade believes SF as a whole can be won to the revolutionary communist programme through exemplary solidarity work and comradely criticism. This is mistaken. SF's leaders have been through many struggles and persistently drawn the wrong conclusions to their lessons. Their programme remains closer to the bourgeoisie than to the one needed by anti-unionist workers, North and South. In fact, the communist programme has to be raised outside of SF, against the programme of petty bourgeois nationalism. But it has to embrace the aspirations and needs of many activists who at the moment follow SF, if revolutionary communism - Trotskyism - is to become a mass force in Irish politics. Our watchwords are no false diplomacy, united actions with republicans for united defined aims, and the creation of a revolutionary international Trotskyist party. ■

# G.C.H.Q. - RIGHT TO STRIKE NOT FOR SALE

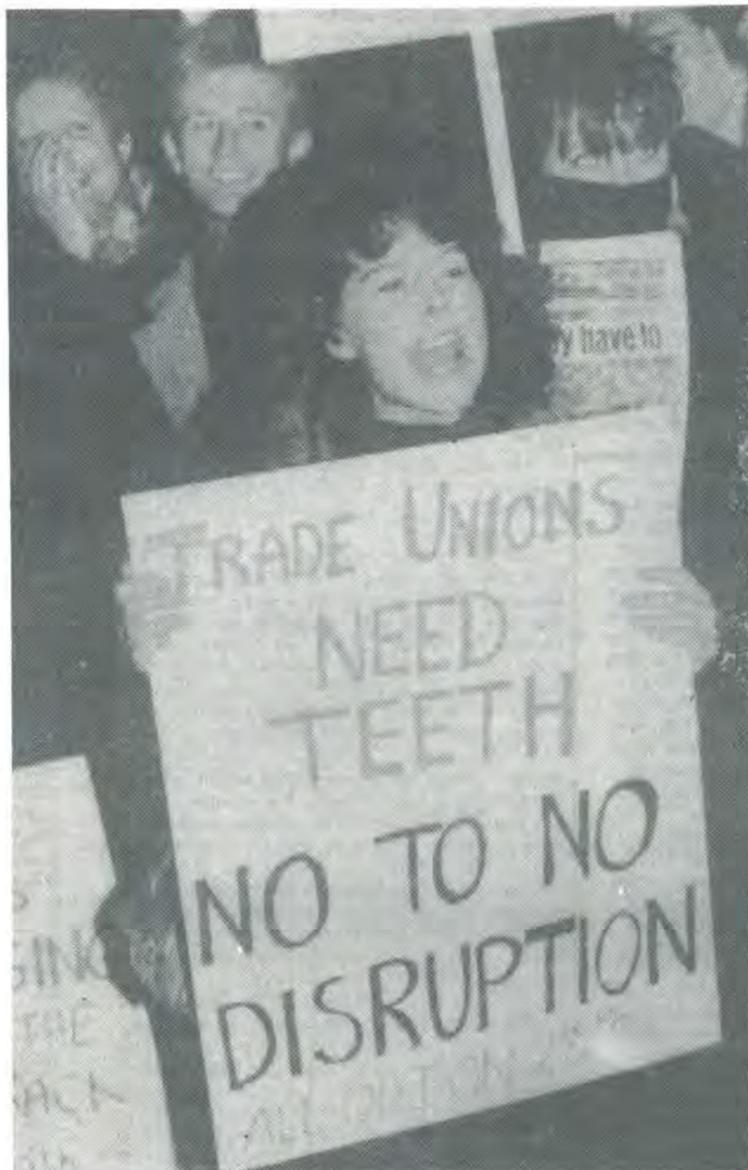
WITH THATCHER'S MARCH 1st deadline for GCHQ workers to give up their Trade Union rights been and gone, the TUC leaders' strategy for fighting this crucial struggle looks ever weaker. From day one Murray and the Council of Civil Servant Unions set out not to mobilise the strength of the trade union movement in strike action to defeat Thatcher's plans. Instead they attempted to appeal to the "broadest possible public opinion".

Alistair Graham set the tone for the whole campaign when he informed CPSA branch secretaries at the end of February that, "This dispute will be won by force of public opinion rather than industrial force." Thatcher has shown that she cares not a fig for such opinions when she can count on the pusillanimity of the trade union bureaucrats.

Throughout the first month of the campaign the trade union leadership concentrated on proving to "public opinion" - ie to the media and Tory and Social Democratic MPs who they hoped to win over - just how reasonable they were. They immediately sold the pass by offering Thatcher a no-strike agreement at GCHQ. Murray cast his whole campaign in terms of fighting the supposed slur on trade unionists honour as true patriots. He fulminated against the very idea that GCHQ workers would disrupt the government's spying and phonetapping activities in pursuit of better pay and conditions. He proceeded to try and sell a deal that would tie the GCHQ unions hand and foot.

The rank and file of the civil service unions fortunately showed themselves to be more conscious of the threat to effective trade union rights than their leaders. They showed themselves to be made of firmer stuff. A wave of locally organised walkouts greeted the announcement by Thatcher. The TUC leaders were bounced into calling the 28th February strike for two reasons. Thatcher kicked the trade union leaders in the teeth at her meeting with Murray on the 23rd February. This came despite the fact that the leaders had prevaricated continuously on what sort of action was being called for on that day, with the CPSA leaders coming out openly against strike action, in order to persuade Thatcher of their reasonableness. The trade union leaders had to save face after this humiliating set back for their policies. Even before then it was clear that at a local level civil service branches were already organising for strike action. At the Central Hall rally on the 23rd speaker after speaker from the floor denounced their leaders' sabotage of the day of action and demanded an end to no-strike agreements.

For Murray and the TUC leaders the action on February 28th was obviously entered into reluctantly and seen as a one-off means of putting pressure on Thatcher to accept the TUC proposals. Civil Service trade unionists must fight tooth and nail against being used as foot soldiers to impose a no-strike agreement on their brothers and sisters at Cheltenham. They must



Melanie Friend (Report)

also make sure the 28th is not left as a one off action. The trade union leaders have plans to let Thatcher have the next move, wait for some sackings at GCHQ and then hold out for a long battle by paying the wages of any sacked workers. Militants had to fight on February 28th to extend the day of action into an all out strike in the civil service until Thatcher retreats. This remains a crucial demand. Further, despite the difficulties, we must demand our leaders mobilise the Cheltenham workers themselves to walk off the job when the first trade unionist is disciplined for refusing to leave their union. Murray and co have consistently refused to do this, yet it is precisely the importance of "national security" to Thatcher that gives the Cheltenham workers great strength in this campaign. The only possibility in winning the majority of the trade unionists at Cheltenham to such a course of action is to provide a firm lead, to organise massive and indefinite strike action throughout the civil service in their support.

The solidarity actions by railway workers, NUPE members and other non-civil service workers on the 28th shows the possibility to spread the campaign. Such solidarity actions were of course 'illegal' under the government's trade union laws. Rank and file militants should have taken the opportunity on that day, and must raise and fight for in the future, the demand for an all out

general strike to smash these laws for good. The retreat of the TUC leaders before these laws in the NGA dispute obviously only wetted Thatcher's appetite for more attacks on trade union rights. That retreat was followed immediately by the attacks on the NUJ and the Cheltenham workers. A further retreat this time will only encourage Thatcher to extend the new trade union laws to cover no-strike clauses in other essential services - such as the power workers, firemen and even hospital workers. It will encourage employers to use the existing battery of anti-union laws against workers in struggle.

Given the clear determination of this bosses government to cripple the trade union movement through a series of laws which make effective industrial action impossible, the working class must show itself equally determined to defend and extend its trade union rights. We must force our leaders to stop crawling before Thatcher and put up a real fight. Only a general strike will force Thatcher and Tebbit to abandon their central strategy to cripple the trade unions. We must fight and organise now :

- for an all out strike of all civil service unions immediately workers are victimised at Cheltenham.
- against all no-strike deals with Thatcher's government.
- for a general strike to smash the Tories trade union laws.

## WORKERS IN ACTION



### BL pay plan

BRITISH LEYLAND MANAGEMENT are dividing up their operations ready for privatisation. The four divisions of BL - Freight Rover, Unipart, Jaguar and the Austin-Rover Group (ARG) - are being spruced up ready for the share sharks.

As a first step management want to ditch national pay bargaining and establish Joint Negotiating Committees for each of the divisions. In the face of this attack most of the stewards in ARG have voted for plant by plant negotiations. Austin Longbridge stewards, for example, voted "that the separation of the existing bargaining units be subjected to reaching satisfactory arrangements within each group. The Austin Joint Shop Stewards' position is to re-establish plant bargaining within the ARG."

It is not hard to see why so many stewards think this way. Management want the mini-JNCs to be staffed by the same local and national officials who served management so well on the old BL national JNC. They will remain responsible to their unions nationally and not to the shop floor in the plants. For most stewards plant by plant bargaining is the way to bypass these officials, take bargaining into their own hands and stop the officials selling the workforce out.

Such reasoning may well be understandable but it is wrong nevertheless. Plant by plant bargaining - if it were ever achieved - would simply allow the company to substitute divide and rule tactics between the plants for its reliance on the national officials to sell British Leyland workers short. Individual plants could be isolated and defeated. Workers in 'profitable' plants could be set against workers in other plants.

Management want to divide the workforce and prepare the way for privatisation. Leyland workers must resist this carve up. That means fighting for a national pay claim that unites all BL workers and which is decided on and fought for by shop floor workers not the officials. Only BL workers know how much of an increase they need, and only a united mass struggle can secure it. Stewards should be initiating discussions in the sections to decide the annual pay claim. A national BL stewards conference should be called to decide on the claim, organise the fight for it and hammer out a policy to resist management's privatisation plans. That is the way to take on BL management and stop the union officials selling the workers short.



ve Evans (FL)

### Break pit deadlock

THE AGREEMENT BETWEEN leaders of NUM, NUS, NUR and ASLEF to block the movement of imported coal will not be enough to win the miners' pay claim. The major obstacle to that claim is not imported coal but the coal still being mined and the coal already stockpiled.

To call on the members of other unions to challenge the anti-union laws when the miners themselves are still at work is a typically bureaucratic manoeuvre designed to give the appearance of militant and determined leadership while actually mobilising nothing.

There cannot be any doubt that strike action is needed, nor that it would correspond to the increasing anger and militancy among many sections of miners. The 'downfall of MacGregor' at Ellington Colliery in Northumberland was only the most publicised example of the anger developing in the pits.

That anger is spurred on by management's obvious intention to exploit the hesitancy of the NUM leadership and the divisions within the membership that their policies have allowed to develop. By the end of the current financial year twenty pits will have been closed, twice as many as in the previous year. In both Yorkshire and Scotland thousands of miners have taken strike action over local grievances - mostly related to management provocation and victimisation. Still the so-called Left leaders of the union refuse to risk a split with the

Right by building on that militancy.

The overtime ban can easily be turned to MacGregor and company's advantage. In the Barnsley area, for example, they have imposed a virtual three-day week in the South Kirby, Ferrymoor Riddings and Kinsley Drift pits. The miners are losing money but seeing no results. Quite the opposite. Miners from South Kirby and Ferrymoor Riddings picketed their own and other pits but were left isolated. A similar fate befell an 11 day strike at Dinnington, near Rotherham, and a strike by 800 miners against a 50% bonus reduction in North Derbyshire.

The picture is repeated in Scotland. In mid February 4,600 miners on strike against the dictatorial methods of Albert Wheeler the NCB's Scottish boss were told that the Polmaise and Boyside pits were to close almost immediately. The response of McGahey and the Scottish NUM was to ask for time to 'convince the members' of the need for strike action. McGahey did nothing except discourage rank and file delegations from Polmaise to other pits. The result was a disastrous rejection of all-out strike action to defend the threatened pits at a special delegate conference on February 20th.

Never has it been more clear than now that if the planned closure of another 30 pits is to be halted the miners will need the creation of a militant alternative to the big talk but no action of the present Broad Left leadership of Scargill and McGahey.

# ORGANISING THE RANK AND FILE

## THE TASKS OF TODAY

SHORTLY BEFORE HER election victory in 1979, Margaret Thatcher was invited by an interviewer to make the ritual denial of a desire for confrontation with the unions, which party leaders Tory and Labour alike had made since the last war. Instead of obliging, she launched into an attack on the health workers, the fire-fighters and the low-paid council workers who had been struggling against Labour's wage freezes: "Some unions are confronting the sick, they're confronting the old, they're confronting children...By God, I'll confront them!"

Any of the sick, the elderly or any patients that thought that Thatcher was their champion have had five years to regret their error, as hospitals closed, children lost their school meals and the very existence of the Welfare State as anything more than a Poor Law provision was called into question. But as for her oath to confront the unions, the Iron Maiden has been as good as her word. She set out to systematically "redress the balance of power" in favour of the employers. By any measure she has succeeded.

Union membership has been decimated in productive industry; the steady improvement of wages and conditions has been halted. Anti-union laws more draconian than any since the 19th Century have been passed and implemented. The TUC mandarins have become rare and unwelcome guests in the "corridors of power". The shopfloor organisation of stewards committees has been greatly weakened and the layer of militants created by the struggles of the late 1960s and 1970s have suffered defeat, victimisation and isolation. The enormous confidence of workers in the unions built up in the victorious battles of the early 1970s has been dissipated by the defeats suffered only a decade later.

These defeats have not been suffered without a fight - at least by the rank and file. In recent months alone, print-workers, car workers, miners have shown their undaunted readiness to take action. Yet for five years, despite rank and file willingness to fight, crushing defeats have been suffered. Why? That is the question that every militant must find the correct answer to. Fatalistic waiting for better times, either through an upturn in the economy or a Labour victory at the polls, will lead to defeats that will make those of 1979-83 look like a tea party.

In 1979, on the eve of the recession, these defeats were far from inevitable. Trade union membership stood at an all-time high of 13,289,000. Thatcher had good reason to go cautiously in her first year of office. Yet behind the imposing facade of British trade unionism, all was not well. The reasons for this lie in the damage caused by the five years of Labour government. These years of TUC - Labour collaboration had systematically weakened the fighting strength of the unions. Trade union leaders and government ministers, terrified by the initiative and independence of the shop stewards in the period between "In Place of Strife" (1968-9) and the collapse of Heath's government in 1974, had set out to undermine this strength.

Amongst the gentlemen who carried out this work were prominent "Lefts" - Hugh Scanlon, Jack Jones, Michael Foot and Tony Benn. Indeed, without their collusion, it is unlikely that Wilson and Callaghan would have got their schemes off the drawing board. Militants in the unions and the rank and file of the Labour Party had few illusions in Harold or Jim. But the prominent Lefts, with their organised fan clubs in the CP-dominated Broad Lefts, carried considerable weight.

Aided and abetted by the CP and LP left, Labour pushed through measures that embroiled senior stewards in participation schemes like that at British Leyland. They were immediately compromised by involvement in a job-cutting programme and in a productivity drive that alienated the stewards from the members, robbing the latter of the militants who had hitherto defended the smallest gain. The victorious NUM was weakened by a pernicious productivity deal that set high productivity areas against low, the effects of which are sapping the NUM's strength to this day. The architect and seller of this scheme was none other than Tony Benn.

A Labour government - unlike its Tory predecessors and

even Thatcher - was able to significantly lower real wage levels by keeping money wages well below the inflation rate. The notorious pay limits, policed by the TUC, were resisted by the Fire Brigades Union, by the Leyland craftsmen, and by the Heathrow workers. They were vilified and betrayed by Murray and Co. The involvement of the whole galaxy of labour movement leaders Right and Left in these attacks, the protective role played for the "Lefts" by the strongest force amongst the rank and file militants - the CP - had a long-term weakening and demoralising effect on these militants. This was doubly so since no alternative leadership, no alternative political answer, existed or emerged in the workplaces.

The spontaneous anger of the rank and file finally blew apart Callaghan and Healey's "final insult" - the 5% limit. But Thatcher, whether she knew it or not, faced a much weaker and more confused movement than Heath did. However, capitalism itself handed her an awesome weapon - a slump on a scale not seen since the 1930s. She was and is, before all else, a slump politician. She is determined to use the dole queues to decimate the union ranks and cow those who still have a job. The government's project was summed-up by the then Industry Spokesman, Norman Lamont: "the unions have been allowed to veto the elimination of bad jobs. If we want rising living standards we shall have to remove the trade union veto".

For "bad jobs" read "jobs not yielding sufficient profit to British and international investors". Thatcher, orchestrating the slump, was to clear out between two and three million "bad jobs". She used the state industries to show the way to what she obviously regarded as the "wet" and gutless private industrialists. Hence her first major confrontation was with the steel workers - a section of the class not hitherto noted for its militancy, and with one of the worst leaderships in the TUC. The great strike of 1980 showed the tremendous militancy, initiative and power of the rank and file to any who doubted it. The country stood for a few weeks on the verge of a general strike. Yet Bill Sirs and the ISTC leaders, in cahoots with Murray and the TUC, snatched a terrible defeat out of the very jaws of victory.



Andrew Ward (Report)

In the decisive days of the struggle, the "Lefts" in the South Wales TUC and NUM failed to act. They temporised, delayed, responded to Murray's appeals, and failed above all to mobilise the rank and file. They demonstrated their absolute inability to defy the right wing, and to give a lead to the whole movement while the right were blatantly betraying the steel workers.

The ISTC rank and file improvised flying pickets, organised mass picketing and led the strike at local and regional level. What they - not surprisingly - proved incapable of achieving was creating a national alternative to Sirs and Co.

The negative lessons of this defeat were drummed into the heads of millions of workers. The Tories were determined to win. Our leaders are not. The unions were proved to have not feet, but heads, of clay. A prolonged retreat for the movement as a whole followed. Betrayal followed on betrayal - in British Leyland, on the railways, in the Health Workers' dispute. Isolated militancy went down to defeat.

The full force of the slump hit the working class. By 1982, manufacturing output was 17% below its 1979 levels. Heavy industry and manufacturing suffered collapse. The effect on jobs was catastrophic. In 1966 there were 8.5 million jobs in manufacturing. By 1984 this figure has slumped to 5.5 million. Following the defeat of the steelworkers, the labour force in BSC was axed by 52%! Over 80,000 jobs disappeared. In BL the labour force was halved in the same period. On the railways, in shipbuilding and in engineering, huge job losses followed. By the end of 1983, official figures showed 12.9% of the working population to be unemployed. In numerical terms the figure is just over 3 million. This is a deliberate underestimate. Over 668,000 youth are on dole-level fake "training schemes". Hundreds of thousands of married women fail to register. The true figure must stand at between four and five million. Even in what will probably be the best year of the "recovery", the mis-named "Department of Employment" notes drily: "the underlying trend of employment remains flat" (*Employment Gazette* - 1984).

Such levels of unemployment inevitably weaken the unions. In 1981 - the worst year of the slump - union membership fell by 6.5%. In 1982 it fell by a further 5.5%. The rising trend of unionisation - unbroken since the war - was reversed. By 1982, union membership was 1.8 million down on 1979. In 1982 alone, union membership in manufacturing fell from 3.4 to 3 million - a 12% loss.

The effects were cruelly felt not only in the dole queues but also in the workplace. There, management went on the offensive against hard-won conditions, against the militants who found that their fellow-workers were less and less willing to put their jobs on the line to defend union organisation.

The TUC, the union leaders and the political parties of the working class have allowed over 3 million workers to languish on the dole without hope, without organisation, without elementary solidarity. In the 1920s the tiny forces of the British Communist Party - around 3,000 members - launched the National Unemployed Workers Movement, whose hunger marches, demonstrations and mass organisation saved the unemployed from total demoralisation. Today the unions and parties are larger, wealthier and better organised, and yet there is no movement. Instead, all these bodies worked overtime to prevent such organisation. Two largely token "Peoples Marches", a few social centres for the unemployed where politics and organisation are banned, is the best these gentlemen could manage. The official movement and their loyal opposition - the CP and the Labour lefts, and also the "revolutionary" SWP - all in their differing ways opposed the creation of an Unemployed Workers' Union. In the coming years, unless this do-nothing policy is reversed, the unions will feel the blows of those unemployed as they are recruited by the state and private employers' organisations to scab and to strikebreak.

One "ray of hope" pointed to by some is the fact that during the slump, there has been no collapse of real wages. Overall incomes rose by 74% in 1982-3, a modest advance when the rate of inflation is deducted. But this increase is more than accounted for by increased productivity. *The Bank of England Quarterly* (December 1983) notes the increase in the rate of exploitation with satisfaction. Unit labour costs are "lower than in any year since 1973". Workers are working harder for less money. Even better for the bosses is the fact that this situation is likely to continue, since the trend of wage settlements is down. The Bank of England notes that "pay increases have fallen in each of the last three years". One set of indicators - from the *National Institute Economic Review*, points to a 1% fall in real income in 1984. Of course, all these figures

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# BUILDING THE MINORITY MOVEMENT IN THE 1920'S

OVER THE LAST five years the working class has suffered a number of serious defeats at the hands of the bosses. Thatcher and the Tories have presided over a serious economic slump. They have worked hard to make the working class bear the cost of that slump. They have erected, and now successfully tested, an anti-union legal apparatus aimed at destroying effective rank and file trade unionism. In a period such as this it is all too easy for union militants and would-be socialists either to fall into despair or to pin hopes on the emergence of a left-wing saviour from the ranks of the Labour Party or union bureaucracy. The SWP are guilty of despair. The Broad Lefts are guilty of false hopes in the bureaucracy.

The history of the British working class shows that there is an alternative to these errors. Militants can learn a great deal from the lessons of the early 1920s - a period, like today, of slump and retreat, of spontaneous militancy and of recovery and reorganisation in the working class. Above all, this period reveals the role that revolutionary communists - even though a tiny minority - can play in the class struggle. The British Communist Party, in the early 1920s a revolutionary organisation, played such a role for a short period. Its efforts to organise the rank and file into a militant minority - the Minority Movement - hold many vital lessons for today's militants.

In 1920 the great period of working class militancy, of the growth of the shop stewards movement during and after the First World War gave way to slump, defeat and demoralisation. The boom conditions of the war period had enormously strengthened spontaneous militancy but by the winter of 1920/21 the boom came to an abrupt halt. The coal owners reacted to the crisis of markets by a wage cutting offensive. The lockout of the miners in April 1921 produced a craven capitulation by the union leaders and with this defeat, inflicted upon the most militant section of the working class, a generalised retreat occurred throughout 1921 and 1922. By the end of 1921 more than 6 million workers had suffered wage cuts amounting to an average of 8%. Engineers, dockers and textile workers all suffered major reverses. Working class organisation was correspondingly weakened as two million workers (a quarter of the entire membership) flooded out of the trade unions.

The origins of the National Minority Movement, not founded until 1924, go back to the very depths of this "downturn". To call this period a "downturn" is in fact an understatement. After the betrayal of the miners by the Triple Alliance leaders on Black Friday 1921, the ruling class offensive was relentless. It culminated in the Engineers' lock-out of January 1922. Yet in precisely this period the young British Communist Party and the British Bureau of the Red International of Labour Unions (RILU) set to work to counteract the disorderly retreat of the trade unions and the panic and treachery of the leaders, by attempting to rally the militants in a fighting united front. During the Engineers' lockout the London Committee of RILU organised a "Stop the Retreat" Conference representing 150,000 workers. The conference pledged itself to support the Engineers by fighting to extend the strike. In Sheffield a conference was held with 150 delegates representing 31 Amalgamated Engineering Union lock-out committees, 12 AEU district committees, four Engineering and Shipbuilding Federation district committees and 32 unemployed organisations. The latter under communist leadership played a prominent role in picketing.

Whilst the Engineers were eventually defeated the CP and the RILU greatly increased their support in the Labour Movement. They were seen as the only rallying centre for militants who wished to resist the employers and the treacherous official leadership. The CP and RILU went on from this to launch a nationwide campaign against the massive de-unionisation that had set in after the defeats of 1921 and 1922. A "Back to the Unions Campaign" held conferences in the autumn of 1921 and 1922 in London, Glasgow, Newcastle, Birmingham, Sheffield and Cardiff representing over 165,000 workers via union branch delegates and 850,000 via Trades Council sponsorships.

The Communist Party as a member of the Communist International (CI) and the British Bureau of RILU bene-

fitted enormously from the tactics elaborated at the congresses of these international bodies. RILU owed its existence to initiatives taken immediately after the Second Comintern Congress. Leading figures from the wartime shop stewards movement, J.T. Murphy from Sheffield, Willie Gallagher from Clydeside and veteran leaders like Tom Mann were encouraged to set up a militant British trade union centre. When it was created in the autumn and winter of 1920/21 it drew in figures like A.J. Cook of the South Wales miners. Internationally the first world congress of RILU (June 1921) held immediately after the Third World Congress of the CI, was guided in its practice by the tactics elaborated there. In particular the method of the united front and the utilisation of immediate and transitional demands were invaluable weapons for British revolutionaries. The CI argued: "the struggle for the concrete needs of the proletariat, for demands which, in their application, undermine the power of the bourgeoisie, which organise the proletariat, and which form the transition of proletarian dictatorship, even if certain groups of the masses have not yet grasped the meaning of such proletarian dictatorship." (Report on 3rd Congress of the CI).

Such a programme puts the official leadership of the working class to the test and allows revolutionaries to win the confidence and leadership of the rank and file. It is an active weapon against the reformist betrayers and at the same time a programme that meets the workers immediate needs. But an agreement for joint action must by no means obscure the strategic, and in the end decisive, differences that exist between reformists and revolutionaries.

The CI directive of December 1921 argued: "While supporting the slogan of the greatest possible unity of all workers' organisations in every practical action against the capitalist front, communists may in no circumstances desist from putting forward their views, which are the only consistent expression of the defence of the working class interests as a whole." (J. Degras, Documents of the CI, vol.1, p.313.)

Such a united front programme, then, represents a bridge from today's consciousness to a struggle for power under communist leadership. The organisational form of that bridge in the trade unions is the rank and file movement. The material basis for this organisation rests in two facts. First, if the trade unions, in the epoch of capitalist decay, are going to be able to effectively defend their members interests, then they have to be totally transformed. Against the



interests and the wishes of the bureaucrats, they have to be made into weapons of struggle for the overthrow of capitalist society. Only the rank and file has a material interest in doing this. Secondly, to achieve this the rank and file need to be politically independent of the trade union bureaucracy as a whole. The material interests of the rank and file are not merely different to those of the bureaucracy, they are actually opposed to them. Making this tactical method absolutely clear, the Fourth Congress of the CI advised the CPGB as follows: "The aim must be to create a more numerous trade union opposition movement. Our aim must be that our communist groups should act as a point of crystallisation around which the opposition elements will concentrate. The aim must be to create, to marshal, to integrate the opposition forces, and the CP itself will grow concurrently with the growth of the opposition." (4th Congress of the CI. Abridged Report, p.226-7)

Over the next 18 months, and with considerable practical prodding by the CI agent in Britain, Borodin, the CPGB put this perspective into practice. But a correct perspective alone cannot explain the success of the NMM. Significant conjunctural factors played a key role in its growth.

The economic situation in Britain underwent a change at this time. During the course of 1923 and 1924 there was a marked upturn. Exports rose from a low of £719m. in 1922 to £767m. in 1923 and £801m. in 1924. Whereas unemployment had rocketed to 14% during 1921 it had receded to 11.5% and 9.7% in 1923 and 1924 respectively. Throughout the coal fields in particular, unemployment declined from 4.6% in December 1922 to only 2.1% four months later.

The overall effect of this upturn was to increase the confidence of the rank and file, to make them feel safe from victimisation, and more determined to fight to retrieve some of the ground lost in 1921/22.

Central to the impact of the NMM was the election of the Labour Government in November 1923. At one and the same time, it increased workers' expectations and their willingness to take on the bosses, and it deepened the class collaboration of the trade union bureaucracy which attempted to halt the wave of strikes throughout 1924.

The resulting unofficial nature of the strike wave served to embolden the rank and file against their leadership, particularly in the Miners Federation of Great Britain (MFGB) and the engineers union (AEU). These unions had suffered most from the betrayals of the earlier period. The early work of the RILU also found itself intersecting with a rich tradition of rank and file organisation amongst the miners and the metal workers. Despite the ups and downs of the previous ten years there was a definite continuity, of ideas and personnel, amongst the unofficial opposition such as Murphy, Gallagher and Pollit. In the MFGB there had been the 1911 syndicalist charter, the "Miners Next Step", and then later the South Wales based unofficial Reform Committee. Within the AEU there was the rich, if politically limited, experience of the shop stewards struggles to draw upon (eg. Sheffield and Clydeside Workers Committees).

Also important were the internal structures of the official unions themselves. To some extent the bases laid down in the MFGB and AEU by the NMM and the rather limited gains made in the NUR, can be explained by the differences of organisation. Both the MFGB and the AEU had grown by a process of amalgamation. These unions enshrined sectionalism and localised separatism. The MFGB in particular, had a weak central executive, meeting monthly and possessing only two full timers. A high degree of decentralisation made it difficult to enforce bureaucratic control and victimise communist militants. The metal workers could point to similar favourable circumstances. On the other hand, the NUR was heavily autocratic, like Chapple's EET-PU today. An Executive of 6 full time officers elected for life and with a power to dissolve branches they considered to be "Prejudicial to the interests of the NUR" and a system of District Committees which were purely "propagandist and consultative" both made MM progress a slower and more difficult struggle.

The South Wales coal field was the first and strongest bastion of the NMM. Under Borodin's guidance a Miners' Minority Movement was built there. Through 1923 it spread to Scotland, Durham and Lancashire. At a conference in Sheffield the National Mineworkers Minority Movement (NMMM) was formed.

In its heyday the NMMM had 200 groups. By August 1925 16 lodges were affiliated with a membership of 14,500. Such was its influence that by May 1926 in South Wales alone there were 16 separate NMM pit papers. Such was its political influence that it rallied some two fifths of the MFGB to reject the 1924 agreement with the coal owners even though that agreement represented a partial success.

During the course of 1924 similar movements were formed amongst Engineers and Transport and Building Trades workers. All were coalesced in August 1924 at the First Annual Conference of the National MM in Battersea Town Hall, at which some 270 delegates formally represented 200,000 workers.

Because the NMM was a CPGB initiative, the Party dominated the NMM leaderships at every level. Its four officers were all members as were the leaders of all the sections. This was not the result of a bureaucratic manoeuvre, however. It flowed from the CP's relentless fight for political leadership of the most militant sections of the rank and file.

Within the NMM supreme authority rested with Conference which consisted of delegates from affiliated trade union branches, unemployed committees and trades councils (which were allowed two delegates). Conference elected a National Executive which in turn appointed a Working

# RANK AND FILE

Bureau. In the period of its revolutionary ascendancy, the NMM prioritised the winning of *affiliated bodies*. Individuals were only allowed "associate membership" status and no power to decide policy.

Unlike the trade unions as a whole, the NMM was careful not to allow a privileged "bureaucratic caste" to develop. Full timers, though indispensable, were fully accountable and the General Secretary received a meagre £4 per week with even less for other full timers.

But it was not only the organisational strength and extensive trade union influence of the MM that was impressive. Particularly instructive for revolutionaries seeking to build a new Minority Movement today was the programme and policies that the organisation was built on. The Minority Movement was not a gathering of rank and file militants exclusively concerned with "trade union" issues and held together by a minimalist programme as the British SWP would have us believe. The workers it organised were not "frightened off" from the movement by the avowed communist politics of its leaders and the references to the struggle for power in its policies. On the contrary they were won to the Movement in such large numbers precisely because the "transitional" programme of the MM was self-evidently relevant to their needs.

The programme presented to the first MM conference was sharp and principled. Whilst not the programme of a revolutionary party (eg. it had nothing in it about the dictatorship of the proletariat), it was an *action programme* whose *logic and direction* were revolutionary. The NMM's "Aims and Objects" stood unequivocally for the overthrow of capitalism. Its nine-point charter began with demands for improvement in wages, hours and conditions of work. It advocated the formation of a variety of *organs* of class struggle; the extension of trade unions themselves into unorganised sectors; an accountable and authoritative central leadership which had an obligation to lead workers as a *class* into combat; and, most importantly, the development of factory committees which could help overcome the inter union divisions, place power in the unions and workplaces in the hands of the rank and file and lay a firm basis for the struggle for workers' control. These power points were seen as organs of struggle to enforce political demands on the Labour Government as well. First, that it should base itself on and make itself accountable to workers' industrial organisations. Secondly, to repeal all anti-working class legislation, such as the Emergency Power Act. Such demands flowed from an understanding that the demands of the working class had to be fought for right up to the level of Government. As the position on the Labour Government made clear: "This is not a question outside trade unionism but the central question for trade unionism....on every side it is realised that trade unionism is not enough and that only a workers' government can solve these problems." (*Report on the First NMM Conference, London, 1924, p.5*).

This tactic was aimed at putting the Labour Government to the test of action in front of its supporters inside the working class. Act in our interests, if not... "the workers will not fail to recognise in such a refusal a complete betrayal of the best interests of the working class". (*Emergency Resolution on Labour Government passed at first NMM Conference.*)

The communists did not hide their belief that the Labour Government would betray the working class but they recognised the need to place demands on it as a tactic for drawing reformist workers into joint struggle.

This political action programme for the trade unions based itself on the recognition that *in the course* of resisting the immediate waves of the bosses offensive the working class comes to recognise that it is capitalist private property and the capitalist state that are the major obstacles to the realisation of their demands. At the 6th Congress of the CPGB in May 1924 this was made explicit. "The CP has on all occasions assisted in the development of this movement and will continue to do so. but at the same time warns those active workers who participate in it, that only a revolutionary communist struggle can serve to achieve the object they have in view."

In the period leading up to the foundation of the NMM the CPGB were clear about the role of the trade union bureaucracy. No section of the official leadership was regarded as 100% reliable. This was true as much for the "lefts" as for the open boss-men on the right. Most prominent of the "Left" leaders was A.J. Cook, an ex-CPer and founder of the Miners MM. In 1924 the CPGB and MM support did much to guarantee Cook's election as General Secretary of the MFGB. Cook's election was a reflection of a leftward movement within the whole working class which was refracted within the bureaucracy. At first, the CPGB reacted with revolutionary realism: "It would be suicidal policy however, for the CP and NMM to place much reliance on what we have called the official left wing...It is the duty of our Party and the NMM to criticise its weaknesses relentlessly." (*Communist Review, October 1924*)

Lefts like Scargill, and Cook before him, are capable of much resounding rhetoric. Enjoying the rank and file's respect they must be put to the test of action. Yet their leftism is not unconnected to the fact that they do not hold the real power and responsibility within their unions. Cook was isolated within the MFGB leadership, as were Hicks and Purcell on the General Council of the TUC. As Trotsky explained: "The right wingers have a system: They have behind them tradition, experience, routine, and most important of all, bourgeois society as a whole is thinking for them...The weakness of the left wingers comes from their lack of cohesion and this arises from their ideological shapelessness...and is therefore incapable of organisationally assuming the leadership of the trade union movement." (*L. Trot-*

*sky on Britain, Pathfinder, pp.163-4*)

Tragically for the British working class, these principled considerations less and less guided the practice of the CPGB and the NMM after 1924.

This is largely accounted for by the centrist degeneration of the CI, increasingly coming under the hold of Stalin, in league with Zinoviev. Guiding the line of the 5th Congress of the CI, Zinoviev refused to recognise the partial stability that imperialism had attained, preferring, in Britain, to see revolution around the corner. Since the British working class were not yet ready to rise to Zinovievite schemas, the CI shifted attention to the TUC "lefts" in the hope of accelerating the revolution through gentle flattery. This policy was enforced upon the CPGB by Tomsky, who attended the TUC Congresses in 1924 and 1925.

But by the latter part of 1924 and throughout 1925 the crisis of British imperialism intensified once more. This time the bosses were confronted by a more confident working class which had been significantly radicalised. At a special NMM conference in January 1925 the number of delegates (and workers represented) had tripled in four months! 617 delegates representing some 17% of the TUC membership.

Yet as 1925 progressed the policy of the CI under Stalin was changing. On the basis of the reactionary utopia of "building socialism in one country", the main plank of Stalin's foreign policy was to pacify the international bourgeoisie - to buy time to "build socialism". And the main agent of this pacification in Britain? The same "lefts" that were to have been a catalyst for the revolution nine months earlier!

The CPGB and the NMM responded to this opportunism uneasily at first. Their centrist decline entailed vacillations and waverings within which some principled work could occur. Throughout the spring and summer of 1925 the NMM was actively preparing rank and file organisations - Councils of Action in preparation for a general strike. They particularly put an effort into building joint committees of miners, dockers, railway workers and engineers. Dozens of those emerged between April and June 1925. The metal workers NMM had established 13 District Committees and the Transport MM some ten others. Alongside this the CPGB was busy, if belatedly, building party cells in the plants and mines.



ARTHUR JAMES COOK

However a major turning point occurred after "Red Friday" (July 31st) when the coalowners and the Tories backed down from a confrontation with the miners. The situation threatened to escalate into a General Strike. The Tories were ill prepared for this in 1925. They bought time with a tactical retreat and during the next nine months they refined all the coercive machinery they needed to smash a General Strike.

In this context the September Congress of the TUC took place. Cook and Purcell had now been made honorary members of the Moscow Soviet. Left resolutions had been passed - opposition to the Dawes Plan and to Imperialism - for British troop withdrawal from China. Only Trotsky gave a revolutionary estimate of the Congress when he said of it: "it was left so long as it had to accept no practical obligations". Indeed, the General Council blocked any attempts to make it responsible for organising the General Strike, and a larger right wing majority was enthroned on the General Council.

Trotsky's perspective was lost on the CPGB. Under the CI's tutelage Gallagher said of the "left" Swales: "In the stern, tough voice of Swales spoke the working class dictatorship." (*Calhoun, United Front, p.174.*)

In the months leading up to the General Strike (May 1926) the NMM continued to build action committees. The March 1926 action conference of the NMM gave voice to the aspirations of more workers than ever before. More than it ever was to again. Nearly one million workers through 883 delegates were represented. 52 Trades Councils were present. Alongside this by April 1926 the CPGB had built upwards of 300 Party Factory/Mine cells - a five-fold increase in 10 months.

But precisely when the *organisational* influence of the NMM and the CPGB was increasing, preparing the basis for a challenge for power, so the *political* line of the NMM was being more and more tailored to the limits of the "left" officials. A two-fold process was occurring. On the one side, the CPGB was depriving itself of its *revolutionary* independence "by the actual dissolution of the party into the so-called Minority Movement". (*Trotsky on the Trade Unions, p.36*) On the other side, within the NMM the independent line of the rank and file was being subordinated to that of the *left* reformist bureaucracy. In February 1926 Cook was to say that he agreed with "nine tenths" of the CP's policies. That is, Cook was not to be trusted. But Hardy, the Organising secretary of the NMM thought otherwise. Of the March NMM conference he declared: "We sent out from MM headquarters instructions for our members to work for the establishment of Councils of Action in every area. We warned, however, that the Councils of Action were under no circumstances to take over the work of the trade unions..."

The Councils of Action were to see that all the decisions of the General Council and the union executives were carried out." (*Hardy, Those stormy years, p.185*)

Murphy added to this view a total identification of the left bureaucrats with their followers, as an excuse for not attacking Cook, Purcell et al: "If we vigorously attack the 'left wing leaders' we attack the mass with a similar outlook and drive them away from the party." (*Communist Review, number 3 1925*).

On the very eve of the general strike from his prison cell, Harry Pollitt, the NMM leader wrote: "The Party's most important task is preparation for this; at present more danger arises from the unorganised character of the left wing than from the right wing...we should consider concentrating on the left wing in the localities and extending the MM as an all-in oppositional movement." (*H. Pollitt, by J. Mahon, p.131*).

Through this policy the General Strike was doomed to defeat in advance. The CPGB taught the working class, through the NMM, to place their trust, not in the CPGB, but in the TUC "lefts". They left the working class rudderless when the likes of Purcell and Cook were politically incapable of giving an independent lead when Citrine and Pugh on the General Council aborted the struggle.

The CPGB should politically and organisationally have prepared the rank and file, through the NMM, for the task of throwing aside Purcell and Cook when they became a brake on pushing the struggle to the end.

After the General Strike Stalin's maintenance of the alliance with the TUC via the Anglo Russian Committee (ARC) precluded the possibility of learning this key lesson of the General Strike. The CPGB fell into line with the by now thoroughly centrist Communist International. It remained impervious to Trotsky's criticisms of its policy of "courting the Left". Indeed it went on to make excuses for the "lefts". At the NMM Conference in 1926 after the General Strike the weaknesses of the left officials were explained thus: "The MM declares that the fundamental failure of the left-wing in the General Council was due (1) To their domination by many right-wing ideas; (2) To their lack of trust in the masses."

And a resolution on the General Strike at the same conference added: "The conference declares that no left leadership can be trusted in the future, unless it breaks with the right-wing policy and allies itself with the left-wing trade unionists organised in the Minority Movement." (*Report of 3rd Annual Conference of the NMM, 1926, p.48*)

The central task remained, therefore, the wooing of this "left" in the hope that it would swap its allegiance.

The CPGB paid dearly for their centrist errors. After the General Strike the TUC went on the offensive against the NMM. In April 1927 the TUC refused to recognise any Trades Council affiliated to the NMM. Even then the CP refused to fight the proscription. In 1928 the NMM was given a reward for its servility. It was totally proscribed by the TUC. Thereafter the NMM collapsed and held its last conference in 1929.

A new, a *revolutionary* NMM, remains an imperative need for the British working class, as does the building of a revolutionary Trotskyist Party that will be both built through it and alongside it. In the next years there will be conjunctures which will either facilitate or make difficult the building and consolidating of this movement. That is purely secondary. The main task of revolutionaries is to search out the existing focal points of resistance to the bosses' offensive which could prove to be the point of departure for a revolutionary rank and file movement. Revolutionaries must strive to give leadership to these struggles in the tradition of the revolutionary period of the CPGB and the NMM.

Today those who aspire to being revolutionaries face an analogous situation to that of the early 1920s. The lessons of the NMM and its predecessor movements are clear. The fight-back must start even in the very trough of defeat. The militants can and must be won to a fighting transitional programme. To wait for a spontaneous upturn is a wretched policy that will leave its advocates on the sidelines of any serious struggle. On the other hand to pin the hopes of recovery on existing left bureaucrats or on ones that might be elected in the future courtesy of the Broad Left electoral machine will be equally disastrous. What is needed is a new minority movement which organises independently of the grace and favour of the left bureaucrats but which is not afraid to unite with them in action, to put demands on them, to put them to the test, and, when it proves necessary, as we believe it will, replace them with militant class fighters.

by Dave Stocking and Keith Hassell

## THE TASKS OF TODAY

continued from front page

ignore the reduction in total living standards of a working class family with one or more members on the dole - often with no prospect of a job.

On the shopfloor, increased "productivity" (=exploitation) is primarily the result not of new investment in machinery, but of speed-up, of intensified work rates. Management has successfully reasserted its control at the expense of shop-floor organisation. BL, under Labour appointed hatchet man Edwardes led the way. Participation and voluntary redundancy payments took the team out of resistance, demoralised many militants and opened the way for victimisations - Derek Robinson and Alan Thornett were only the best known.

The number of stewards in the Cowley plant dropped to forty. A BL Director exulted: "We have discovered a cadre of factory managers who have gone back to managing. Mrs Thatcher has given management the environment to make changes" (*Financial Times* 23.7.81).

MacGregor followed suit in BSC and is now attempting the same job at the National Coal Board. Private industry has taken its lead from this. Ford is now attempting the same at Dagenham. The result of this offensive has been productivity increases at an annual average rate of 10% between 1978 and 1983, and its corollary - a greatly weakened shopfloor organisation.

The "changed environment" given to management by Thatcher includes a series of anti-union laws. Prior's 1980 law and Tebbit's 1982 Act were put in place with minimal resistance from the TUC. Last December the bosses showed their teeth when playboy millionaire Eddie Shah was able to humble the once-powerful NGA. The courts seized hundreds of thousands of pounds of union money, and again the union leaders engineered a complete collapse of resistance. The respective role of Left and Right was again shown to the full. Murray and Graham went all out for total surrender. The NGA leaders yielded to TUC pressure and refused to call an all-out print strike when the Fleet Street barons were visibly quivering at the knees. The Lefts on the General Council mobilised no solidarity action. All the Left heroes huffed and puffed about Murray's betrayal but did absolutely nothing to stop it. Again, as in 1980, the possibility of united action was sabotaged by Right and Left bureaucrats alike.

Evans, Scargill, Buckton and Co have passed the buck to the Right at every crucial juncture. To expect that these leaders will stop Murray's dutch auction of trade union rights is to believe in miracles. The overall result of these defeats has been to strengthen the right and weaken the left in union after union. Murray and Graham are offering up the elementary trade union rights of the GCHQ workers with a servility unthinkable even two years ago. The TUC policy of renewed "negotiations" with the Tories indicates the strength of the right.

Even on the terrain of their own industry, and in unions that they dominate, the "left" bureaucrats have shown themselves weak and inept against the bosses and to be concealed enemies of those of their members who mount a fightback. The present situation in the NUM demonstrates this. Explosions of militancy in pits hit hard by closure are damped down or denounced in favour of the uselessly prolonged Overtime Ban.

The defeats of the last five years have provoked a debate in the pages of the Left Press on the underlying causes. The prominent "Marxist" historian E.J. Hobsbawm has written a series of articles on the theme that "the forward march of Labour has been halted", because of the long-term decline of British industry. His answer is a turn away from the "economism" of the trade union struggle, a turn away from the "sectarian" goal of an exclusively Labour government. Instead, the old Stalinist recipe of the 1930s - the Popular Front or broad alliance - is the answer, a sort of Anti-Thatcher League.

*Marxism Today*, the CP's theoretical journal, has given space to sharp criticism of the unions - especially the rank and file leadership. They have been accused not only of "economism" but also of corruption. On the other hand, the Liberal-SDP Alliance, liberal journalists, Police chiefs and Tory councillors have all been given a tribune! The venomous attacks of middle-class feminists upon the labour movement are also gladly retailed. This critique is not worth the glossy paper it is printed on. It is a symptom of the defeats of the working class has suffered, not an explanation of them. As long as the working class giant remains prone, these Lilliputian critics will continue to run about in all directions, chattering and bickering endlessly. When the working class rises for struggle, these mannikins will disappear into their studies and lecture halls. Meanwhile, we can expect continued attempts to commend all sorts of "allies" to the working class, attempts to get workers to tailor and trim their class demands to meet the sensibilities of these well-heeled "friends". Above all, the working class must not frighten them with "economistic" demands, and "sectarian", "divisive" and "old-fashioned" methods of struggle like strikes, occupations and so on.

The old-style CP approach still gets a hearing in the *Morning Star*, but it is a declining force. The Liaison Committee for the Defence of the Trade Unions (LCDTU) has nothing to offer but the old chimera of "left advance in the unions". Kevin Halpin and Co channelled the militancy of the early 1970s into uncritical support for Scanlon and Jones. Their payment for this was the triumph of the right in the AUEW. During five years of Tory attacks they have obstructed each and every attempt to mobilise any fightback which could clash with the union bureau-

cracy. In January 1980 the LCDTU conference was, for the first time, dominated by non-CP sympathisers. In a display of Stalinist thuggery, the CP silenced their opponents, dissolving the meeting rather than allow a vote to be taken which they knew they would lose. The next conference was carefully vetted and consequently much smaller. All it called for was a lobby of the TUC - which proved pathetically small. At its conference in January 1984, the LCDTU met the fate it deserved. Meeting at 10.00am, it wound up its miserable agenda by 1.30pm, and adjourned to the pub! These old-style Broad Leftists and Stalinists have learned nothing and forgotten nothing. They will certainly not be the source of the needed revival at the base of the unions.

Under the patronage of the Bennite Labour left, and some leaders in the white-collar unions, and certain skilled unions like the POEU, a "new Broad Left" has emerged. This adds to the old CP Broad Left electoral strategy within the unions, an obsession with the "solution" of a left Labour government. Some elements of this left - *Militant* and *Socialist Organiser*, know how to wrap this up in "Trotskyist" verbiage. *Militant* present a rosy perspective of inevitable upward advance which is totally unable to even recognise the problems facing militants today. Indeed, it combines bureaucratic place-seeking with a type of religious consolation. Ever-nearer grows the day when "Marxists" will capture the unions and the Labour Party, and when a Labour government pledged to Socialist Policies will inaugurate the millenium. *Socialist Organiser* want to "organise" a broad left current around Benn's (discarded) democratisation programme, which will transform the Labour Party from an instrument for taming the working class into a party "roughly adequate" to the task of creating a "workers' government".

*Militant*, *SO* and their Johnny-come-lately rivals in *Socialist Action* all back the "Broad Left" approach. Yet this approach has already shown its bankruptcy in the CPSA and in the POEU. The very concept of a "Broad Left" is riddled with ambiguities. In fact, the Broad Left chain is only as strong as its weakest link. "Broad Left" majorities have repeatedly crumbled when faced with a head-on fight. *Militant*, *Socialist Organiser* and *Socialist Action* denounce the individual traitors after the event, but they have done nothing to warn or prepare the rank and file for this eventuality. Worse, they do little or nothing to organise the rank and file. The process of transforming the labour movement must start at the base - otherwise the left electoral caucuses will be turned over by the right as easily as Losinska and Graham have done in the CPSA.



One group proudly distances itself from this soft-peddling of criticism of the Lefts, or from reliance upon them. The Socialist Workers Party (SWP) have also tried to elaborate an explanation of the causes of the "downturn". The leaders of the SWP share their starting point with the industrial sociologist (and ex-SWP member) Richard Hyman. They argue that the defeats of the 1970s and 1980s must be put down to the "bureaucratisation" of the shop stewards. Starting from the fact that the number of full-time convenors quadrupled during the 1970s, the SWP extends this analysis to the stewards. The fact that virtually no stewards have 100% facility time is neither here nor there to the SWP. It ignores political and industrial events altogether, concentrating on stigmatising the corrupting influence of the "perks" of office. For Hyman, who is merely returning, chastened, to the teachings of Michels on the inevitability of bureaucratisation (the so-called "Iron Law of Oligarchy"), this is unavoidable. Such a doctrine is of little use to a "revolutionary" organisation. The SWP therefore explains this bureaucratisation process by a strange "downturn" which has afflicted workers since 1976 at least. Once the SWP's leader, Tony Cliff, argued that when the long boom of the 1950s and 1960s ended, then "the death knell of reformism will sound". In the 1970s, the boom gave way to a period of deep slump and shallow recoveries, but lo and behold! - reformism and the trade union bureaucracy did not wither and die.

Now we have an alternative "theory". During the "downturn", no sustained rank and file opposition to the bureaucracy can be built. No serious changes can be made in the fighting organisations of the working class. We must wait for "the upturn". More complete political bankruptcy could not be confessed to. It amounts to saying to militants "You got yourselves into this mess - you can get yourselves out of it!". Meanwhile - any socialists amongst you should join the SWP!

By artfully combining the period of capitalist crisis with the crisis of leadership in the working class, the SWP

produce an objective process of downturn about which nothing can be done, unless workers struggles spontaneously "turn up". In fact, revolutionary communists should be able to outline a course of action to the best militants which can stop the retreats and lay the basis for successful resistance. This can be done on the basis of an understanding of the crisis, of a critique of reformism (political and trade union), and of a knowledge of militant tactics.

The present period is not one for hiding under your bed. The present period is the nearest thing to a boom we are likely to experience in the 1980s. Gross Domestic Product grew by 3% last year. However, this "recovery" is extremely shallow. Unemployment shows no sign of falling significantly. The rate of profitability stood at 6% last year, a rise indeed, but still lower than the rate in 1978. The "boom" is weak and very partial.

Certainly, it may encourage or facilitate wage struggles in certain profitable sectors, where employers are eager to benefit from the boom. Recent struggles at Vauxhall and certain engineering firms herald this. The rumblings of revolt can be heard in BL. A renewed combativity in these sectors can be expected. However, no dramatic favourable shift in bargaining conditions can be expected in the present boomlet. Bitter defensive struggles, however, are certainly on the order of the day.

Linking up these various struggles is the task of the coming period. Government and judicial attacks on the unions repeatedly pose the possibility of a political generalisation of the struggle. Today the crisis in the mines and the shipyards shows the anger and hatred felt by millions. Each such explosion offers a starting point for resistance. But if the workers of British Telecom, the NHS and the Civil Service are left to fight alone, then there will be no "upturn".

What is needed is a conscious, planned and organised intervention to achieve this. In the unions a fight must be launched to stop the betrayals, to stop the retreat. This has to start from the workplace upwards. Shopfloor organisation must be rebuilt - new stewards elected, committees rebuilt; regular bulletins and section meetings must weld the rank and file to the militants, and start to educate the mass of the membership. The horizons of the new rank and file organisation must, however, extend beyond the workplace.

They must extend simultaneously into the whole locality or region, and into the unions nationally. A militant stewards committee must use every opportunity, every struggle, to build links with other workers, no matter what industry or trade. Initiatives should be made - officially where that is possible, unofficially where that is necessary - to rally the fighting battalions of the labour movement in every town and city. Conferences of workplace union delegates should be convened to both discuss the problems the labour movement faces, and to mobilise solidarity for those in struggle. In every union, a reform caucus should be formed around a programme of action for democratising the unions, for reducing the bureaucracy to the status of regularly elected executors of the democratically expressed wishes of the rank and file - paid the average wage of the membership for doing it. Every workplace must have a joint shop-stewards committee that fights against sectional, racial, sex divisions in the workforce, and for militant class goals.

The unemployed must be organised to fight the scourge of mass unemployment - to stand shoulder to shoulder with the employed against the bosses and the government. Working class youth, black workers, women-discriminated against and made the butt of the recession - must be brought into organised resistance to the Tories.

The rotten betrayals of the TUC leaders must be fought. Murray and Co must be called to account - they must be sent packing. Above all, a new political goal and new methods of reaching it must conquer the working class. Thatcher has popularised the cut-throat ideals of capitalism with the middle class, and even sections of skilled workers. Labour under Kinnoch offers no full-scale alternative re-organisation of society to banish slumps, unemployment, cuts in elementary health and welfare provision. The goal of socialism has been besmirched and discredited by the Labourite and Stalinist parties. One identifies socialism with nationalised industries sinking under the weight of interest charges to the banks and repayments to the former owners. Labour's welfare schemes even at their peak never did more than ameliorate the worst effects of capitalism. Now the capitalists want those concessions back. Wedded as it is to keeping within the framework of parliament and the judiciary, Labour cannot even promise an end to unemployment. Stalinism at its "hardest" offers bureaucratic tyranny as "socialism".

The task of the present is to place before the working class a real socialist programme which will truly expropriate the exploiters, creating the basis for a planned economy in a society based on democratic workers' councils. Such a programme has to start here and now by fighting for the measures which really meet the needs of the millions of unemployed, of the old, the young, the sick, at the expense of the parasites who exploit our labour. Millions of working people who are far from being socialists now can be won to fight for these measures. In this fight they will learn the full nature of the enemy - capitalism - and the extent of their own strength and ability to replace this evil system.

Such are the tasks of rank and file militants today and in the years ahead. Those militants who first and most clearly realise this, must be won not only to a rank and file movement in the unions, but also to a new revolutionary party, part of a new international movement for working class power.

# SWP - HARD OR HELPLESS?

TO MANY MILITANTS the SWP appears to be a hard alternative to the Broad Lefts. Unlike the Broad Lefts the SWP brook no cuddling-up to left reformist officials and leaders in either the Labour Party or the unions. In attacking the Broad Lefts Duncan Hallas pointed to the general strike defeat in 1926 as an example of the unreliability of the lefts. He warned: "It is very tempting, when shop floor activity is hard, as it is today, to see the election of left officials as a short cut. We must remember where it is a short cut to." (*Socialist Review*, February 1984).

The SWP are now selling themselves on the basis of this "hard" stance. However, militants need to be warned. It is a superficial hardness based on completely muddled politics. For a start, the SWP's approach to trade union struggle is marred by an inability to break with syndicalism.

When we talk about the SWP's syndicalism we mean their inability, in the course of actual struggles, to develop a strategy to oust the present reformist labour bureaucracy and replace it with a revolutionary leadership. They counterpose to this the combined strategy of developing better controls over the existing leaders and the building of strong rank and file organisation to implement these controls. Of course, we support both control over the bureaucrats and rank and file organisation. Where we differ from the SWP is that we do not see these as ends in themselves but as means to our goal - the transformation of the existing organisations into organs capable of fighting for working class power under a communist leadership. The other side of the SWP's syndicalism is a view of politics as something reserved for the party, something you get, like a membership card, on joining the SWP, or reading *Socialist Worker*. Politics, in the sense of a political programme of action to use in the class struggle and mobilise workers around, is kept out of trade union struggle by the SWP.

## SWP SYNDICALISM IN SHARP RELIEF

Both of these aspects of the SWP's syndicalist politics are in evidence in their analysis of the balance of class forces after the NGA's defeat.

The SWP correctly analysed the NGA dispute as one in which the bureaucracy called the shots. At each stage of the dispute it was the machinations of Wade, Dubbins and the TUC that were decisive. The cardinal question for revolutionaries was not whether but *how* to break this stranglehold. For the SWP this is answered by pushing for the dispute to be carried on behind the backs of the officials. Thus they will argue that victory: "would be possible if printers were prepared to act in the same way as hospital workers were eighteen months ago: go out and have the argument with other rank and file workers". (*Socialist Review* January 1984).

What short memories the SWP leaders have. The hospital workers, for all their self-activity were defeated. The reason for their defeat was because that self-activity did not result in the creation of a body of militants capable of challenging and defeating the existing bureaucrats. That self-activity left Bickerstaffe at the head of NUPE with his "left" credentials tarnished but still intact. In short, independent rank and file activity is a necessary but not sufficient pre-condition for victory.

In the NGA dispute the left bureaucrats made a great show of their conflict with Murray and Co. However fake their blusterings, they did raise the opportunity of raising demands on them. To have done this would have meant recognising that the dispute posed the central question of defying and smashing the anti-union laws. These laws are a general attack on the working class. The NGA dispute was all about making sure that they could be used effectively against workers. The need to mobilise workers in action alongside the NGA was starkly posed. In the circumstances - given the weakness of the shop floor organisation today thanks to a series of defeats - spontaneous rank and file generalisation was unlikely. However militants would have organised and mobilised for action by demanding that the leaders who were nominally supporting the NGA - the so called "lefts" - put their money where their mouths were. At the same time, of course, there was a need for immediate solidarity action, for rank and file organisation and so forth. But to achieve the sort of action necessary to win a general strike against the laws - the bureaucracy, particularly the lefts, had to be confronted with the demand to act. The SWP, for all their fuming at the bureaucrats, did not raise this demand or any demands addressed to the leaders and did not organise militants to raise them. Instead, by their own account they organised their buses and coaches to Warrington to demonstrate the efficiency and enthusiasm of their party. Commendable as these efforts were, they were never adequate to the actual tasks posed.

Workers Power believes that in current struggles and in the battle to overthrow the bosses, workers need national centralised trade unions - without the existing leaders but with new revolutionary ones. Self-activity and spontaneity without leadership will prove inadequate. The self-activity of the British workers in 1972-4 was unable to secure a final victory. The leadership for this was lacking. The SWP

do not understand this. The method of the united front and of demands placed on bureaucrats like Scargill, Evans, Bickerstaffe etc., is beyond them. It might "sow illusions" and undermine "self-activity". The result of this, however, is that it leaves these "left" bureaucrats free to cultivate their enormous influence over the rank and file. The SWP seem ignorant of the fact that the defeats and retreats of the last period have, for important sections of the remaining militants, consolidated the politics of the trade union bureaucracy in their heads. In the absence of a strong revolutionary party, the lessons learned after a defeat have been the ones the likes of Murray have wanted them to learn - or at least those of the "lefts". This means that it is more important than ever to address demands to these leaders in struggles to break the political bond that unites militants with their bureaucratic leaders. It is the politics of the kindergarten to act as though these defeats have destroyed the illusions of the militants in these grandees of the labour movement.

In essence this approach reflects the SWP's fear of the bureaucracy, a fear stemming from their lack of a distinct strategy from, and therefore capable of overthrowing, the bureaucracy. This fear is what lies behind their own fear of taking official positions in the unions: "In the present period full-time positions only serve to trap revolutionaries who get caught up in the trade union bureaucracy."

This statement by two SWP leaders is a confession that their politics are incapable of preventing them getting trapped.

The political primitiveness of the SWP's analyses is well illustrated in Chris Harman's reported speech to the January SWP National Committee (*Socialist Review*, Feb. 1984). Here their view of the "downturn" in working class militancy is elaborated and the consequences for revolutionaries stated. For the SWP the "downturn" began with the election of the 1974 Labour Government and became progressively worse after 1979. Its chief feature is the lack of militant shop floor organisation capable of generalising any struggle from one workplace to another. This was a feature of the "upturn". In bald terms it's the difference between the Pentonville dockers struggle (1972) and the NGA dispute (1983). In the "upturn" the SWP glorify the spontaneity of these eruptions. They tail them and downgrade any specific contribution by revolutionaries to the overall strategy, aims and methods of the struggle, and in no way pose the need for alternative leadership. In the "downturn" the lack of spontaneous generalisation leads to a warped and one-sided view of what a political intervention means.

All this is well illustrated in Harman's view of the difference between the "spontaneous" and "bureaucratic" mass strike. Thus: "The mass strike of the upturn is organised and carried through from below upwards."

## SELF ACTIVITY AND POLITICS

However the British general strike of 1926 was a bureaucratic mass strike because it took place "during a period of downturn". Throughout his article Harman counterposes Russia 1905, France 1968 and Britain 1972 to Britain 1926. In the former cases the bureaucracy is portrayed as weak, politics are relegated to a secondary role and self-activity is presented, totally one-sidedly, as the key to all problems, and startling comments such as: "Politics is much more central in the situation of 1984 than it was in the situation of 1972. Politics was much more central in 1926 than it was in 1905." just go to prove that we are not caricaturing the SWP's position. They do not understand the role of the bureaucracy and the role of politics in different phases of the class struggle. The politics of the Bolsheviks in 1905 were very important, just as the politics of the Communist Party in Britain were in 1926. The role of the bureaucracy in 1926 was as important as it was in France in 1968. In both types of strike postulated by Harman the role of leadership is decisive. Without a communist alternative no mass strike in history - despite the tremendous self-activity of the masses - has successfully achieved the revolutionary overthrow of the bosses. France 1968 was a case in point. The Stalinist leaders defused the biggest strike there had ever been in Europe.

This counterposition of two types of strike leads the SWP to conclude that in the present period their role is to try and use any bureaucratic strikes that do come about to strengthen the rank and file. Fair enough, but once again no mention is made about overthrowing the bureaucratic leaders. Instead the SWP believes that generalisation will come about spontaneously so long as confidence can be rebuilt.

The SWP's fear of their own opportunism should they enter the arena of national leadership which they resign to the bureaucracy leads them into a sectarian avoidance of the problem. Their belief in the existence of the "downturn", as a fact of life that is not being decisively altered by movements in the economy or developments in the class struggle, means they are not confident about the ability of the rank and file to organise. There is no room for the united front with rank and file reformists, let alone the bur-

eaucrats. Harman rationalises this by arguing that the Minority Movement of the 1920s was a doomed venture: "What is clear is that the idea that you could create an alternative leadership in the down-turn by revolutionaries coming together with reformists in some kind of rank and file organisation didn't work."

The present period is similar. Without workers "who come together in some kind of spontaneous organisation" the SWP believe it to be impossible to build any rank and file movements. This is tailing of the worst sort. It is an abdication of leadership. It means in practice that the SWP intervene in disputes with the objectives of simply servicing the dispute (collections etc) and recruiting ones and twos. They do not intervene with a perspective of developing out of those disputes an alternative leadership to the bureaucracy. This is tantamount to ceasing hostilities against the traitors because of a fatalistic belief that the downturn by definition prevents a challenge being mounted.

The logic of this is a sectarian stress on politics. Not crucial in 1972, politics - nay "very very hard politics" (Harman) - are now central. This theme has run through the SWP's propaganda and practice for several years now. The problem is that it is never too clear what these politics consist of. Harman gives politics an exclusively organisational content. Politics is the SWP: "Hard political organisation becomes extremely important."

He elaborates no further. Harman won't come clean. In fact, what he does mean is evident from the SWP's practice. Given Harman rules out a political united front programme of action with reformist militants to replace the official leaders, then it leads to substituting the SWP for the rank and file. This was a key element in their mobilisation for the mass picket at Warrington. On the other hand, "hard politics" is what goes on at the branch meeting. It is the weekly lecture on the Paris Commune, the Lessons of Chile, etc. It is not something that is a weapon for intervening in the disputes that they work around. For the veteran SWP leader Tony Cliff politics are collections at work for disputes to locate "the ones and twos who are prepared to fight and to identify with our politics." Politics are, to use his classic phrase "little things."

Whatever version they might favour at any one time, politics is not for the SWP, political intervention in the class struggle. For them the major political problems facing the working class - the problem of the Labour Party, the problem of government, the need for a political answer to the bosses' offensive - are irritating obstacles to "pure self-activity". This attitude to politics leaves militants disarmed. It left them disarmed in France in 1968 in the face of Stalinist politics. It left them disarmed in Britain in 1972 faced with social democratic politics. It will leave them disarmed today faced by the range of political problems raised by the bosses attacks on rights, jobs, services and living standards.



Scargill & McGahey - bureaucrats unchallenged by SWP

The SWP's "hardness" is, therefore, no alternative to the soft Broad Lefts. It is merely the other side of the left-reformist coin. Its refusal to organise the militant minority on a political programme stems from its inability to lead in the class struggle. Faced with a series of defeats it has accommodated, in its own way, to the pessimism that exists among militants. It offers no antidote to that pessimism. Its refusal to address demands on the bureaucracy and mobilise the rank and file around these demands leaves it and workers subordinated to the existing leaders. All it can offer is its organisational services. All it can hope for is an end to the "downturn", not a strategy for stopping it. Indeed it seems that workers cannot stop the retreat. It all depends on the bosses making a slip-up: "Unfortunately no-one knows whether they will slip up tomorrow or in a year's time or in ten year's time, but we must prepare now for that conflict."

Without a strategy and without tactics based on revolutionary communism all the SWP can offer its members and the working class is a political rationalisation of demoralisation, passive propagandism and frenzied servicing of spontaneous eruptions in the class struggle.

by Mark Hoskisson

# THE FAILURE OF THE NEW BROAD LEFTS

THE "NEW" BROAD Lefts organised in the Broad Left Organising Committee (BLOC) are the true-born heirs of the "old" Stalinist-led Broad Lefts of yesteryear. Their "newness" lies in the fact that they are dominated by an axis of Bennite and Militant Labour Party activists. With the chronic decline of the CP's industrial base through the late 1970s, the old Broad Lefts withered or sustained themselves, like those in the NUM and TASS, as support groups for established left leaders. In unions like the AUEW the CP-led Broad Left, which had helped Scanlon to high office, was, for the most part, decimated by the victories of the right following Scanlon's retirement.

The impetus for the formation of the "new" Broad Lefts or the resuscitation of old ones, came from Labour Lefts during and after the Benn for Deputy Campaign. Prior to this the Bennites and Militant had always emphasised the struggle to democratise the Labour Party and win it to their respective brands of socialism, as central. The role of the trade union block vote brought home to these people the importance of the unions. Not surprisingly the Broad Lefts Mark 2 mushroomed in 1981 - the year of the Benn campaign - and BLOC itself came into being though on a loose and informal basis. In 1981 in USDAW, the CPSA, the NUR and other unions Broad Lefts were formed. Now around 20 are said to exist. Many of these groups are shadow outfits - the TGWU group for example. Others, like that in the POEU, claim 400 members and produce a regular journal.

## BENNITE GINGER GROUPS

For their first period of existence the Broad Lefts, and BLOC in particular, remained centrally concerned with the Labour Party and the Block vote. In an interview with *Militant* (10.2.84) the BLOC secretary George Williamson admits that this was the case. Indeed as late as last year BLOC could see no perspective beyond acting as a ginger group for the Bennite left in the Labour Party. At a conference it called last year 109 delegates met without so much as discussing the water workers' strike which was raging at the time. Even on the question of the block vote the leaders of the Broad Lefts showed themselves to be conservative about any fundamental drive to democratise it. Phil Holt of the POEU warned that it was not their intention to "question the principles of the system" of the block vote. The Broad Left's NUR journal *Left Lines* echoed this describing the blatantly undemocratic nature of these "principles" as of "secondary interest", when Weighell mis-cast the NUR's Block vote. The Broad Left thus underwrote the process of bureaucratic horse-trading that leads to the casting of block votes for particular candidates. It merely objected that it was slippery Sid who was doing the casting and not honest Jimmy Knapp! The conference went on to reject a resolution from an AUEW branch, which Workers Power supporters proposed, calling for the breaking up of the union block vote and in favour of proportional representation according to votes cast at union conferences. The resolution called for total rank and file control over the block vote. The fact that this was rejected - and described as "hairy" by Holt - is indicative of the BLOC's real nature. In this case they were not interested in democratising the block vote, but in capturing it. Their strategy in the trade unions reflects this reformist and bureaucratic approach. This strategy offers no hope whatsoever of forwarding the organisation of the rank and file into an anti-capitalist, anti-bureaucratic fighting force.

Like the old Stalinist-dominated Broad Lefts before them, today's "new" models are geared, fundamentally, to a purely electoral strategy. Just as the Labour Party Democracy movement cherished illusions that it could capture the Labour Party with a few basic constitutional changes, so today's Broad Lefts believe they can capture the various union executives with good caucusing. All that is needed is one big electoral push. The story is the same in each union. The election of Broad Lefts, or fellow travellers, is sufficient evidence that the left are winning. Thus, *Left Lines* greeted Knapp's victory as: "evidence of the process that is taking place within the Labour Party, the decline of the old right-wing and the increasing strength of the left." (*Left Lines*, No.5)

This really is the most purblind electoralism imaginable. It pays no attention to the fact that rank and file organisation in the NUR is in the most rudimentary and fragile state. It ignores the bad effects of the defeats encountered

in the summer of 1982 and the scars left by the bitter divisions that erupted in the union during the ASLEF dispute of the same year. None of this weighs as significantly as Knapp's election for the Broad Left. Yet, since Knapp's election and with a supposedly left executive the NUR has not been able to rally its members to a struggle against the decimation of their own industry.

In the CPSA the Broad Left had an identical strategy. Their view was that all that was needed to transform the union was to replace the Losinka clique with Roddy, Macreadie and co. Their journal *Broadside* argued that the only way the rank and file's needs could be met was: "by throwing the Moderates off the NEC, electing a Broad Left majority and a Broad Left President." (April 1982) In the CPSA and the POEU this blinkered concentration on elections has had disastrous consequences.

In these unions the Broad Left secured majorities on the executives. In each case the promised land of militant struggle and rich rewards has not been reached. In the CPSA the Broad Left pinned everything on the national pay claim for 1983. A campaign around this was the centerpiece of its strategy. So much so that the actual struggles of rank and file members of the CPSA that erupted were regarded as a diversion. When in late 1982, Birmingham and Oxford DHSS workers struck over staffing levels the BL leadership prevented their struggle from spreading. Instead of building on the initiative of the rank and file the leaders declared that the membership as a whole were not ready for a fight, and if and when they became so, it would be around the pay claim. To this end the executive first recommended that Oxford return to work with no concessions won from management. Then the NEC recommended that both offices return to work, in November, because the management had promised a "high-powered review" of staffing levels for the following March! The right-winger Alastair Graham was able to commend the "courageous" behaviour of himself and the Broad Lefters for: "deciding against their natural emotional response to the dispute and recommending that members should return to work." (*Red Tape*, December 1982)

The result of this strategy was demoralisation in the ranks as the members were left isolated and defeated. The opportunity for an all out struggle was lost. The great Pay Claim campaign belly flopped - arbitration figures were accepted with no opposition. And, not surprisingly, the right-wing swept back into power in the following round of elections.

In the POEU the Broad Left dominated executive led the struggle against privatisation in the same fundamentally bureaucratic fashion. They used as an excuse the argument that the members were not prepared to take all-out strike action. This was a typical left-faker's excuse. How could they know since they did not *once* seriously attempt to launch a vigorous campaign amongst the rank and file for such action. Instead they pursued a campaign of selective action. Even in the face of management threats of a lock-out, they steadfastly refused to spread the action. The crunch came when the bosses used the anti-union laws to stop the blacking of Mercury, the private telecommunications firm. Four Broad Lefters voted with the right to stay within the law and stop the blacking. As a result the selective strikes are over, the members are demoralised by the defeat and the right will use this demoralisation to reassert their control over the union.

## UNITY WITH THE RIGHT

The problem with the Broad Left's strategy is that, in order to achieve electoral success they need to maintain unity at the cost of rank and file independence. Left leaders are crucial to the Broad Left electoral machines. Either as allies or as members they are deemed to be above suspicion. What this ignores is that these left leaders - like Knapp, Scargill and co. - are tied to the right by a bureaucratic bond. They will never, fundamentally, break with the trade union bureaucratic caste - its right wing and all - because they have, by virtue of their own position a real interest in maintaining that caste. The Militant supporters and the Bennites who lead the Broad Lefts especially reject this view. Pete Rowlands, a spokesman for the Broad Lefts, argued: "Broad Lefts explicitly organise at both levels (rank and file and bureaucracy - WP) recognising that the real divide is between left and right rather than between the official leadership and the rank and file." (Quoted in

*Socialist Review* March 1983)

This striving for harmony between the ranks and the leaders was described as a crucial function of the Broad Lefts in the CPSA's *Broadside*: "Meetings of Broad Left supporters also enable union officials at all levels to get along together with rank and file members." (February 1983)

What this boils down to is a reliance on left bureaucrats, a refusal to warn that they will run scared from decisive battles with the bosses and the right wing, and in consequence, a covering up of their crimes. The disastrous strategy in the POEU dispute and the role of the Broad Left is not mentioned. The defeat is blamed on the right-wing. *Left Lines*, with Militant's hand clearly in evidence, wrote of that defeat and the executive's decision: "These have been the last in a whole series of set-backs blunders and compromises which the right wing have perpetrated on workers willing to fight." (No.7. Our emphasis.)

This is astonishing. It glosses over the fact that there was a 14-9 Broad Left majority on the POEU executive. For their part the POEU Broad Left have refused to alter their fundamental strategy. They have simply blamed the individuals who voted with the right.

To cover up for the lefts is to defend them. In defending the lefts, Broad Lefts are defending unity with the right. This is their decisive weakness. So broad is their leftness that it becomes reduced to left verbiage. Unity in the Broad Lefts and therefore unity with the right, replaces unity in action.

## BUREAUCRATIC CONFERENCES

The Broad Left's strategy of electoralism and broad alliances leads directly to a refusal to build the Broad Lefts as fighting rank and file organisations. Nowhere and in no union do the Broad Lefts co-ordinate militants around an action programme of building stronger anti-bureaucratic rank and file movements. They bill themselves as loose democratic groupings "who support progressive and socialist policies within the unions". Anyone can come along and enrol since no commitment to a specific programme of action is involved. Local groups are built merely to service the election machine. Nationally the conferences follow a familiar pattern. They do not differ in essentials from the old-style Broad Left and Liaison Committee for the Defence of Trade Unions conferences. In the NUR a small self-selected conference set up the BL in 1981 and adopted a programme. At the second, broader conference, no resolutions were allowed, and when Workers Power sought to discuss the programme of the movement the conference was told that "we have got the programme, now we have to go out and fight for it."

The BLOC conference itself is being run along similar undemocratic lines. A list of big name speakers look set to dominate proceedings. The purpose of the conference is to debate "the issues that are affecting working people today." In the absence of resolutions focusing on the burning tasks of the day, committing delegates to a course of action, enabling militants to thrash out an answer to the issues affecting them, such a debate will be vacuous. Worse, it will lend itself to bureaucratic manipulation and demagoguery. Yet this suits the Militant and Bennite axis perfectly. A conference to address the assembled with their politics is what they want. They do not want a conference that could begin to organise militants into a fighting movement. It would upset their electoral plans and their relationship with the speakers - like Benn and Blunkett - who are addressing the conference.

The various programmes that do exist in the Broad Lefts are propagandistic and reformist. In no sense do they serve as rallying calls for united action. They generally ignore the question of workers' control, the political independence of the rank and file, the Tory attacks on trade union rights etc. They centre instead on calls for the 35 hour week and wage improvements, unrelated to any proposals on how to begin a fight for them. Nevertheless the answer to their achievement is given in nearly all of the various programmes. The NUR one is typical when it states: "Labour to power on a socialist programme." What this programme is, what organs of power are needed, whether the workers will need to combat the bosses' resistance and so on, is all ignored. It is merely an extension of the Broad Left strategy of capturing the unions - this time applied to the capitalist state and economy! All that is needed is a Broad Left style Labour Party to come to power and solve all working class problems. In this lifeless schema Militant's passive propagandist politics are clearly in evidence. A process of "Left advance" moving inexorably towards power is taking place. The Broad Lefts' role is to help it along. This invests the Broad Lefts with a reformist political content. If realised it would lead to a catastrophe. We have seen what happened when it occurred in the POEU and CPSA. Not only was the left advance halted, it was thrown into reverse. If this were to occur at a governmental level the same thing would happen - but with far worse results than the loss of a majority on an executive.

The entire new Broad Left strategy is bankrupt. In not recognising the clash of interests between the rank and file and the bureaucracy it leaves the rank and file at the mercy of the reformist leaders - left and right. It dupes them with the belief that a left leadership - not their own strength and organisation - is the key to victory. In practice, it leads them to defeat. In this respect the new Broad Lefts are very like the old Broad Lefts. They pursue a strategy that sacrifices long term rank and file strength for short term electoral glory. This is a road to disaster for militants.

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