

Workers Power

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TORIES COOK UP NEW ATTACKS

THE TORIES ARE preparing the scenes for the great charade that they intend "Election '87" to be. They have unveiled a mix of uncharacteristic (and insincere) concern for the health service - an extra million or two for AIDS research and breast cancer screening - with plans for more union bashing laws and promises of more sell-offs of state assets.

The Tories need to appeal to a broader stratum than the few million yuppies of the Thames Valley who think they are entrepreneurs on the basis of juggling a few BT shares and owning a personal computer. Recent scandals in the City have not done much good for capitalism's image. Once the flash and smoke of the 'Big Bang' cleared it was revealed as an unsavoury thieves kitchen where Thatcher's share holders are more likely to lose their shirts than make their fortunes.

The 'greed and selfishness brigade' do not form a majority of the electorate - they never did and they never will. But in circumstances where the Alliance has robbed Labour of at least five to ten per cent of its traditional vote and where the British electoral system grotesquely under-represents the Alliance's 20-25%, Thatcher stands a real chance of pulling off the treble.

WORSE

Left phrase-mongers might say 'what does it matter?' So too might the unemployed; and the oppressed victims of racism in the inner cities say that things can't get worse. The truth is that they can. No thoughtful worker can or should remain indifferent to the prospect of another lease of life for Thatcher.

Minister for Unemployment, Kenneth Clarke, has already outlined the basis for a fourth wave of anti-union laws. These will hit at the closed shop by removing legal immunity from prosecution for any strikes in favour or in defence of a closed shop. It will outlaw strikes in essential services. Doubtless health workers, fire-fighters and communications workers will head the list. A bitter battle for the right to strike could face millions of workers.

In addition the proposals envisage a new scabs' charter to codify the actions of the rabid Tory judges in the miners' strike and since it. They intend to remove a union's right to discipline or expel a member who crosses a picket line. They will even subsidise scab herding from taxes by setting up

a special government commissioner to help and encourage scab-union members to take their unions to court.

Last but not least the proposals will extend the principles of bosses' 'democracy' even further into the unions. They are not satisfied with the balloting system that can be held at the workplace where workers can experience directly their collective strength and where they can listen to the arguments put by their own union representatives. Instead they want to impose postal ballots so as to give the Murdochs and the Alistair Burnetts a monopoly of the argument and to make sure that each worker feels isolated and weak when she or he makes their decision. Solidarity action between unions, either in the form of support on the picket line or loans and financial donations, are also to be banned.

The unions are to be further hog-tied so that the Tories can press ahead with bringing about a fundamental and irreversible shift in favour of millionaires and their hangers on. Another way they intend to do this is to attack 'progressive' taxation. A 'progressive' tax is one that increases in percentage terms the larger your income is. The main such tax is income tax itself. The Tories plan to slash it, perhaps by half. But they intend to double VAT. That is they will make everyone - the unemployed, pensioners, the low-paid and the lawyers, stock-brokers and industrialists pay the same rate of tax on their purchases. This is regressive taxation which shifts the burden even more dramatically onto the backs of ordinary people.

PRIVATISATION

Another wave of privatisations and carve-ups is inevitable if Thatcher wins again. British Coal is an obvious target with the profitable super-pit areas being handed over to private ownership and a further wave of closures mopping up the rest. The Post Office is also widely tipped for the sell off.

Thatcher's big gamble is snatching another term of office with a minority of the electorate, but one that gives her more seats than the combined forces of Labour and the Alliance. She is hoping that the impending new world recession will continue to be held at bay just long enough to pull it off. Once back in power we can expect a renewed offensive as she sets out to "rid Britain of Socialism"



- her declared life's ambition.

Can she be stopped? The answer is yes, but not by the methods that the union and Labour leaders are resorting to. For them winning the election is the only way to stop her. To win the election they think they must woo the yuppies, who voted Tory or Alliance in 1983, by stealing their policies and adding a 'caring, sharing' approach. They will top this up with a bit of image-making and media hype to make the medicine go down. But Kinnock's approach is likely to lose potential working class Labour voters whilst still failing to win the yuppies. Why vote for second hand Alliance policies when you could have them first hand, will say the young 'middle class' voters.

RALLY THE CLASS

In order to rally the working class, and turn out the millions of unemployed and their friends, families and relatives from the vast areas of deprivation and industrial destruction, Labour needs a credible and massive programme of re-employment and reconstruction. This Labour dares not promise because it fears the question - 'who is to pay for it?' It fears the question because it would not dare give the only answer that can be given - the rich, the capitalists whose system caused and is causing the misery and destruction in the first place.

Of course such an answer won't guarantee an election victory. But neither can Kinnock's. It would, however, rouse millions of working people against Thatcher and the junior Tories of the Alliance and prepare them for combat whoever won this election. In the end that is what counts.

Of course we have to fight for a Labour victory right now. To block the Tories' path on the electoral terrain will temporarily cause the bosses some confusion. Far more importantly it will put Kinnock and co in the hot seat before the whole working class.

WE WON'T BE THATCHER'S SLAVES

MASS UNEMPLOYMENT IS central to the Tories' plans to restructure the labour market. They are using it to undermine the strength of the trade unions in order to push down

wage rates and push up profitability. It is youth in particular who have to pay the price for the callous policies of the Tories, eking out their lives on miserable benefits.

Now the Tories are set to turn the screws even tighter on the young unemployed. In April the government will introduce the Job Training Scheme (JTS) aimed in particular at 18-25 year olds who have been unemployed for 6-12 months. It is clearly a form of slave labour. It is one step nearer the 'work for your benefits' system operated in several states of the USA. The youth will receive minimal 'training' - in theory six hours a week - in exchange for a worthless certificate guaranteed never to be any use in getting them a real job, and six months slave labour for the employers.

The JTS is not simply another device to help the Tories launder the unemployment figures in election year. It is part of a systematic attack on the already paltry rights and meagre benefits of the unemployed. It coincides with the laughably named Restart scheme.

FAKE SCHEME

Under this scheme claimants are offered the alternatives of either going on a fake job creation scheme or being intimidated into de-registering. The only thing you are likely to have to restart after it is the tedious process of filling out new claim forms after your course or scheme has finished. At the same time the Department of Employment is introducing new rigid 'availability for work tests' designed to frighten claimants into enlisting for one of its slave labour schemes.

While thousands of youth are being condemned to enforced labour at supplementary benefit level (£27.50 plus rent for a single person) for the sake of profit, the labour and trade union movement has disgracefully connived in the super-exploitation of the unemployed. In Birmingham, for example, the Labour council is planning a submission for 1,000 JTS trainees. The TUC welcomed the Restart programme. It should have denounced it and organised to stop it from ever being implemented.

INSULTS

A few unions have been prepared to recruit the unemployed or have attempted to organise those on MSC schemes. But in the case of the TGWU unemployed members never meet or receive mailings. In the FEETPU you get free membership with no voting rights and have to leave the union when your scheme finishes! In fact, so frightened is the TUC of giving a voice to the militant pent up anger of the unemployed, that it is helping the bosses build up a potentially massive conscript scab labour force.

The unemployed will be expected to endure even more insults in May with the obscene "Hands across Britain Campaign". GMBATU, for example, is forking out £25,000 to underwrite a spectacle of Labour leaders, trade union bigwigs and the few unemployed workers who might be conned into joining hands in a grotesque human chain with Jimmy Saville. The unemployed are offered no more hope from the labour movement's leaders that that someday Jim might fix it for them. A campaign to defend jobs across Britain, using the weapon of industrial action, would be a more useful exercise than giving clapped out, right wing DJs free publicity.

The unemployed must be organised. Wherever possible they must get into the unions - the TGWU

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PLATFORM

The protracted election campaign should be used by militants and socialists as a platform from which to stigmatise the Tories' record and as an indictment of capitalism and its inability to provide a decent life for the great majority of people. It should be used to warn workers of the attacks to come and the need to fight them tooth and nail. It should also be used to expose the terrible weakness and incapacity of Kinnock's 'solution' and the need for a real anti-capitalist answer for working people.

If we do this effectively, linking up with and encouraging all sections in struggle, then we can begin to create a renewed movement - the basis for a new leadership, a new party that can put working class power and socialism on the agenda for millions. Then far from Thatcher wiping out socialism - socialism will wipe her, or her successor, out for good.

editorial

AFTER GREENWICH

THE SDP'S CAPTURE of Greenwich from Labour has thrown a massive spoke into the wheel of Neil Kinnock's election bandwagon. Kinnock blamed the defeat on by-election tactical voting. The Labour right blamed the result on Deirdre Wood and the 'lunatic' left.

The response of the softer left has been to blame it all on the press smear campaign, while the harder left has blamed Kinnock's bland politics for losing votes. All of these explanations, which are being trumped up to bash factional opponents, are unconvincing.

Of course the bosses' media, by skillfully using the opinion polls, can produce swings to Labour's enemies. But they are able to do this for a number of reasons. Firstly the labour movement, both Party and unions, has long abandoned any serious attempt to develop its own mass press or independently use other media. In addition, the media unions, 'blinded by economic short-sightedness, have failed to take up a real fight against the hate propaganda directed at the labour movement that is the staple diet of the yellow press. Kinnock's winging about the media is meaningless and self-defeating - it just makes him look like a bad loser as did his complaints about the Tories' attacks on Glenys.

Those who attack tactical voting must answer the question of who is to blame if a large slice of the electorate is dominated more by a desire to avoid something they dislike than by any positive espousal of a cause? A large majority (between 50-60%) of the electorate do not want the Tories in. Nobody knows what on earth the Alliance stands for. As for Labour, the press and television all put over the message that it has been taken over by "the loony left".

Labour's right wing powerfully confirm this story in many voters' minds with their constant releases to the press of any dirt they can find out about the left. Vincent Hannah revealed that the original source of all the smears against Deirdre Wood was the London Labour right's campaign to balk her selection in the first place.

Kinnock's present strategy is somewhat different to that of the right. It is to cover over left policies, either at national or local government level, in a welter of words and visual gimmickery. In the final analysis his promo-job politics are totally vacuous. Like an empty vessel he makes a lot of noise; but it doesn't take the Tory media to plant in most people's heads the suspicion that he is a man of no substance - a windbag.

His low, or no promise, profile which he thinks will allay the media-induced fears of loony leftism does nothing of the sort. At best it convinces people that Labour's policies are as vague and wishy-washy as those of the Alliance.

This approach erodes Labour's vote at both ends. The fickle will prefer first hand Alliance policies from Alliance candidates as a safer prospect altogether. On the other hand the unemployed, the youth on slave labour schemes, the low paid, the council tenants in decaying estates will not be attracted to go out and vote by Kinnock's "I'm realistic, I'm making no promises" patter.

TOTAL SUBORDINATION

But if the old right and the Kinnockite centre both contribute to softening up the Labour vote, the official Labour left - the hard left in the constituencies - have for three years been contributing to this. The total subordination of their politics to a Labour victory on whatever policies and under whatever leadership has proven disastrous. Deirdre Wood is an example. She was a left. She had a decent record of support for left causes. But her campaign was completely in the hands of the Labour leadership's media machine. Thus her victory over the right in the local party came to nothing. This is a microcosm of the whole Labour left's dilemma.

Since they dare not and will not fight to take control of the party whenever an election looms they are, more or less willingly, dragged into electoral campaigns whose content and terms are set by the right. All that remains is the leftist past of some candidates. This in turn can be treated by the media as a skeleton in the cupboard to be taken out and rattled in front of the electorate at the crucial moment.

Despite all their efforts the left has not been able to make the party as a whole or any constituencies really organise, campaign and win mass support from working class voters for demands that really and obviously meet their needs.

The crushing defeat at the start of the election campaign means that the right will go on the offensive again. The announced formation of "Londoners for Labour" signals a new attack on the already enfeebled left in the capital. Unlike the left, the right are not at all abashed about what damage their campaign will do in election year. In fact the hard right - the majority of Labour MPs and many union leaders - would probably regard a third election loss as a price worth paying if it would actually serve to mobilise the forces in the unions to get rid of the left altogether. According to the hard and soft left's predictions a successful electoral showing for Labour will seriously weaken the hard right in the PLP. An election disaster would stop this.

The reformist left however are still holding onto their tried and trusted tactic of super (and self-destructive) loyalty. They fear that if they openly stick up for pro-working class policies and criticise the milk and water, gas-bag "socialism" of the official campaign they will be blamed for any defeat. They forget that they will be blamed for it anyhow. What is more by not using the election period to win the support of ordinary working class Labour voters, by putting forward policies that meet their needs, they will confirm to many workers the picture the right presents of them as behind the scenes conspirators concerned at best only with the interests of minorities.

The working class - the great majority in Britain - needs a fighting action programme to totally reverse the Tory vandalism of the Thatcher years and to launch an offensive against capitalism that can mobilise millions not just to vote but to take up the struggle for socialism for themselves. □

AN RCP FRONT

Dear Comrades,

Workers Power, like the RCP, considers the impending general election to be of vital importance. That, however, is our only point of agreement. The conclusions you draw from this fact will do absolutely nothing to prepare the working class for a capitalist offensive, help break it from Kinnock and reformism, nor advance the struggle for communism in Britain one bit.

At the most basic level your proposals are in conformity with the 'front' style politics that have become your sectarian trademark. The Red Front is an RCP front and we advise workers not to be taken in by it. Why else would you publish a pamphlet in the name of this supposed non-RCP dominated Red Front, which your covering letter describes as:

"the new updated programme of the RCP".

If the pamphlet is your programme why give it the name of your supposed non-RCP dominated 'electoral bloc'?

Moreover, since you are obviously unfamiliar with the norms of workers' democracy we would like to point out that 'blocs' normally decide their 'minimum' programme at conferences of the participants. You, however, put forward what you regard as the 'basic demands' needed and then demand:

"Anybody who is committed to the interests of the working class should support it." (TNS 23.1.87)

Anyone who is serious about building a real bloc ought not to decide its policies in advance.

The freedom you generously grant non-RCP participants to "campaign in a way that is consistent with their own politics" (TNS 23.1.87) and to put forward their own programme as well, does nothing to alter the fact that the election circus you are hoping to stage will have chairman Frank as the ringmaster. That freedom is meaningless outside of the context of participants themselves deciding their basic policies.

Even if the Red Front was not the property of the RCP, its whole approach to the election is faulty in the extreme. It manages to combine, like its Stalinist 'Third Period' predecessor, an ultra-left and sectarian position on social democracy with an opportunist stance on questions of platform and programme.

We'll begin by looking at what you tell us about the Labour Party:

"... whichever of the major parties comes out on top, the consequences are inevitable."

Further on in similar vein you assert:

"The mainstream parties only offer a choice among different varieties of pro-capitalist parties."

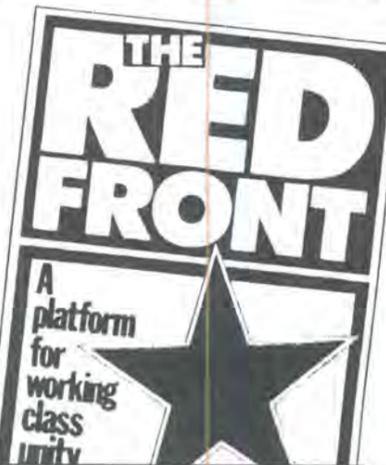
So concerned are you to project an anti-Labour image that you make the fundamental mistake of suggesting that there is no real difference between the 'major' or 'mainstream' parties. These terms like your repeated use of the term 'establishment', are not Marxist terms. Marxism analyses parties on a class basis. In this respect we, unlike you, recognise that the loyalty of the majority of the working class to the Labour Party means that it is not simply a bosses' party, but, to use Lenin's phrase, a "bourgeois workers' party". The attitude of millions of workers towards the Labour Party - and not a belief that our job in life is to change the Labour Party from within - determines the tactics real revolutionary communists will utilise in the coming election.

In the absence of a mass revolutionary alternative our task is to break millions of workers from reformism. Do we do this by waging a campaign with these workers - by calling for a Labour vote - or by standing aside from them as the Red Front proposes. We have no doubts on this. We will fight for a Labour victory to put the Labour leaders to the test

THE REVOLUTIONARY COMMUNIST PARTY (RCP) have launched a new organisation called the 'Red Front'. It is intended to be an 'electoral bloc' in the forthcoming general election.

The RCP's paper, *The Next Step* (TNS), is campaigning for organisations and individuals to join the Red Front, and build an electoral alternative to the Labour Party. In addition, a 'platform for working class unity' has been adopted as the Red Front's platform.

In TNS (23.1.87) Frank Richards, chairman of the RCP, published an open letter "To all left wing groups and individuals", appealing for forces other than the RCP to join the Red Front. These thoughts of chairman Frank reveal in a graphic form the errors and flaws of the RCP's politics. Printed here is our own open letter replying to the RCP's proposals.



of office in front of the millions of workers who are placing their hopes in a Labour government.

The stock reply of the sectarian to this is that Labour has been put to the test and exposed before. Why bother again? Exposed to whom, comrades? To us, certainly, but to the masses of workers? Not even the Red Front's script writers can work that assertion into their scenario. The Red Front pamphlet admits:

"The opinion polls suggest that Labour has won back much of the working class support it lost in 1983."

As against the RCP's sterile propaganda exercise, the task revolutionaries really face is to exploit the contradiction between the needs and hopes of the workers and rotten reformist policies of Kinnock. At the moment, given our inability, due to our small size and influence, to present a real alternative to Labour at the polls, the best way of exploiting that contradiction is through the tactic of critical support - vote Labour, formulate and fight for demands that can force Labour to act in the interests of the working class, and organise to fight against Labour's inevitable betrayals.

The value of this tactic as against the RCP's electoral clowning, is that it places revolutionaries alongside the mass of real workers in Britain and enables us to engage in a dialogue with them. The value of the RCP's tactic was highlighted at Greenwich. Despite their media conscious campaign that bought their general secretary, Kate Marshall, a fair few column inches in *The Guardian* and *The Independent*, they mustered only 91 votes - 33 fewer than the loony, beer and skittles Rainbow Alliance!

A particularly pernicious element of the RCP's Red Front stunt, is its effective endorsement of the view that it will be better for the working class if the Tories get in. In rejecting the argument that Labour is the lesser evil, the RCP pamphlet declares:

"In another sense Labour is an even greater evil than the Tories. A Kinnock government pursuing pro-capitalist policies could have a devastating impact on the working class... with Thatcher in power, people know what to expect and can get ready to resist. With Kinnock

people would be unprepared and vulnerable."

Anyone reading the above could be forgiven for thinking that where there is no Red Front candidate, people should vote Tory and so be prepared! It is part of the Red Front's sectarianism that it offers no advice in *The Next Step* or any Red Front literature on which way to vote where there is no Red Front candidate.

The RCP's programme for the Red Front shows that its sectarianism coexists, quite happily, with rank opportunism. In place of a communist answer to the crisis and the bosses' offensive in the form of an action programme that would guide workers in struggle we get a bland collection of proposed reforms. There is no mention of socialism, let alone the need for a revolution in this programme. Given that in the election workers will be choosing a government, the lack of answers from the Red Front on the range of questions that would confront a government really committed to the working class, is amazing. For example would a Red Front government renationalise privatised companies - a question of some import for millions of workers? We are left guessing, as the platform keeps quiet on this. However, the real clue to the RCP's attitude to such questions is given in the Red Front pamphlet. With typical petit-bourgeois disdain for the real life economic questions that workers need answers to the RCP declares:

"The RCP has no economic policies to offer."

Any thinking worker should treat this non-class approach to issues of vital importance with total contempt.

The RCP's excuse for this agnosticism on key issues is that they are not interested in forming a government. This Red Front palaver is merely designed to:

"rally a core of activists around a platform that can lead the struggle against the capitalist system."

This is no excuse at all. A platform with such pretensions is obliged to be specific, concrete and act as a coherent route map towards the seizure of power.

The RCP's platform on the other hand is:

"simply the minimum which the working class can afford to campaign on". (TNS 23.1.87)

It is a minimum that says not one word about what forms of action the working class must take to win the things it calls for - like work or full pay. It rejects "all forms of militarism" - but what about proletarian militarism, workers' defense guards and the like? It "rejects the Aids panic" but says nothing about what sort of health service we need to find a cure for the disease and treat its victims. It expresses goodwill with liberation movements everywhere, but instead of saying what needs to be done, particularly in Ireland, it says:

"We place a particular priority on supporting the fight for freedom in Ireland."

What has happened to the two basic anti-imperialist demands of Troops Out Now and Self-Determination? The answer is they have been dropped for fear of excluding from the Red Front, organisations who have not got an anti-imperialist position on Ireland.

The working class has no need of such empty and vague policies. Better to fight Kinnock over policies and open up the potential of actually breaking workers from reformism, than to posture as the already existing alternative but with no alternative programme to offer the working class.

Workers Power regards the Greenwich result as indicative of what the Red Front will achieve in the election. Indeed, if it goes into the election on the basis of the useless and vague policies embodied in its literature to date, then its candidates will not simply trail behind the joke candidates - they will be the joke candidates.

TORIES'

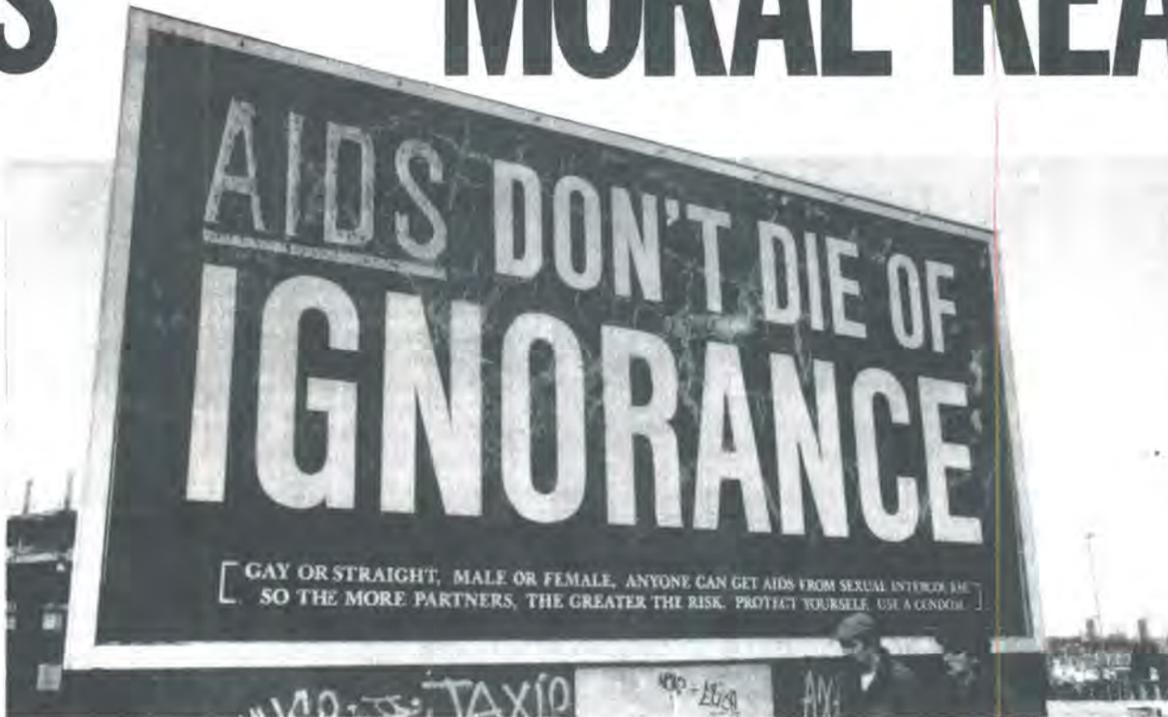
EDWINA CURRIE AND James Anderton are, by and large, good for nothing. But both of their recent outbursts about AIDS were timely indications of the ruling class's real attitude to the disease. Despite its concern to stop the spread of AIDS, it still views the disease as either a "gay plague" or as god's punishment to people who have sex with more than one partner.

Anderton's view of gay men as being in a "cesspit of their own making", is an extreme version of the official government line on AIDS. The recent spate of adverts, for example, reassure "people" (namely heterosexuals), in a subtle way, that so far AIDS is a gay plague. Its victims are "relatively small groups of people". This seemingly coy description in fact leaves people in no doubt that so far AIDS is still mainly affecting gays - let's keep it that way is the Tories' real message.

Of course the threat of the spread of AIDS amongst heterosexuals has led the Tories to take the disease more seriously, despite opposition by Thatcher in the cabinet to any publicity campaigns. However, their attitude, nurtured and strengthened by the gutter press, is defined by a reactionary moralism.

When AIDS emerged on a wide scale in the USA amongst the male gay community, the capitalist press stigmatised it as a "gay plague", utilising the absurd but deeply reactionary arguments from the Moral Majority, that the curse of god (or for the more secular bigots the curse of nature) was being visited upon those who had challenged his sexual norms. The capitalist state in the US was content to accept the fundamental tenet of this reactionary outlook. It was a "gay plague" so leave it to the gays to cope with it. Research into the nature of the disease, let alone finding a cure for it, was systematically underfunded. The attitude that the disease should be regarded as either a curse or a subject for gay baiting jokes was encouraged. In the context of the capitalist crisis the disease was a handy weapon for the ruling class enabling them to scapegoat gay men.

As the disease developed in Britain, from 1982 onwards, the moral right copied the anti-gay campaign of their red-neck counterparts in the US. And the fact that 88% of the people who have contracted AIDS since 1982 were male homosexuals fuelled these reactionary arguments. For a period of four years the Tories were indifferent to what they regarded as a gay-only disease. It was left to voluntary organisations like the Terence Higgins Trust to try and cope with the mounting danger the disease posed. An



article in the New Scientist pointed out:

"If the world had not ignored the discovery of the AIDS virus, researchers might now be a year ahead in their fight to cure victims of AIDS." (12/2/87)

By 1986, however, cases of AIDS amongst heterosexuals began to cause alarm. Cases amongst drug users had been recorded but ignored. When "normal" people contracted the disease the government finally began to respond to the medical pressure that was building up for something to be done.

ADVERTISING

Accordingly the government spent £20 million on AIDS. But as an "Action for AIDS" leaflet stated:

"Our government's recent AIDS allocation of £20 million is intended mainly for advertising and preventative health education; this leaves the major part of AIDS-related work still grossly underfunded."

In other words most of the money has gone into the coffers of advertising sharks like Saatchi and Saatchi.

The main hospitals that are dealing with AIDS testing, counselling and caring are under major strain. At the Middlesex Hospital in London the AIDS laboratory consists of a temporary portacabin stuck on the roof of the Sexually Transmitted Disease (STD) clinic. NUPE has estimated that it costs £20,000 to care for each patient with AIDS and given that as many as 3,000 may develop the syndrome over the next two years the government will need to allocate at

least £60 million for AIDS patient care by the beginning of 1989.

The question is, why has the advertising industry in AIDS enjoyed a boom while the hard cash available for finding a cure remains totally insufficient? The answer is that the government is using AIDS to further a reactionary moral crusade which has been expanded from an attack on gay sex to an attack on all sex. The AIDS issue is being used to reinforce the "Victorian values" so beloved of Thatcher and Tebbit, at the moral level.

One look at the government sponsored campaigns proves its reactionary anti-sex nature. It recommends the use of condoms for everyone - once again proving that capitalism incessantly writes lesbian sexuality out of existence. However, at the same time it bans any publicity about condoms on TV or in the papers! Safer sex videos from the US, such as *Chance In a Lifetime* are banned in this country. And, underpinning the whole of the campaign is the message, do not have sex with more than one partner. This theme is now being hammered into people in the leaflets, adverts and publicity stunts that the government has authorised. In particular the youth have been targeted and the message spewed out at them is - sex is bad for your health, don't do it. This was the undisguised theme of the television spectacular *First Aids*. It used various youth oriented entertainers to plug the motto safe sex means no sex (except, perhaps, in marriages blessed by the church!).

The government campaign is getting back-up from the hypocritical press. The same press that daily serves up lurid tales of a seemingly sex-crazed society is now busy attacking Britain's youth who

are rightly suspicious of the Tories' morality. The *Sunday Today*, the paper of one of Thatcher's favourite capitalists, Eddie Shah, fumed:

"Britain's carefree youngsters are ignoring the warnings about AIDS." (1/3/87)

Or to put it another way **"Just seven per cent have bothered to give up one-night stands"**. In other words the drive against sex, rather than the drive against AIDS, has not yet convinced the youth.

This sickening campaign against sex must be fought. Of course we favour an explicit, factual campaign that simply explains the nature of the disease, AIDS, the methods by which it can be contracted and the precautions that can be taken to lessen the risk irrespective of the number of sexual partners a person has. Additionally we are in favour of positive sex education courses in schools. Sexual pleasure should not be a taboo subject.

We are for a massive educational campaign on AIDS and other sexually transmitted diseases, financed by the government, but under the control of workers (especially those working in liaison with medical experts, in the NHS, in the schools and in the media) and representatives of the lesbian and gay organisations.

But we reject the idea that there is such a thing as "safe sex" or that the responsibility for countering AIDS lies with individuals. Of course precautions can be taken but no contagious disease has ever been eradicated either by education campaigns or individuals observing self-denying ordinances. They are eradicated by cures, by the discovery of immunising vaccines and so on. The process of discovering a cure is hampered by the fact that medical and phar-

maceutical research is organised not on the basis of scientific collaboration, but on the basis of capitalist competition. Information is kept secret, not pooled. Moreover, countries desperately in need of an AIDS vaccine, like a number of central and eastern African states, will not be able to afford any drug or vaccine that some imperialist corporation has discovered. These corporations are only interested in marketing drugs for profits, not to help people. It is significant that one thing Thatcher did encourage was a meeting of drug company executives to discuss the value of private industry competing in the search for a cure!

ANSWER

The communist answer to the AIDS question is therefore based on a fight to force capitalism to provide a health service that can tackle the combined problems of research for a cure and provision of the requisite patient care facilities. These requirements cannot be met if the Tories pursue their present policy in the NHS in general and the AIDS research establishments specifically. This policy of cuts, closure and privatisation is incompatible with a health service that meets people's needs. To facilitate the finding of a cure for AIDS in the short term we fight for:

- ▶ A massive expansion of the NHS as part of a plan of public works under workers' control. For a massive expansion of the AIDS research and patient care budget.
- ▶ The ending of all privatisation inside the hospitals and NHS. The ending of all private practice inside the NHS. The abolition of the private health sector altogether and the seizure of their resources for the NHS.
- ▶ The nationalisation of the profiteering drug companies with no compensation and under workers' control. Research for a cure, not for profits.
- ▶ A massive educational programme under union control, to acquaint health workers with the nature of AIDS and to dispel all myths.
- ▶ Opposition to any moves by the state to introduce compulsory testing.
- ▶ For free condoms on demand and for free sterile needles for drug users with confidentiality guaranteed.

A fight for these demands can help tackle AIDS and counter the moral backlash that the government is sponsoring. ■

SHEFFIELD WORKERS WILL soon be paying for the failure of Blunkett's labour council to resist the Tories' rate-capping attacks. As a council letter Budget News sent to all its employees says: "It is likely to be inevitable that there will be cuts in some services" to "protect essential ones such as those for the elderly and infirm".

In fact the building of special facilities such as access ramps to houses for the elderly and disabled has already stopped. Many vacancies in council jobs will be left unfilled, reducing the overall number of jobs and further cutting the already inadequate level of services. And in the meantime according to *Budget News*, "all employees are asked to look at ways to work more efficiently". Also, rents for council tenants are to be increased in April by 10%.

Resistance to these measures has been weak within the Sheffield Labour Party. Only five of all District Labour Party (DLP) delegates voted against Blunkett's cuts budget and the council itself can only offer the prospect of pleading

for more cash from hard-nosed Tory, Ridley.

Blunkett has demanded no oppositional politics to the council's backdown. In effect this means no opposition to around £15 million of cuts this financial year. *Workers Power* supporters in Sheffield have fought for opposition to these cuts around a programme including such elements as:

- ▶ building links between Labour Party wards opposed to any cuts and those council trade unions and tenants' associations who are likely to be attacked.
- ▶ arguing for rank and file inter-union organisation to prevent manual and non-manual council workers being divided by the council and local union bureaucracy.
- ▶ arguing that Labour candidates

SHEFFIELD BUDGET

in the local elections stand on a platform which exposes the council's plans and pledges support to all those who will be resisting the cuts, and fighting for an increase in the provision of services.

This last call has already been

labelled 'unconstitutional' by officers from Sheffield Central Constituency Labour Party. One ward, Netherthorpe, which had voted to take such action has been threatened with disaffiliation, disbandment and if necessary the imposition of candidates for the local

election who will stand on the basis of the DLP's anti-working class attempt to get a 'balanced budget' (i.e. make cuts).

The opposition of Labour Party branches and the council itself to rate-capping is based on an opposition to Tory cuts in already inadequate services. Our opposition should continue even when cuts are dressed up in the name of pre-election 'realism' or compliance with constitutional rules and carried by a 'socialist' council. ■

by Stuart Crossthwaite

ANOTHER RACIST POLICE MURDER

ONCE AGAIN RACIST police are trying to get away with murder. On Friday 23 February Clinton McCurbin died after being forcibly arrested by two policemen in Wolverhampton. When word got round a number of the local youth, both black and white, took to the streets to protest with the result that more arrests were made. On Saturday, the police were out

in force in the town centre with riot shields and snatch squads, arresting 21 black youth. First reports claimed that Clinton died of a heart attack and was on drugs. By the Tuesday inquest they had to drop this line and argue that it was a rumour not put out by them!

A national demonstration has been called for Saturday

8 March and all community and labour movement groups are to be contacted. All socialists should support the demonstration on Saturday 8 March and support the calls to:

- Release the youth!
- Drop all charges!
- For a workers and black community inquiry into the death of Clinton McCurbin!

HOW OPEN A CONFERENCE?

The Editor,
Workers Press

Dear Comrades,

As you know the Movement for a Revolutionary Communist International (MRCI) responded positively and promptly to your declaration for an open conference (see MRCI statement of 28th January published in Workers Power 90). We offered to contribute resources to building the conference and to participate in its organising committee on the basis of working for a democratically run conference.

Along with members of a number of international tendencies, the International Workers League (IWL) and Lutte Ouvriere, members of the MRCI sections attended a recent meeting called by the WRP on the International Conference. At this meeting comrade Bob Archer, speaking we understand for the Central Committee of the WRP, declared that the conference was now being organised on the basis of acceptance of the 'Ten Points' put forward by the WRP being a pre-condition for full participation in the organising committee and the conference itself.

This seems to us to be a dramatic change from the concept of the conference as previously outlined to us by WRP members. You had originally called for a 'world conference of Trotskyist organisations'. Its aim was to clarify 'many of the key historical and political issues which have confronted the (Fourth International) movement for decades.' It was 'to begin the task of elaborating a programme based on the transitional programme'. How, we would ask, do you intend to clarify any of these questions if you begin by excluding the overwhelming majority of forces claiming to be Trotskyist before you start? As we pointed out in a previous letter to you, if the 'Ten Points' are pre-conditions, they immediately rule out, for example, the Mandeliste wing of the USFI, as well as other large tendencies like that of Lutte Ouvriere in France. You might reply, 'We do not want Ernest Mandel and his organisations anyway' but if you really want to challenge and debate out the political mistakes which led to the political crisis and organisational disintegration of the FI surely you should be challenging the USFI and other tendencies to attend, to agree to circulate all the documents and resolutions within their organisations, to participate fully in the conference. Perhaps the leadership of the USFI will not want to, but if so why give them an excuse? Especially when we know there are minorities who disagree with important aspects of the current USFI line, on Nicaragua for instance, minorities who surely anyone seeking to recreate a Trotskyist international would want to reach and win?

While the 'Ten Points' are too

The WRP (Workers Press) call for an international "open conference" of groups claiming to be Trotskyist looks like it is turning into an exclusive event. We print below a letter we have sent to Workers Press registering our opposition to any attempts to exclude any tendencies that regard themselves as Trotskyists from an open conference.

exclusive as pre-conditions for an international conference aimed at the task your organisation set it, they are certainly inadequate as a basis to define genuine Trotskyism against centrism, to, as you put it, 're-organise the Fourth International' upon. Your characterisation of Stalinism for instance, as 'counter-revolutionary through and through' is as one sided and undialectical an analysis as the 'dual nature' one you correctly reject. Historically within the IC tradition it has led to a differential hostility to Stalinism as against social democracy, and an adaptation to the latter (Healy in the Labour Party, Lambert in the French Socialist Party). Do you characterise the Labour Party too as 'counter-revolutionary through and through'? If so you ignore the contradiction involved between the working class base of both these parties and their Stalinist and reformist leaders. This is a contradiction which leads at various points to the leaders being forced to take actions which revolutionaries might support, and opens the possibility of a united front with these parties within which the communists would attack the vacillations, retreats and outright sabotage of the leaders. Such tactics would not be possible if these parties were 'counter-revolutionary through and through'. Of course we would and do characterise both parties as counter-revolutionary in their practice, their programme and their leadership. But they remain parties with an organised proletarian base and thus bourgeois workers parties.

ANONYMOUS THRUST

In your recently added 'point two' you declare the necessity of building the Fourth International in opposition to all those who pronounce it dead or proclaim the need for a new international. Who do you aim this anonymous thrust at? The insignificant and almost non-existent Banda grouping? They do not call for a Fifth International to our knowledge. The SWP(US) still support the United Secretariat of the Fourth International while advertising themselves as willing to take part in a 'broader' new international with the Sandinista's and Castroites. Or do you perhaps think you have struck the MRCI with this formulation? Comrades we do not hold any of these positions. Our slogans are 'Forward to

the refounding of a Leninist Trotskyist International! For a new world party of socialist revolution!'

We certainly do not think that the Fourth International still exists either organisationally or in terms of programmatic continuity. Its revolutionary continuity was broken in 1951, when a world congress adopted general and systematic revisions of Trotskyism on all the major elements of the programme. Its organisational existence as the 'world party of socialist revolution' was shattered in 1953. The IC played an equally culpable role in shattering the organisational unity and, whilst it offered a number of partially correct 'left' criticisms of Pablo and Mandel, never took these to the level of a revolutionary restoration and then further development of the transitional programme.

We wish to restore and develop Trotsky's programme and Trotsky's world party of socialist revolution. Whether this re-founded international will call itself the Fourth or the Fifth is for us a question to be decided in a struggle with the centrism which masquerades as Trotskyism and which has torn into pieces the banner of Trotsky's FI. In any case the question of the number, separated from principled questions of an actual existing political and organisational continuity, we leave to the political confusionists, people with something to hide. Here we find your talk of the 'continuity' as contradictory - as either double talk or double think. If there has been a revolutionary continuity over the last 35 years, you must say who defended it and against whom they defended it. The IC as a whole, Healy and the WRP, Lambert, Moreno? The Moreno current as you well know was not struggling 'against revisionism' in the 1960's but capitulating to it. The SLL-WRP committed revisions of theory and practice as well as outright crimes which make a mockery of any claim that it represents a line of continuity. You cannot point to an unbroken series of programmatic documents, and theses representing defence and extension of Trotsky's work or to a national organisation or grouping that has continuously fought for the revolutionary programme in the class struggle. Your notion of a contradictory continuity is not a dialectical but a vulgar, logical contradiction.

Whatever the outcome of this struggle to build a revolutionary international we clearly stand for the building of a Trotskyist international. Yet you are willing to exclude us from full participation, from the organising committee. At the same time you do include the International Workers League in the committee. This organisation openly says it is aiming to build a non-Trotskyist international, one where Trotskyists would be in a minority, that is one whose programme will not be a Trotskyist one! In essence

this is no different to the SWP(US) position, the IWL just looks to different 'left' forces for its international. Yet you are willing to accept their full participation on their supposed acceptance of the 'Ten Points'? If you think you are going to persuade them during full participation in the conference period why not us and other tendencies as well?

IN COMMON

The reason can only be that the WRP leadership thinks it has more in common politically with the IWL (and others who can agree to the 'Ten Points') than with those who are excluded from full participation. The 'Ten Points' in this case will have become the first step towards a political fusion. Indeed this was precisely the method adopted by the IWL (then the Bolshevik Faction under the leadership of the PST of Argentina) in 1979. They, with the Lambert grouping, called for an open conference of 'the world Trotskyist movement', which would involve a 'democratically organised and exhaustive discussion'. We and other groups, like the Workers Socialist League, were rapidly excluded and, as you know, the conference took place as a closed fusion conference of the Bolshevik Faction and the OCRFI - a fusion which lasted less than a year. Is this the road the WRP is being taken down? We hope not.

We therefore call on the WRP to put forward its 'Ten Points' not as pre-conditions for full participation, but as a basis for discussion. We intend to put forward our own set of points which we think will be a starting point for defining a communist position against the centrist distortion of Trotsky's programme. We expect other groups would wish to do likewise. All who are willing to support and build for the conference, circulate its documents internally and open their press to the debates should be allowed full participation, in the organising committee and the conference itself. The aim should not be a 'talking shop' but a serious attempt to clarify political positions and thus take forward the struggle to re-elaborate a Trotskyist programme for the current period and to rebuild a revolutionary leadership of the world working class.

We recognise this letter is longer than you normally ask for. But given the importance of the International Conference and the fact that you have not received or published any response in Workers Press to your call, we hope you will publish it in full as, perhaps, a start of the pre-conference discussion process.

Yours in comradeship

Stuart King
Secretary, MRCI

24th February 1987

PHIL PENN

We learnt from the WRP (Workers Press) of the jailing of Phil Penn following a disgraceful provocation by sellers of the Newsline. We print here the letter of solidarity with Phil that we sent to the WRP.

Dear comrades

We are saddened and angered to hear of the imprisonment of comrade Phil Penn last week. Alongside the rest of the left and the labour movement we condemn the actions of the Newsline group both for provoking a fight with the comrade and then for utilising the bourgeois courts to intervene on their behalf.

The Healy-Torrance group, both now and in the past, have never



been able to conduct open debates within the labour movement and have frequently resorted to the use of violence, intimidation and if these methods failed using the police and state to silence their opponents for them. Such antics must be condemned by all on the

left.

We send comradely greetings to Phil, Sandra and their daughter and will ensure that this case is made known as an example of Healyite thuggery into which such sections of the FI degenerated.

In comradeship,
Workers Power
Political Committee.

LEICESTER HOSIERY WORKERS BALLOT

Dear comrades

Being a 'militant' hosiery worker in the National Union of Hosiery and Knitwear Workers (NUHKW) can be a little depressing especially

in Leicester, not known as a revolutionary hotspot - until recently!

The membership having been offered a "substantial" pay rise, were in fact offered a rise of less than 5%. The union decided a ballot was needed.

I contacted two SWP members to see if they would co-operate on a joint leaflet advising a vote for action. They said no, explaining that there was no militancy within the membership.

On 9 January a ballot was taken. 25,000 plus voted and the margin of defeat for action was just 281. So much for "no militancy"!

After this encouraging vote I will approach the SWP to ask if they will co-operate on a monthly journal for hosiery workers.

Yours in comradeship,
Leicester hosiery worker

NAHUEL MORENO, A leading figure in the International Workers League (Fourth International), died of a heart attack on 25 January at the age of 62. He joined the Trotskyist movement in the early 1940s, being a founder member of the Partido Obrero de la Revolucion Socialista (PORS) which fused a number of Trotskyist groups in Argentina in 1941.

Moreno was to remain a leading figure among groups claiming allegiance to Trotskyism in Argentina for the next four decades. The PST (later MAS) was to be the dominant force within the international current with which Moreno was most recently associated; the Bolshevik Faction, which later became the International Workers League - IWL(FI). We express our sympathy to his family, friends and comrades. However we have nothing to praise in the overall political content of his life's work.

The politics of the groups in which Nahuel Moreno was a prominent leader reflected in every way the political crisis and centrist degeneration of Trotsky's Fourth International after 1951. Early Argentine Trotskyism was riven with splits and divisions. Many of these stemmed from disagreements over how revolutionaries should relate to 'anti-imperialist' movements of both bourgeois and petit-bourgeois nationalist origin - principally, by the mid-1940s its attitude to the bourgeois nationalist Peronist movement.

SELF CRITICISM

While Moreno's organisation at first vigorously attacked Peronism, by the 1950s the POR, as his organisation was then called, conducted a "self-criticism" and started the course which has since been the hallmark of "Morenoism". In Latin America - a chronic opportunist adaptation to both bourgeois and petit-bourgeois nationalism.

As one of the leaders of the POR at the time, Ezequiel Reyes, has put it "we were opponents of the Peronista government, implacable adversaries, until 1954 . . ." In this year the POR dissolved itself to join the newly formed Partido Socialista de la Revolucion Nacional (PSRN) which was a pro-Peronist party, having split from the Partido Socialista because of its anti-Peronist stance.

By this time Moreno's POR was an inactive section of the inactive International Committee (IC) of the Fourth International while the 'Pabloite' wing, the International Secretariat (IS), was represented in Argentina by J. Posadas and his organisation, the Partido Obrero. Moreno's "struggle against Pabloism" outside of his rivalry with Posadas added nothing to the meagre output of the IC.

When Peron was overthrown in 1955 and the PSRN declared illegal, Moreno's group continued to work with the Peronists producing a paper *Palabra Obrero* which declared itself an "organ of Revolutionary Workers' Peronism" produced "under the discipline of General Peron and the Peronist Supreme Council". The paper was linked to a group of 'left' Peronist trade union leaders called the "62 organisations" which acted as the transmission belt for maintaining the hold of Peronism - bourgeois nationalism - over the Argentinian trade unions.

By 1964 Moreno's group had, along with the SWP(US), re-united with the IS to form the United Secretariat of the Fourth International (USFI). So much for any claim that Moreno represented, even in a "contradictory fashion", a struggle against Pabloism. Quite simply, like the SWP(US) he surrendered to Mandel and co. The key to this reunification was uncritical support for the Castroites in Cuba. The "recognition" that a "blunt instrument" was sufficient to achieve a socialist revolution.

POLITICS OF NAHUEL MORENO

This instrument could be either Castroism or petit-bourgeois nationalism, as, supposedly, the FLN in Algeria had shown.

This revision of Marxism added that guerilla struggle based on the peasantry was to "play a decisive role". It was therefore no surprise that Moreno's group fused with an openly Castroite current (FRIP) in 1964 to form the Partido Revolucionario de Trabajadores (PRT). From then until 1968 Moreno was at one with the policy of the USFI leaders, supporting the 'guerillaist' turn, being a fervent supporter of the Castro backed OLAS movement which was described in the PRT's journals as "the only organisational vehicle for power".

However the actual formation of a guerilla wing, the ERP, of the PRT, caused Moreno to draw back. A split in 1968 saw Moreno's PRT (Verdad) - named after their journal - line up with the SWP(US) in the Leninist Trotskyist Faction to oppose the International Majority Tendency's (IMT) line on guerillism.

This belated rejection of the worst excesses of the USFI's disastrous guerilla adventure, which led to the annihilation of the cadres of the PRT/ERP in the 1970s, did not herald any change in Moreno's opportunist politics. Like the SWP(US) it represented an electoralist, rightist reaction to adventurism not a revolutionary critique of it.

By 1972 Moreno had found a new, Social Democratic, group to fuse with led by a long time reformist, Juan Carlos Coral of the Socialist Party of Argentina (PSA). The fusion programme of what became the PST, was printed in the 13 November 1972 *Intercontinental Press*. In an accompanying interview Moreno optimistically described the new party as "95% Trotskyist". In fact it put forward a democratic rather than a transitional programme, dressed up in revolutionary verbiage. It rejected any outside control or direction - from the USFI - it called for the "Democratisation of the armed forces" and the end of "their use in the service of capital". Was this wretched formulation part of the 95% Trotskyism or part of the 5% something else? It called for the:

"building of a great socialist party, a revolutionary workers' party deeply rooted in the realities of the nation in solidarity with the socialist movement (unspecified) of Latin America and the World."

Far from being a revolutionary workers' party the PST was to distinguish itself by its fawning opportunism towards Peronism, which was on the verge of its 'second coming'. Having participated in the Grand National Accord of General Lannusse, which aimed at a carefully controlled return to a restricted democracy, *Avanzada*

Socialista (the PST's paper) on 8 November 1972, went on to comment on Peron's imminent return:

"Why is Peron coming? Hopefully it will be to impose fighting workers candidates and not to make deals with the oligarchy."

Some hope!

In the last period of Peron's government the PST became a craven defender of "institutionalisation", that is of the existing bourgeois democratic system. In March 1974, in a situation of increasing right-wing killings and left wing guerilla activity, the PST was drawn into an accord with six bourgeois parties and the CP, in the presence of General Peron (the PST represented by Coral), which promised to adhere to "the institutional process", that is to renounce revolutionary struggle. It took *Avanzada Socialista* three months, under pressure from the International Majority Tendency, to announce both that this was a mistake (!) and that they had in fact not signed it!

Signed or not, their agreement to this perspective was clear. After one (of many) meetings in the Governmental Palace, Juan Carlos Coral is quoted as saying to Isabel Peron, then president following the death of Juan Peron:

"The PST declares its categorical opposition to a coup d'etat and the violence in the form of terrorism and guerilla activity which although with different motives are equal in provoking coups and thus stand in opposition to the democratic demands of the masses. We have no illusion that we can change the policy of the government by speeches but surely you Senora Presidente and your ministers have taken note of some of our observations." (15 October 1974 *Avanzada Socialista*)

This scandalous equating of the 'left' Peronist and ERP guerilla forces with the right wing death squads was only equalled by the PST's response to Videla's coup when it actually came on 24 March 1976 - a coup that was to lead to 30,000 dead and 'disappeared' Argentinians.

"We are in the presence of the most democratic military government in Latin America. It was impossible to wait for another nine months in this situation of nightmare until the election took place. The whole people were crying out against the government (of Isabel Peron - WP). The eruption of the 24th March (Videla's coup - WP) can be traced to these causes. Despite the principled objections that any healthy democratic person would raise against military coups or any concrete judgement of the measures of the present government it is a fact that the military carried



Moreno

out in their own way what the popular wave of anti-government discontent was unable to do because of the defection of its leadership." (*Cambio* No.1)

What could this mean other than that the dictatorship of Videla was progressive!

ADAPTION

The history of Moreno's current, which proceeded to suffer the same terrible repression as the rest of the left under the military dictatorship, was one of chronic adaption to bourgeois nationalism combined with electoral cretinism. While any group or party can make mistakes, and in the last years of his life Nahuel Moreno made a virtue out of plaintively admitting some of them, these were not isolated mistakes. They were systematic errors, codified into a method - a rotten centrist method.

By 1976 Moreno had parted with his erstwhile allies in the LTT, the SWP(US), following differences over the Portuguese revolution. He formed the Bolshevik Tendency which later became the Bolshevik Faction. The events in Nicaragua in 1979 were finally to lead to a break between Moreno's current and the USFI (See *Workers Power* No.11 December 1979 for an analysis of the split).

Although on the question of defence of the need to build a section of the Fourth International in Nicaragua the Bolshevik Faction appeared to take a 'left' position, in practice the political basis of its intervention in Nicaragua was its same old adaptionist politics. Their claim to have raised the banner of Trotskyism and the

Fourth International in Nicaragua is a complete fraud.

The Simon Bolivar Brigade's (SBB) declaration that it was "under the leadership of the Sandinista Front" meant not only under its military discipline. The open letter for its establishment declared that the "only programmatic point of the SBB is to support the struggle of the Sandinista people" (our emphasis). Their call for a "Sandinista government without capitalists" could only mean - in the absence of a call for a workers' and peasants' government and the struggle for the expropriation of the capitalists, cancellation of the foreign debt, land to the tillers and so forth - a call for a government of the FSLN, committed as it was to defending "mixed economy" capitalism.

The call for a Sandinista government was of course accompanied by references to the "glorious years of Castroism" (whenever they were!) and the call for "a federation of Nicaragua and Cuba". Certainly the SBB clashed quickly with the Sandinistas. But this said more about the FSLN's reaction to independent trade union organisation on the Atlantic coast where the SBB were organising, than about the SBB's "intransigence".

ILL-FATED

Since the formation of the IWL(FI) after the Bolshevik Faction's short lived and ill-fated fusion with Pierre Lambert's OCRFI (see *Workers Power* Nos.22 and 29 for analysis of this sorry saga) its major section in Argentina had carried on its tradition of opportunism. In 1983 after the defeat of Argentina by the British imperialists in the Malvinas War, the dictatorship was forced by a rising struggle of the workers to manoeuvre a cautious and controlled return to bourgeois democracy.

The PST characteristically declared this stage an electoral one and fused with an ostensibly social democratic current the 'Movement Towards Socialism' (MAS) led by one Visconti. For those who now claim that the MAS is a Trotskyist party it is worth citing Moreno's own presentation of the tactic for founding the MAS. He said that the fusion aimed to create

"a reformist, non-revolutionary front or party, and that is how we must intervene" (IB No.5 of the LST, French Section of the IWL - Letter from Moreno to the Central Committee of the PST).

Moreno saw Visconti's reformist politics as something that

"reflects the low political level and the confused reformist consciousness of vast sections of the mass movement who are moving towards the new party".

Presumably 'Trotskyism' would at a later stage permeate and transform this mass reformist party into a revolutionary one. However this project aimed entirely at the elections was poorly rewarded - the masses preferred the traditional parties or the Peronists and the MAS received only 50,000 votes instead of the 500,000 confidently predicted by Moreno.

Recently Moreno has claimed that Visconti was all along a member of the PST, a long term political collaborator and that the MAS is a Trotskyist party. This double-talk and double-think is typical of a centrism without strategy or principles.

PEOPLE'S FRONT

Over the last year the MAS has been assiduously courting the Stalinists of the Argentinian Communist Party. A recent letter of greeting to the CP Congress refers to "the great tool we are building together: the People's Front". This 'people's front' is indeed a bloc of all classes on a reformist programme.

An article by Lutte Ouvriere militants who were working in the MAS (*Class Struggle* No.1 July 1986) reveals that in the November 1985 congressional elections, the "People's Front" (FREPU) lists were headed by the 'rank and file' or 'combative' Peronist grouplets, splits from the main Peronist Parties. One is obliged to ask what sort of Trotskyism is it that repeatedly and systematically espouses popular fronts with bourgeois and petit-bourgeois nationalist forces?

On an international level the IWL(FI) pursues an identical course, searching for "revolutionary fronts on a national and international scale". The fact that "Trotskyists will surely be a minority in this International does not bother us at all" (*Manifesto of the IWL(FI)* 1985). Indeed why should it? If it is possible to repeat on a world scale the rotten blocs, centrist combinations and popular fronts constructed by Moreno's party in Argentina so much the better.

EXAGGERATION

In Britain today certain leaders of the WRP are hailing Nahuel Moreno as someone who built a party with tens of thousands of workers. It is certainly true, leaving aside the chronic exaggerations that the Argentinian PST/MAS is prone to, that in the conditions of Argentina, and indeed in many countries of the crisis wracked Latin American continent, it is possible to win workers to what appears to be a revolutionary banner.

But the growth of centrism does no service to the working class and its struggle for power. It was not for nothing that Trotsky in the revolutionary crisis in Spain, conducted a bitter political struggle against Andre Nin and the POUM, once it was clear that the POUM was an incorrigibly centrist organisation.

The whole history of Lenin's struggle within the Russian Social Democratic and Labour Party and within the Second International and of Trotsky's struggle against Stalinism in the Third International proves that centrists, no more than reformists, can lead a successful socialist revolution and establish the dictatorship of the proletariat based on soviet democracy. That same history gives many examples - Italian maximalism, the Chinese Communist Party in 1927, the POUM in Spain - where leadership or influence of centrism can lead to bloody defeat for the workers' movement. ■

by Diego Mocar & Stuart King



The Simon Bolivar brigade in Nicaragua

CHINA

THERE ARE MOUNTING signs that the process of economic reform embarked on by the Chinese eight years ago is provoking ever sharper conflicts within the bureaucracy.

The overall direction of the reform has been to promote market relations in agriculture and economic self sufficiency for industrial enterprises. Yet this in turn has weakened the political rule of the central party apparatus. As the problems engendered by the reforms have accumulated so key sections of the bureaucracy are moving to reverse elements of the reforms and reassert their social, political and ideological grip.

The present crisis in China has its roots in the fundamental contradictions that exist between the political rule of the parasitic bureaucracy and the economic mechanisms that it has encouraged in the light of its inability to sustain the development of Chinese agriculture and industry. Under the leadership of Deng Xiaoping, structural economic reforms were begun in the countryside in 1979. In the hope of boosting agricultural production the People's Communes were decollectivised and the land divided under a family responsibility system. Under that system each family is allocated an annual contract to produce a state quota.

As long as the quota is fulfilled,

the family is free to grow whatever it wants and sell it on private markets. In some rural areas, there is no longer even a state quota.

The family responsibility system has benefited the rich peasants most as they can afford the investments needed for higher yields. It has also led to the neglect of large scale projects like hydro schemes which generally benefit poorer peasants. Rich peasants are said to have had income increases of up to 13.7% in the last five years. There has been a mounting gap in incomes between resource rich and resource poor regions.

The changes in agriculture have caused sharply fluctuating demand and supply in certain commodities such as grain. Peasants have changed over from grain growing (in spite of a subsidy in grain price) to cash and industrial crops which fetch higher prices. The 60,000 free markets now sell more food than the state stores.

In the industrial sector the Central Committee approved measures in 1984 which under the director responsibility system removed the direct control of plant party secretaries and party committees. The Party secretary's responsibilities were limited to the sphere of "ideological and political work". The scheme freed industrial

management from interference by the party and state authorities on matters of funding, access to raw materials and marketing of the produce. The factory director responsibility system now operates in over 27,000 enterprises, one third of the entire state-owned industrial and transport sectors.

The director's job was now to administer enterprises which were to be responsible for all their profits and losses. Just as in the agricultural sector the mechanisms of the market were to be markedly strengthened. Chinese management was to be forced to emulate many of the features of the capitalist market economy.

Reports in the Chinese media about the Kaifeng Electrical Machinery state-owned enterprise shows how the new system works. Pay and bonuses are now linked with work and piecework was introduced. There was an overall reduction of the number of workers. There were wage cuts of 20-40% for elderly, weak, sick and disabled workers. The Kaifeng Electrical Machinery Enterprise made 2 million Renminbi (Rmb) profit in 1985.

In order to strengthen management authority new labour laws were promulgated in October 1986. The new labour contract system, which covers 80% of all new state employees allows mobility of labour, especially skilled labour, between enterprises and localities. The new laws systematised the procedure for recruitment and dismissal as well as establishing a new unemployment and retirement insurance system to sweeten the pill. Most important of all they give management the right to hire and fire.

POOR ATTITUDE

There is now a specified list of dismissible offences, for example, having a poor attitude to service. Previously the state Personnel and Labour departments allocated people to work in units, usually for life. There is now a labour market based on supply and demand. It allows management to deal with 'over manning', i.e. to make redundancies.

For the workers, there has not been such a significant rise in their standard of living as in the rural areas. In urban areas increased agricultural prices and the free market have meant a higher cost of living and inflation, said to be in double figures, higher rents and increased unemployment, particularly for youth.

Private enterprise and private



Deng Xiaoping and Hu Yaobang

VIETNAM

LATE LAST YEAR the Sixth Congress of the Vietnamese Communist Party (VCP) saw a major change over in the top leadership. No less than seven members of the political bureau 'retired' at the congress. Three of the VCP's long-standing leaders, Truong Chinh, Pham Van Dong and Le Duc Tho were among those who retired. These leaders of the 'old guard' were replaced by a rival faction led by Nguyen Van Linh rooted primarily in the southern part of the country.

This faction has a programme of extensive economic reform and fought under the slogan: "The North won the war. The South must manage the economy". It has clearly been influenced by the triumph of the Gorbachev faction in Moscow. But it is primarily a product of Vietnam's internal economic difficulties.

These problems are of course partly the product of the US inspired economic blockade of the country that cut it off from foreign loans, trade and even the aid and relief agencies. But the crises and dislocations of the planned economy are not solely to be laid at the door of the US. Now a faction of the VCP has been obliged to identify an important cause of the crisis in the rampant corruption and mismanagement of the bureaucratic caste that runs

the statified economy, and like Gorbachev call for more openness and accountability. In no way do these elements challenge the rule of the bureaucracy itself however.

The bureaucracy came to power in the North in 1954 and in the South twenty one years later. It did so by leading the masses in the national independence wars against French and then United States Imperialism. These victories led to the flight and expropriation of the weak Vietnamese bourgeoisie and the local agents of the Imperialist corporations. The VCP however did not lead the masses to the conscious overthrow of capitalism and its replacement by a state based on the democracy of workers' and peasants' councils. Rather it seized total political power for itself first of all and demobilised and atomised the workers' and peasants' movement. Then, against its original intentions and proclaimed programme, it carried out the nationalisation of trade and industry and its centralisation into a planned economy. It did this under the pressures of internal and external counter-revolution. Thus - despite the historic gains of the expulsion of Imperialism, the expropriation of the bourgeoisie and the creation of a planned economy, the Vietnamese proletariat and poor were robbed of workers' democracy and consequently robbed

of the ability to direct planning towards socialist reconstruction.

The bureaucratic caste has directed the planned economy towards maximising its own privileges and its own arbitrary power. But this parasitism has thrown the already weak and war ravaged economy into deeper and deeper crises. The VCP reformists wish to ameliorate these contradictions without actually abandoning the rule of the bureaucracy. Just as Gorbachev has done, they have had to launch an attack on the elements of the bureaucracy most associated with corruption, privilege and tyrannical excesses. To appeal to a section of the working class and the intelligentsia the 'pragmatists', as the western press calls them, have launched a campaign for the Vietnamese equivalent to 'glasnost' - open public criticism - especially or rather exclusively of the much weakened 'old guard'.

OUTGOING

The elderly outgoing leader Truong Chinh, in a speech that was broadcast live to the whole nation, declared at the Congress that serious errors in economic policy had to be openly criticised. Moreover, that criticism had to be levelled against himself and the old leadership:

"Responsibility for these shortcomings and mistakes rests first of all with the party Central Committee, Political Bureau, Secretariat and with the Cabinet."

Stalinism's

ownership were made legal in 1982. In the first half of 1986, the number of private enterprises registered with China's State Administration for Industry and Commerce (SAIC) grew from 2.6 million to 11.34 million. This is still numerically small. In cities the number of privately employed workers make up only 1% of China's 476 million workforce. However they provide essential services mainly in tertiary industries such as retail sales, catering and transport.

In order to codify the impact of the various economic reforms last year's National People's Congress adopted a basic legal framework regulating internal and external economic relationships. One third of the articles were devoted to defining the legal status of different economic entities and their property rights.

Private ownership of the means of production is protected by law and may not arbitrarily be seized or interfered with by any person or organisation. State and collective enterprises are conferred the right to manage state property and to liquidate that enterprise should it prove unprofitable.

The country's financial institutions have also undergone a major restructuring. In 1983 the handling of circulating capital was taken out of the hands of government departments. The monopoly on foreign exchange was taken from the state bank and into the hands of regional and special banks in a bid to encourage competitive banking and the money market. 80% of the capital investment in state enterprises used to come from the state budget. Now enterprises are encouraged to raise funds on the credit market. The Peking Economic Daily reported that as a result of these measures enterprises and government departments in 1985 held their own funds of 140 Rmb, equivalent to 80% of the entire budgeted state revenue.

As well as strengthening capitalist mechanisms internally the Chinese bureaucracy has also been pursuing an 'open door' policy to foreign capital. This too was introduced as a means of modernising the Chinese economy. As recently as October 1986 this tendency was still being strengthened. At this time measures to reduce bureaucratic control and guarantee managerial autonomy for all foreign investors were announced. A

foreign-investment steering commission was created. Some of the measures included the remitted profits and full tax refunds on profits reinvested for not less than 5 years, and the lowering of income tax paid by export enterprises in the special economic zones and other specially designated zones from 15% to 10%. It gave the foreign investors the freedom to hire and fire, to determine salaries, make planning decisions, raise funds, and to trade foreign exchange among themselves.

The Seventh Five Year Plan for the years 1986-90, passed by the National People's Congress in 1986, has as its theme - "Drive to Modernisation". The Plan deletes any previous reference to "socialist modernisation" and replaces it instead with a "socialist commodity economy based on public ownership". The Plan envisages most Chinese enterprises to be economically independent entities responsible for their own profits and losses by the end of the five year period. They will be given more autonomy so that they can "accumulate funds, update their technology and raise productivity". There will be price reforms and a shift of the government's role from one of direct to indirect control in various economic fronts. The Plan merely confirmed the line taken by Deng's faction in the bureaucracy in the last 5 years.

COUNTERPART

The ideological counterpart of Deng's course was to be seen in the relative relaxation of the party's ideological control particularly over the intelligentsia. Deng's designated party general secretary, Hu Yaobang, sanctioned a party line that openly argued at times that Marxism was outmoded and in need of "enrichment". Mao had also made mistakes while other previously unrecognised sources of inspiration including, quite consistently, Bukharin were now acknowledged.

The package of economic, political and ideological reforms was by its very nature charged with contradictions. It significantly undermined the political base of the very party bureaucracy that instigated it as market mechanisms increasingly replaced party and state dictat. It had a similar

to work clearing out his opponents from key positions at all levels. The party daily *Nhan Dan* reported in February that 190,000 members had been expelled over the last ten years, but that this was not enough! It set a ten week timetable of struggle against 'negative phenomena' namely all those in the party who had:

"... taken advantage of their authority and positions to confer special perogatives and privileges and to oppress the masses".

The paper roundly condemned the old leadership for failing to keep theory abreast of practice - a clear attack on the 'heavy industry' brigade in the bureaucracy. Criticism was followed up with action. Twelve former ministers were dismissed from the Council of Ministers, including the present leader of the 'old guard' Pham Hung.

CRISIS

The hand of the 'reformers' has been strengthened by the mounting crisis of the bureaucratically planned economy itself. The massive amounts of Soviet aid in energy projects and heavy industry have not produced any tangible results. Indeed it is now officially admitted that this aid has been 'frittered away'. Inflation is rampant, running currently at 700%, but having reached 1000% last year when a currency reform engineered by an old guard leader, To Huu (now retired) went disastrously wrong.

Crisis in Asia



Burning copies of the Peoples Daily during the New Year student demonstration

effect on the ideological front where the party leadership's monopoly of wisdom was undermined. Moreover the economic reforms created severe disproportionalities within the internal economy and alarming results from the 'open door' honeymoon with foreign capital.

By allowing a degree of the market economy to operate in China the bureaucracy has unleashed a form of boom-slump cycle. 1985 saw an investment boom that took place outside

central government control. It occurred despite leadership policies and regulations designed to hold industrial growth down to manageable levels.

Foreign capital proved that it had no interest in investing in the rounded development of the Chinese economy. 1985 saw a drastic deficit on visible trade of 114.9 billion US dollars. This was equivalent to more than half the total value of exports last year. 1986 also saw a foreign exchange crisis as the hyper growth resulted

in increase in aggregate demand for foreign exchange for capital investment and the import of raw materials and components. Increased earnings, particularly in the countryside, boosted demands for imported consumer products such as TVs, cars, calculators and cassettes.

The foreign exchange problem was compounded by a slide in oil prices. Oil made up 28% of foreign earnings in 1985. Some joint ventures were put into jeopardy because of a lack of foreign funding, e.g. the US jeep plant in Peking had to be rescued by special funding from the state. The bureaucracy is faced with the choice of letting market forces control funding supply and excess investment though it would make many state enterprises bankrupt. In July 1986 the Reminbel was sharply devalued overnight from US\$1 : 3.19Rmb to US\$1 : 3.69 Rmb - a fall of 13.6%, in the latest effort to ease foreign-exchange problems.

In addition to crisis on the economic front late 1986 saw a revival of Chinese student mobilisations doubtless in part because of the relaxation of party control over literary and academic debate. In all probability elements within the bureaucracy were prepared to encourage and tolerate the demonstrations for their own ends.

In the big character posters put up during December and January, there were demands for a multi-party system. This was raised against the Four Basic Principles that the CP saw as being the limits to dissent (to uphold the socialist road, the democratic dictatorship of the people, the leadership of the CP and Marxism-Leninism-Mao Tsetung thought). It was as a challenge to the right of the CP to nominate the candidates to the Anhui provincial party congress that the first student demonstration took place in Hefei.

Other demands were more general e.g. for freedom - freedom of press and association, freedom of demonstration. The students were inspired by the overthrow of Marcos and the Philippines and the French student movement. Students and intellectuals are the elite of Chinese society. Though most of the students are the children of privileged CP cadres and officials, the new mandarins, they do have grievances such as unemployment after graduation if they wish to stay in the cities or being allocated to posts in distant rural areas; high registration fees, insufficient grant and no independent student unions. However not all the demonstrators were in the "distinctly socialist, egalitarian and

anti-capitalist" spirit recently described by Ernest Mandel (*International Viewpoint* 9.2.87).

That this is the case is highlighted by the nature of the politics of Fang Lizhi, vice president of the University of Science and Technology in Hefei, Anhui, and hero of disaffected students throughout China. He was dismissed from his post by the CCP Central Committee and expelled from the Communist Party for promoting westernisation. He supported the students' demand to nominate their own candidates not in the "socialist, egalitarian and anti-capitalist" spirit, but because he is an elitist. Fang has been a prominent advocate of greater intellectual freedom. In an interview with *Shanghai World Economic Herald* in November, the main thrust of his remarks was that intellectuals in China have failed to achieve their proper status:

"In society today, knowledge and information represent the most advanced productive forces . . . since these forces are controlled by intellectuals, it is natural that intellectuals should be the leading force in society."

His opposition to the Four Basic Principles - the leadership of the CCP - is not based on opposition to their bureaucratic rule but based on the assumption of intellectual superiority of academics.

REPLACEMENT

The heightened factional stress within the bureaucracy was highlighted by the unceremonious ousting of Deng's General Secretary Hu Yaobang and his replacement by Zhao Ziyang. Both Hu and Zhao were appointed to their positions in 1978 as proteges of the twice-purged Deng Xiaoping when he returned to power after the downfall of the Gang of Four. Premier Zhao is the architect of the economic reforms currently sweeping through China. Sichuan, where he was Party Secretary, was where the agricultural responsibility system was first initiated.

Ranged against Deng is a strong coalition headed by such old guard Stalinists as Chen Yun and Peng Zhen, 81 and 84 years old respectively. In the Party National Conference in 1985, Chen was outspoken in his criticism of Deng's reform measures for their lack of central planning and excessive reliance on the market mechanism in the economy. He pointed out that

"regulation by the market i.e. no planning, means production according to the changes of

supply and demand of the market, and such regulation is 'blind'. Planning is the main foundation of macroscopic control. Only with good macroscopic control . . . can the economy be active but not chaotic." (*October Review* Vol.12 No.11)

Peng also argued for a return to the system of Party control and bureaucratic planning of the 1950s. The views of Chen and Peng are popular with party cadres in the bureaucracy because Deng's economic reforms took control from them and threaten to undercut their power and privileges.

Since the student demonstrations in December and January, Peng and Chen have added their weight to the criticisms and denunciations of "spiritual pollution" which is seen as being the result of bourgeois liberalisation and the opening up to western influence. Peng, echoing Mao's first shot in the Cultural Revolution, said in a New Year speech that

"our intellectuals, including our literary and art workers, should serve the people and socialism." (Far Eastern Economic Review - FEER - 12.2.87)

This was a coded attack on bourgeois liberalisation though he was careful not to rule out completely the open door policy.

"We must stick to the policy of opening up to the outside world (despite) casting aside the capitalist system which upholds exploitation and oppression." (FEER 5.2.87)

Since the ousting of Hu Yaobang the more conservative elements within the bureaucracy have become increasingly confident. Peng Zhen has been calling for a return to more orthodox Marxist guidelines while President Li Xiannian has pointed to dangers that the open door will mean that "our industry will not grow". The agricultural reforms have also come under attack with *Peoples Daily* worrying openly that the new rural wealth is being squandered rather than invested. As it put it recently

"farmers have spent a lot of money building new homes and many of them even used their hard earned money to build temples and tombs and carry out superstitious activities." (Financial Times 23.2.87)

Under this pressure Deng and Zhao Ziyang have been forced to endorse a campaign against 'bourgeois liberalisation'. Deng is no stranger to repression. His return to power was secured during the Chinese Spring of 1979-81 when the anti-bureaucratic democracy movement flourished. Once in com-

continued on page 8

The current foreign debt of 6 billion dollars has doubled since 1981. While rice production has increased since the crop failures of 1979, it is still not reaching a level that can guarantee sufficient food for the Vietnamese masses. The regime's leading economic spokesman and chairman of the State Planning Commission, Vo Van Kiet summed up Vietnam's plight in fairly bleak terms:

"... the economic situation in our country is still rife with difficulties such as unemployment, waste of materials, shortages of raw materials and serious economic phenomena".

The 'phenomena' of course, are the chronic shortages of food and consumer goods.

The increasingly dominant reforming wing in the VCP couch their programme in terms deliberately designed to enlist the support of the masses. They declare their chief enemy to be, in Van Linh's words "the bureaucratism and centralised mechanisms". Their chief task, again using Van Linh's own words is a "complete and radical renovation". But what is the content of this programme? Experience in various degenerated workers' states has been of oscillations between tight centralised management of the economy - producing crises of disproportionality between different sectors of industry, and alienating a workforce coerced into meeting unrealistic plan targets - and decentralisation - the encouragement of market competition and even the introduction of small scale private enterprise ventures.

Neither of these options can break the cycle of crises that characterise the economies of the workers' states. Neither have ever been able to raise the productivity of labour to a consistent level anything like that necessary to effect the transition to socialism. Indeed both centralised coercion and market mechanisms tend to undermine the bureaucracy. The first turns it into a rigid monolithic caste whose privileges are the object of justifiable indignation and whose rule and repression are hated by the masses. The alternative 'market socialism' course, lays the economy open to capitalist restorationist tendencies which are enormously strengthened by decentralisation drives. The bureaucracy itself tends to become fragmented as the central planning authority weakens.

OSCILLATION

The Van Linh faction represents an oscillation towards decentralisation. The specific impulse in Vietnam towards a more 'competitive' economy is the disparity between the North, a degenerate workers' state since 1955, and the South where a relatively well developed capitalist economy existed until 1976. Though now integrated into the planned economy, Saigon (now Ho Chi Minh City) has many of the features of the economy as it existed prior to 1976, particularly at the level of small scale private enterprises. The Van Linh faction believe that only

decentralisation can overcome the disparity that still exists between North and South. The North, in his perspective, will be compelled to emulate the South's entrepreneurial traditions.

The key elements of Van Linh's programme are a turn away from large scale heavy industry and the collectivisation of agriculture and a turn to food and consumer goods production carried through by state enterprises with autonomous managers or by small private enterprises. The latter are to be encouraged via the system of Khoan pioneered by Van Linh in the South in 1981. This is basically an incentive scheme whereby private farmers or enterprises sell a quarter of their produce to the state at a fixed price and are then allowed to sell the remainder of their produce on the open market at prices determined in the market, not by the state.

Applied within state industry this policy will translate itself into a piece-work system that would facilitate the creation of a labour aristocratic stratum that could serve as a social base for the bureaucracy. Van Linh favourably describes these measures as "socialist cost-accounting" combined with "business activities". The combination is meant to solve the economic crisis. For good measure he is also proposing breaking the state monopoly of foreign trade by giving provinces the right to import and export goods as they see fit.

Not surprisingly these 'reform-

ing' policies at home are matched by an increasing willingness by Vietnam to seek a deal on Kampuchea with the pro-Imperialist states of the region. Vietnam will consider a compromise with Imperialism that it believes will guarantee its own security. The Vietnamese Stalinists are not strategically committed to keeping Kampuchea a workers' state. This much is clear from the willingness of the VCP to negotiate with all elements of the opposition coalition 'except the Pol Pot clique' - that is except Pol Pot and his immediate supporters.

SIHANOUK

This means they are prepared to talk to Prince Sihanouk and the openly pro-Imperialist elements in alliance with him. The recent border clashes with China however demonstrate that Vietnam is no pushover on this question. The VCP knows full well that their military dominance in Indochina needs to be maintained to deter any future Kampuchean government from repeating the 1978 war. But they would be prepared to do a deal on Kampuchea if their security conditions can be met. Additionally the Van Linh faction know that the costs of the occupation cannot be maintained indefinitely, and in the absence of a stable social base for the pro-Vietnam Heng Samrin regime they might be obliged to go for another option.

To the extent that the reformer's are successful the gains won in the long struggle against imperialism will all be jeopardised.

Decentralisation, the profit motive, small scale capitalism and piece-work are concessions to capitalism not steps forward to socialism.

The weakening of the economy will not be reversed by these measures, though temporary gains may strengthen the prestige of the Van Linh faction. But a return to the old guard's bureaucratic centralism is no answer either. Its mismanagement of the economy has left the country in its present mess.

The best elements of the Vietnamese proletariat must chart a course independent of either the 'old guard' or the reformers and must win the poor peasants to this course. They must demand more than open criticism and an end to corruption and privilege. They must demand workers' democracy and accountability which will make privilege and bureaucratic arbitrariness impossible. Only with the conscious participation of the masses in a democratically decided upon but centrally directed plan can the forces of capitalism in Vietnam be controlled and defeated. To bring this massive change about a political revolution that will deprive the bureaucracy of its usurped power is necessary. The bloodily severed traditions of Trotskyism, once a powerful force in Vietnam, must be restored by the creation of a new party dedicated to the political revolution and to the expansion of the social revolution into capitalist South-East Asia. The possibility is again raised by the crisis of Stalinism in Vietnam.

by Mark Hoshisson

WORKERS FIGHT PASOK'S AUSTERITY

GREECE HAS BEEN shaken by four general strikes since Andreas Papandreou's government imposed an austerity package last October. There have been three general strikes this year as well as a wave of student occupations of the colleges. In this situation of intensifying class battles the bosses and international bankers are firmly behind Papandreou. Against them it is vital that the energy and anger of the workers is not frittered away in rounds of one day actions that never bring the struggle to a head.

Papandreou's Panhellenic Socialist Movement (PASOK) came to power in 1981 after decades of right-wing government and a military dictatorship. It was formed by a group around Papandreou in the pre-dictatorship Centre Union Party of his father. It grew at the expense of the liberal centre party (FDHK) in the late 1970s. Its electoral base was not to be found among the central core of the Greek industrial working class who were and remain principally organised by the pro-Moscow Greek Communist Party (KKE-Exterior, as opposed to the smaller Euro-communist KKE-Interior). PASOK's votes came primarily from the extremely large Greek petit bourgeoisie of small shopkeepers, artisans, lower ranking state employees and small farmers.

NATIONALIST

PASOK's politics in the 1977 and 1981 elections combined promises to aid agricultural co-operatives and to extend nationalisation with a nationalist campaign for 'Greece to the Greeks'. Its nationalist demagoguery was laced with anti-Turkish chauvinism and promises to withdraw from NATO and negotiate the closure of US bases in Greece.

As a party PASOK has remained very much the personal property of Papandreou himself. Not only have left-wingers such as the British Militant's counterpart around the paper *Xekinema* been expelled. So too has every major politician or trade union leader who has

crossed Papandreou's path. Besides Papandreou only one member of the 1981 government remains in office - the actress Melina Mercouri.

All of these factors indicate the specific nature of PASOK as a party. Despite having a social-democratic wing within it, it is not a social-democratic party like, say, the Labour Party or the German SPD. It is far closer in character to Ecevit's former Republican People's Party in Turkey or Garcia's Aprista party in Peru. In other words it is a petit-bourgeois populist party, not a reformist workers' party. The reformist party that bases itself in the central core of the Greek industrial proletariat is the KKE (Exterior).

Papandreou's government inherited an underdeveloped capitalism which had just joined the EEC. Greek agriculture is still overwhelmingly dominated by small family units. In the sphere of manufacture large scale enterprises are relatively few compared with the preponderance of small family units. Of its economically active citizens only 45% or 3 million are actually wage earners. While the economy grew in the 1960s and 1970s at 5-6% annually after an influx of foreign capital, the World Bank still places Greece in the 'intermediate income' category along with Brazil and the Philippines.

Anticipating prosperity as brokers with the oil rich Middle East, PASOK presumed that Greek capitalism could afford reforms to raise living standards and that it required a degree of limited protective nationalisation. Hence the popular appeal of its promises to

stand up to the EEC and NATO and improve living standards at home. The chickens have come home to roost for PASOK as world oil prices dropped, as the damaging effects of EEC membership on Greek agriculture became clearer and as Greece's indebtedness increased. Its populism proved as thin as Ecevit's did, in the crisis that wracked Turkey in 1979-80, when the vote-buying reforms were ditched in favour of a massive austerity drive.

Initially the PASOK government did introduce reforms. In November 1981 a sliding scale of wages was legislated for to protect wage levels from erosion at the hands of inflation. Some small scale nationalisations were effected in the construction industry and of Niarchos Shipbuilding. Legislation was passed for sex equality and civil marriage rights. Yet as the bonanza days for Greek capitalism failed to materialise so the pace of concessions was at first slowed down and then reversed.

BUTRESSED

The first two years of PASOK government were buttressed by mounting foreign debts to the tune of \$15 billion. EEC membership at the same time was having a disastrous effect on Greece's small scale agricultural sector. Rather than opening an anticipated lucrative market for Greek agricultural produce in Western Europe, precisely the opposite happened. The agricultural trading balance went from surplus to a deficit of \$3 billion. Inflation leapt to 25% per annum.

As Greek capitalism's ailments

piled up so Papandreou unleashed a stark austerity package on the Greek working class after a second electoral victory in 1985. In October 1986 he imposed a two year wage freeze and announced the termination of the cost of living sliding scale agreement. A temporary price freeze was terminated on 2 February. Having regained power on a platform of opposition to monetarism PASOK unleashed monetarism against the working class. Crack militarised police - the MAT - were sent in to break student occupations and demonstrations resulting in the death of one young demonstrator on Exarcheion Square in Athens last November.



The defender of 'Greece for the Greeks' also did a sharp about turn on foreign policy. In January 1987 Papandreou announced that Greece was staying in NATO and would negotiate the continuation of US bases as long as Greece stood to benefit. The threat of a Turkish invasion was given as the excuse for requiring American protection!

The Greek working class has shown its determined opposition to the austerity package and forced its leaders to act. Since 1983 the major trade union federation - the Confederation of Greek Workers (GSSE) - has been led by PASOK who had 26 places on its 45 seat council compared with the 17 places held by the KKE (Exterior). The KKE also maintains its own trade union federation and controls Athens Trades Council. In November a majority of the GSSE (including several PASOK members) voted for a general strike against austerity which Greece's two and a half million organised workers backed unanimously. Taxi drivers joined in, in many areas troops refused to carry out strike breaking activities and the student movement rallied to the workers.

The trade union leaders were not prepared to deploy the massive show of strength to force Papandreou to drop his plans. They never intended any more than a two day show of opposition which Papandreou was easily able to sit out. Immediately afterwards the pro-strike PASOK trade union leaders were summarily expelled from his party. The courts and the Ministry of Labour imposed a new set of pro-Government leaders on the GSSE. The ex-PASOK leaders found themselves, like the KKE, with their own federation.

Papandreou's failure to budget and the increasing burden of hardship for the working class has forced three more general strikes

this year. Even the new GSSE leaders have been forced to support token stoppages for fear of losing all credibility in comparison with the KKE and ex-PASOK trade unionists. But the GSSE leaders are appointees of Papandreou and only act in order to take the teeth out of any opposition to his government. They are PASOK's loyal stooges. Their treacherous calls for one day strikes threaten to exhaust the workers who are largely encouraged to sit out the action at home.

While the ex-PASOK and KKE unions talk of stronger stuff they are still hoping these actions will persuade Papandreou to return to the 'true' PASOK path or, in the KKE's case, help get them into a left coalition government.

Once again the parallels with Turkey are striking and alarming. The Turkish Stalinists, the TKP, pinned their hopes on a left coalition with progressive elements in Ecevit's RPP right up to the day the Turkish military seized power and set about crushing the workers' organisations. In Greece today the KKE (Exterior), despite the recent militant muscle flexing, hold to a similar populist frontist strategy that risks leading the working class in Greece to a terrible defeat.

NO PATH

None of the leaderships within the union federations offer a path of decisive organised action for an all out general strike to defend workers' living standards and force the bosses and the rich to pay for the credits by securing a sliding scale of wages and an end to the wage freeze.

There are real dangers that under such leadership the militancy of the working class will be dissipated. And this in turn will pave the way for the Greek right and the forces of repression to be unleashed against the workers. Last October's local elections saw a collapse in PASOK's vote. This strengthened the hand of the right-wing New Democracy and the fascist National Front, with New Democracy taking the three major cities of Salonica, Athens and Piraeus. While the KKE (Exterior) gained votes and 25% registered blank ballots in the compulsory voting the right will be immeasurably strengthened if the workers' movement goes into retreat in the face of Papandreou.

WAGE FREEZE

At present the Greek bosses and international banks are backing Papandreou so long as he can give them a legal wage freeze and so long as they need the PASOK machine to tame the working class. But should Papandreou fail, or should they no longer need PASOK's populism as a disguise for their austerity programme, then they will reach for their traditional right-wing party and the forces of repression that they control.

Papandreou likes to talk of the 'Turkish threat'. In reality the 'Turkish threat' facing Greek workers and students is that if they do not mobilise for victory against Papandreou and the bosses they will be at the receiving end of the same bloody repression as their class brothers and sisters in Turkey. ■

by Dave Hughes



Demonstration during January general strike

➤ continued from page 7

plete control, he immediately turned and removed the "Four Great Freedoms" - the freedom of speech, publication and demonstration from the constitution and jailed activists of the movement. He too, denounced the anarchism of the students in January. At least initially, the proclaimed target of the crack down was to be 'bourgeois liberalism' within the party itself. The bureaucracy is deeply mindful of the danger of its own internal feuds mobilising forces outside its control and unleashing deeper social and political conflict.

Zhao gave assurances that the present campaign against liberal-

isation will be limited to within the Party and that it

"should not be linked to the policies of economic reform, rural policies, scientific and technical research, exploration in literary and artistic styles and techniques, nor the daily life of the people." (FEER 12.2.87)

The balance of power between the factions will largely depend on the stance taken by the People's Liberation Army.

The army, though personally loyal to Deng, is critical of the "economic reforms". It thought Hu was over zealous in the de-bunking of Mao and excessive in the indictment of Mao's errors. It resented Deng's reduction of troop

strength by 1 million, and his reluctance to modernise the army's outdated equipment. Also, the economic reforms in the rural areas made previously prestigious army positions less attractive. The *Liberation Army Daily* insisted that "the whole army corps should also participate" in the campaign against bourgeois liberalisation in spite of Zhao's instructions.

SHOWDOWN

There seems to be a stalemate at the moment but it is expected that there will be a showdown at Fifth Plenary session of the Sixth National People's Congress in March. Meanwhile it is to be ex-

pected that there will be increasingly footdragging in the implementation of some of the "economic reforms" particularly the factory director responsibility system, a return to more central control and moves to limit consumer spending and use of foreign exchange.

The current crisis in the Chinese bureaucracy is one that cannot go unnoticed amongst the Stalinist bureaucracies of the world. The Chinese bureaucracy looked to foreign capitalism and the internal market to solve the accumulating problems of its bureaucratically planned economy. Now it finds that these self same 'remedies' are undercutting its political rule and sharpening the conflicts in its ranks. A return to

economic isolation and the old style planning may succeed in strengthening bureaucratic rule temporarily but it will not solve the problems of China's economic development. However the prospect of serious divisions in the bureaucracy and attacks on the job security of Chinese workers opens up the prospect of sharp conflicts within Chinese society. In those battles the Chinese workers must organise as an independent force with an independent revolutionary party to overthrow the parasitic bureaucracy through political revolution. Only that can open the way to a democratically centralised planned road of economic development for China. ■

by Din Wong

POLITICAL STALEMATE

FEBRUARY WITNESSED a general election in the Irish Republic, after four years of mounting cuts in wages, jobs and social services under a coalition of the big-bourgeois Finé Gael party and the small trade union based Labour Party. With the opposition populist Fianna Fail party poised to reap a majority from the anti-government feeling, the coalition partners staged a break-up in January and gave themselves the longest possible campaign period in which to whittle down the commanding lead of Charles Haughey.

Faced with extinction, Labour was compelled to declare its future 'independence' in the next parliament (Dáil) and its opposition to austerity. Garret Fitzgerald's Fine Gael spelt out its austerity plans and even challenged Haughey to examine the finance books and justify his expansionary rhetoric. Fine Gael claimed to be the only trustworthy accountant for the nation's finances and succeeded eventually in whittling down Fianna Fail's credibility in the eyes of the middle class.

MARGINAL

The result leaves Fianna Fail just short of a majority, with 81 of the 166 seats in the Dáil. Fine Gael lost 19 seats, down from 70 to 51. There was a marginal swing to Haughey in working class and small farming areas but the party failed to gain the confidence of the middle class. The one-year-old Progressive Democrats Party (four 'monetarist' defectors from Fianna Fail and one from Fine Gael) retained their seats at Haughey's expense. But they inflicted far greater damage upon Fine Gael by taking an additional 9 seats at Fitzgerald's expense, returning with 14 seats as the third party, the clearest exponent of middle class interests.

They failed, however, in their dream of decisively breaking the historic political division of the ruling class between two parties, a division which has seriously obstructed the capitalist austerity drive since 1979. The PDs may yet remain, however, a potential catalyst for a Grand Coalition in the period ahead if Haughey flounders.

The Labour Party vote collapsed from 9.4% to 6.4% but they returned with 12 seats compared to 14 outgoing, and these include two



Sinn Féin on the campaign trail

openly left-wing figures. The chronic parliamentary cretinism of the Workers Party over the past 4 years of golden opportunities in opposition, resulted in their gaining only a tiny increase - from 3.4% to 3.9%, adding two new deputies to their previous two. Labour's more favourable translation of twice as many votes into three times as many seats, compared with WP, is due to of transfers from Fine Gael, under the single transferrable vote system of proportional representation, based on past class collaboration. The results hides somewhat the severity of Labour's defeat in terms of votes, and the gains for the 'left' have strengthened their belief in a Labour revival in the future.

Nevertheless, whereas Labour alone gained 17% nationally in 1969, the total ostensible working class vote today was under 13%. This includes Workers Party and 'left' independents, community activist Gregory in Dublin, and 'Democratic Socialist' Kemmy in Limerick who both played the role in the past of supporting Haughey or Fitzgerald in power. Haughey is faced with courting them again for similar purposes. Although he can bank on the support of the ex-Labour independent, Sean Treacy (who was too catholic to support Labour's meagre reforms on divorce and contraception) and of Donegal nationalist Blaney, that still leaves him one short of a working majority.

Sinn Féin will play no role in the power brokerage, for their dismal performance of 1.9% nationally was no better now than in 1982 despite ditching abstentionism.

Their few small concentrations of votes were as much in the rural Border areas as in urban working class communities.

Left independents Gregory and Kemmy were quickly joined by the Workers Party foursome in calling on Labour for a parliamentary alliance which would co-ordinate its brokerage so as to exact concessions from Haughey while making it possible for him to govern. Labour ignored this call, not because of any aversion to wheeler-dealing with the ruling class, but for two opportunist reasons.

It fears to concede any recognition to the external challengers on the left by co-operating with them. It regards itself as the only viable party of the working class. Secondly, it recognises that there is little chance in any case of prising any real policy concessions out of a Haughey government which has already publicly been offered parliamentary support for its toughest measures by Fitzgerald 'in the national interest'. Thus, for opportunist reasons, Labour plans to take the formally principled road of opposing all other nominees for Taoiseach/Prime Minister and putting up its own leader, Dick Spring, for the post. As for the 'strengthened left' in the Labour group, when they put up an internal opponent to their present right-wing leader, they could not even get a seconder!

Now more than ever, organised workers need to be able to control the reformist politicians who claim to represent them. The co-operation of these reformists will be crucial for the capitalist parties to push through their programme

of cuts without having to sacrifice the party divisions which maximise their social dominance, their control over privileges and their overwhelming dominance of all elections.

Yet those claiming to be of the revolutionary left have repeatedly failed to tackle the twin tasks of winning workers from illusions in Fianna Fail and of mobilising them in the trade unions to place demands on the Labour Party to which the majority of the unions is affiliated - and to call to account also the other 'left' deputies. The 'far left' groups ignore these important tactical questions. They prefer to welcome the continuing decline of Labour as justified punishment, and even welcome the refurbishing of reformism in the growth of the Workers' Party. The Socialist Workers Movement (linked to the SWP) advocated a vote for the Workers' Party as a welcome and 'undoubted shift to the left'.

With complete disregard for any method of relating tactically to parties with an organic base in the working class, they and the USFI section (Peoples Democracy) called for votes for the cross-class Sinn Féin party. This was despite Sinn Féin's lack of any organic connection with the Southern working class (confirmed in the results) and despite its open disavowal of revolutionary action against the Southern state. While critical electoral support of Sinn Féin is correct in the Six Counties in the present conditions, the call for votes for Sinn Féin in this way in the South can only help create a new obstacle in the working class - a renewed faith in the kind of cross-class populism which enabled Fianna Fail in the 1920s to establish the hegemony that persists till today.

Militant Tendency, which fully supported Labour in the election canvass, was no more principled, for it fails to use its base in Labour and the unions to argue for the mobilisation of workers on an action programme which would openly place demands on the party

to break it from class collaboration. Thus it never raised the call to force Labour out of coalition in the past four years.

The Irish Workers Group alone argued the tactical need to 'Vote Labour' in the elections as a means of breaking workers from the capitalist parties and to gain the ear of the class-conscious minority of workers in the unions who, with bitterness for its recent record, still see it as their party and even believe in reforming it. Few though they be, no other party of the working class, sadly, commands the support of a larger fraction, and certainly no other reformist party has the kind of explicit relation to the unions which might allow a mobilised working class to effectively place demands on Labour which would either make it fight or remove it as the obstacle to building a party of revolutionary class struggle.

The purpose of revolutionaries in such an electoral united front with Labour, as argued by the IWG statement, is to fight to mobilise workers in the unions around an action programme of resistance to the offensive of the ruling class - in the economy, in oppressing women, and in supporting British imperialism in the north. Such a programme would necessarily place demands on Labour and the union leaders who cover for the treachery of that party time and again.

TINY FRACTION

Of course, these tactics still only relate to a tiny fraction of the working class at election times. There is repeated evidence, however, of a strong sentiment for a fighting opposition of socialists and genuine representatives of the working class movement to make a stand in the Dáil and break the mould of Irish politics along class lines. The immediate post-election talk of a united left opposition in parliament caught the imagination of many, but it quickly showed all the signs of being an opportunist manoeuvre.

The union bureaucracy, secretly preferring to deal with Fianna Fail, is already openly boasting its commitment to a process of 'national understanding' which would certainly ensure that workers will pay for the crisis. Clearly, the aspiration for working class political unity will remain the plaything of charlatans unless an action programme of real struggle is spelt out as its basis. The perilous conditions of capitalism in semi-colonial, debt-ridden southern Ireland will demand open class struggle by workers in the period ahead if workers, women and all who resist are not to pay a savage price to save this rotten system.

by a member of the Irish Workers Group

SYRIA

DEFEND THE PALESTINIANS

ON SUNDAY 22 February, 3,000 Syrian troops moved into West Beirut with the supposed mission of "restoring order" to the ravaged Lebanese capital.

Walid Jumblatt's Druze militia have been attempting to prevent the Amal achieving total dominance in Beirut, while the Amal have been doing President Assad of Syria's dirty work for nearly four months by besieging the 45,000 Palestinians in the refugee camps.

The Syrians' motive both in using Amal and in intervening directly is to prevent the Palestinian camps again becoming a base for Arafat's PLO fighters. Assad has two motives. Firstly to make sure no faction achieves such dominance within Lebanon that his own influence and role as arbiter amongst the warring communities is weakened and secondly to

prevent the PLO being able to take up their struggle against the Israeli state.

Assad has no interest whatsoever in seeing the Palestinians succeed in their struggle for national liberation. The existing system, created by the imperialist powers and Israel which Balkanizes the region and creates and sustains murderous communal antagonisms within Lebanon, also is the basis which sustains the squalid Baathist regimes in Syria and Iraq. That is why they are partners with imperialism and the Zionists in the game of playing first one and then another faction off against the rest.

After having been the epitome of evil in 1986 and the inspirer of international terrorism the West is now hailing Assad as the restorer of 'order' in Beirut.

Imperialism wants to see the Palestinians removed as a potential force in the Middle East.

For socialists and democrats, the crucial immediate task must be to defend the Palestinian people against what could well become a pogrom by the Amal Shi'ites aided, overtly or covertly, by the Syrian army. The root cause of the conflict in the Middle East is in the consistent denial, since 1947, of the right of the Palestinian people to nationhood. Any democrat must support the Palestinian people's right to self-determination and must mobilise to prevent a massacre in the camps in Lebanon.

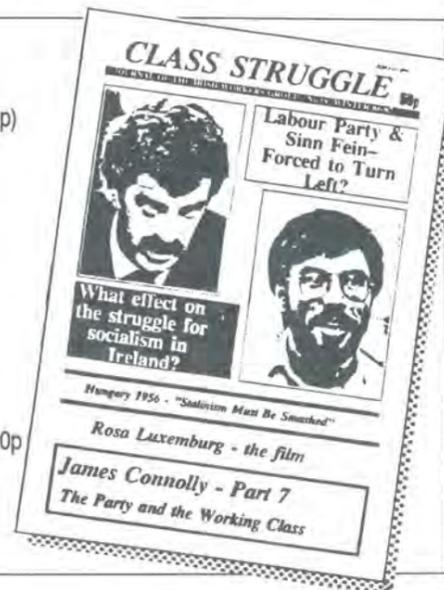
- Solidarity with the PLO fighters against imperialism, Zionism and Arab reaction!
- Self-determination for the Palestinian people!

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BLACK WOMEN ORGANISE

BLACK WOMEN WORKERS in Britain have repeatedly demonstrated a capacity to struggle for their rights. Many of the most famous women's strikes in the past decade have been led by black women - Grunwicks, Imperial Typewriters and Chix are only the most well known examples.

The background to such struggles is the super-exploitation black women face at the hands of the bosses. Under the Tories this super-exploitation has been intensified through policies designed to force down wages and trample on employment rights.

The abolition of the Wages Councils for example, inadequate as they were in improving wages has allowed more and more employers to pay rates well below any minimum acceptable wage. The Institute of Directors agreed that abolition would allow further super-exploitation of black workers:

"A statutory minimum wage discourages employers from taking on blacks, who for a number of socio-economic reasons have a lower marginal productivity than whites." (Wages Councils: The Case for Abolition December 1984)

In addition to privatising domestic work in the NHS the Tories have given the bosses the same opportunities to force down wages and attack conditions in the public sector. Private contractors have undercut in-house tenders by cutting wages, employing fewer workers, and undermining conditions such as employment protection and holidays. This sector of the health service is one where many black women are employed and have suffered badly as a result of these policies.

In organising collectively against these intensified attacks many black workers, men and women, have joined trade unions. This has partly contributed to the higher density of unionisation among black workers. The findings of the Policy Studies Institute in its survey **Black and White Britain** (1984) found that 56% of all Asian and West Indian workers were in unions compared

to 47% of white workers.

In addition, black workers have often taken the lead in major struggles; for trade union recognition in the 690 day dispute at Grunwicks in 1977, which was led by Asian women; and against racist employers in the Imperial Typewriter dispute in Leicester in 1974.

Despite this it is all too common for black people to find trade union structures alienating, fellow workers racist and official leaders indifferent or hostile to them and the problems they encounter as a result of the racism in British society. The fact that only 4% of black members hold union posts at any level, compared with 11% of white members, is indicative of this. This low level of participation reflects the real obstacles still facing black union members. The West Midlands Regional TUC reported in **Trade Unionism and Race** (1984):

"Black members see unions as white organisations which are either indifferent or hostile to the concerns of black people. There is a lack of confidence in the ways in which unions represent their black members. Grievances are not taken seriously, officials will not challenge management over issues of race."

Black women who have taken the initiative in getting organised have faced obstruction and betrayal from the union bureaucrats.

Black women face additional problems trying to organise and struggle. They are met by the racism and sexism within the union hierarchies and within their family and community whenever they try to establish their rights as women to actively take part in a strike. As Grunwick strike leader Jayaben Desai was to comment at the end of the strike:

"My husband gave me every help, but few husbands treated their wives like that, all too often husbands actually prevented their wives from coming to the picket lines."

In order to overcome these problems black trade unionists are

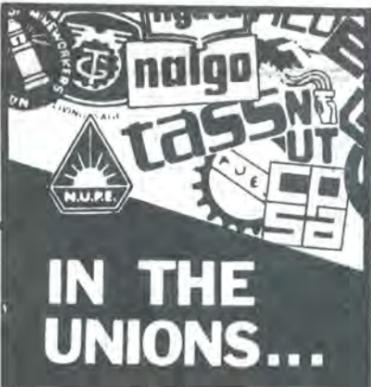
increasingly organising within caucuses to fight racism in the workplace and the indifference of union officials. These bodies, such as the black workers group in NALGO, are vital stepping stones to drawing black women into the unions. This is often a difficult task given the large number of black women working in sweatshops or as homeworkers. The unions have made little or no efforts to organise these sectors to date. As a result black women trade unionists who have come to the fore recently have been mainly in white collar unions.

Recent moves by the TGWU to start an organising drive amongst sectors where large numbers of black women are concentrated has not been prompted by the union leadership's concern for black women and other unorganised workers. It has far more to do with stemming the dramatic collapse of their membership levels (down by almost one million since 1979).

Resolutions at the TUC Women's Conference in 1985 and 1986 have centered in particular on:

"the unemployment suffered by ethnic minority women and the need for special measures to assist them in employment; the need for trade unions to reflect the special needs of ethnic minority women; ways of encouraging more black women into trade unions and to become stewards and full-time officials; ways in which the TUC could assist through its policies and education courses."

Certainly the trade union movement needs to be made conscious of the plight of black workers in Britain. In a situation of mass unemployment and particularly



SCPS victory

CIVIL SERVANTS working in DHSS computer centres up and down the country have struck a major blow against the government's plans to introduce regional and merit pay into public sector wage bargaining. Computer programmers, technical support staff and supervisors faced an attempt to impose discretionary control over allowances paid to computer staff. They resisted and forced the employers to retreat.

Fifty SCPS members at the DHSS computer center in Reading walked out on strike at the end of January in opposition to the payment of discretionary supplements. They were angry at the decision by the DHSS management to make the payments only to a selected minority of the staff in Reading.

ANGERED

Management also decided not to make any payments to staff outside Reading and London and this angered workers in other DHSS computer sites around the country. 30 workers at the Livingston site near Edinburgh joined the dispute to win payments for themselves and, following a meeting in the computer centre at Lytham St Annes which was addressed by strikers from Reading, action was taken there and key sections of computer workers struck from early February.

The Society of Civil and Public Servants (SCPS) made the strike official as it was in support of national union policy against the introduction of discretionary and regional payments. Groups of workers elsewhere in Reading and in

Blackpool joined the action in early February and selected workers in the giant computer project at Newcastle were balloted over action and voted to strike.

It had been said by the SCPS that the allowance given to Automatic Data Processing (ADP) staff to tempt them to stay in the Civil Service was totally inadequate. A claim was lodged for a substantial increase in the rate to over £2,500 pa. The government responded by raising the maximum allowance payable to £2,000 pa, but kept a portion of it back by saying that up to £800 of this would be discretionary according to regional or local recruitment circumstances and the skills of the staff involved.

For DHSS management, this meant drawing a line across the country at Watford and writing off everything north of it! They also decided to further sub-divide the Reading workforce by offering payment to only a select few who, they thought, were in most demand locally.

REGIONAL

It is no coincidence that the DHSS management tried this on. The government wants to see the scrapping of national pay scales in favour of regional settlements in the public sector. This could then pave the way for private industry to follow suit.

Ironically, most other government departments are already paying their computer staff across the board supplements. This only served to increase the anger of the

strikers. But the treasury - which foots the bill for civil service pay - was unhappy at the level of payments being made and could have used a defeat for the DHSS strike as an excuse to reduce or even scrap the supplements elsewhere, or just keep them in reserve for use as merit pay.

At the start of the strike, DHSS management refused to negotiate 'under duress' and offered a management-only review of ADP pay, but on condition that the strike action was called off. This was rejected completely by the strikers and management were left to sweat with a computer network which was slowly falling to pieces.

Eventually the pressure became too great for the management and, following a meeting between the DHSS and Treasury officials, an offer was made to the SCPS. The collapse of the bosses' resolve was dramatic. Not only did they drop their demands for regional and merit payments, but they improved on the payments made to executive officers by reducing the qualifying time for the allowance.

Not surprisingly the strikers voted overwhelmingly to accept the offer and hailed it as a major victory. This is undoubtedly true, but why should the government have shifted its position so quickly?

The 1987 pay settlement for all civil servants is due on 1 April and an alliance of four unions, including the SCPS, has submitted a claim for 15% or £20 per week minimum across the service. The alliance has also agreed a plan of industrial action if the treasury refuses the deal. There has been no fight on pay in the civil service since the defeat of the 1981 pay



youth unemployment, the chances of young black women finding work remains slim. The burning task now is launching a serious fightback against unemployment, cuts in services and provision, etc. But if special measures to assist black women workers are to lay the basis for the active participation of thousands of black women, then simply an increased number of black female full-time officials is not the solution.

Only out of rank and file struggles will a genuinely representative layer of militant black women capable of assuming leadership in the unions be forged. The first step towards this is the organisation of black women in the unions into caucuses to fight for the specific demands of black women workers and rally all workers against the inaction, the bureaucracy and, in many instances, the racism of the trade union leadership. ■

by Laura Williams

campaign. Rates have slipped by 30% since 1979 and the general feeling of union members is that 1987 must be the year to begin the fightback.

Having a key section of workers on the battlefield in the run-up to strike ballots in other branches could provide a major boost to the confidence of all workers to take on HMG over pay. The government could not afford this and needed to settle the computer strike quickly even at the expense of their demands for smashing national wage agreements.

NO ILLUSIONS

The lesson for all civil servants is clear. Our employers are not invincible. The computer victory has shown this. We must build on that now in fighting for the national pay claim. But we should be under no illusions. The government will be back with attacks on National Pay Scales and we will need to be prepared to defend ourselves again.

The union alliance is holding meetings throughout March to canvass members' views on a 1987 pay campaign. That pay campaign has already started with the computer workers scoring the first victory. If 1987 is to be the year when the tide is really turned, workers need to attend their meetings and demand full support for the pay claim. Members must demand that the union executives link the pay claim with the fight against regional division and argue for an all out national strike in support of the full settlement.

■ **Build joint committees of civil service unions at office level!**

■ **For the national pay claim in full!**

■ **All out for total victory!**
by a Reading strike committee member

WHEN

SEVENTY YEARS AGO this month women workers from the Vyborg district of Petrograd marched out of their factories demanding "Bread!". Five days later the workers and soldiers had led an insurrection which forced the Tsar to abdicate. The Petrograd women workers celebration of International Womens Day had unleashed the February revolution.

International Women's Day was first adopted as a holiday for proletarian women by the leaders of the Second International's Socialist Women's Movement. Clara Zetkin proposed to the International women's meeting in 1910 that a day be declared for proletarian women, similar to the May Day workers' holiday. The date eventually agreed was 8 March - commemorating a day on which thousands of women workers in New York had demonstrated against appalling conditions in the needle workers industry.

The holiday was taken up in Russia from 1913 onwards. Because of the old calendar in pre-revolutionary Russia the equivalent date was 23 February. In 1913 planned demonstrations were cracked down on by the police and only leaflets and papers were issued in the end. The Bolsheviks, under the instigation of Konkordiya Samoilova and Inessa Armand, produced several articles in their paper *Pravda* in the weeks before 23 February culminating in a special issue to celebrate the day itself. The articles outlined the reality of life for working women in Russia and argued the need for them to be organised alongside men in fighting organisations of the class.

RESPONSE

The response from working women to these *Pravda* articles was so overwhelming that there was not enough room in the pages of the paper for all the letters received. This prompted Samoilova to urge the exiled Lenin and Krupskaya to produce a special paper directed at working class women. Inessa Armand, who herself had been arrested and had fled to exile, was instrumental in persuading them to agree to this idea. Krupskaya raised it on the exiled Bolshevik Central Committee which agreed to the production of *Rabotnitsa (Woman Worker)* with the launch to be around International Women's Day 1914.

These developments within the Bolshevik party occurred in response to a renewed wave of militant class struggle in Russia between 1912 and 1914. Women workers were an increasingly important force in the Russian working class. After the 1905 revolution the employers deliberately recruited women in preference to men in many industries. As the bosses' own factory inspectorate noted in 1907:

"The reasons for this (recruitment of women - WP) are as before: their greater industry, attentiveness and abstinence (they do not drink or smoke), their compliance and greater reasonableness in respect of pay."

WORKFORCE

By 1914 women made up 25.7% of the industrial workforce in Russia and were becoming increasingly militant, making all political groups take notice of them. The bourgeois feminists, the Bolsheviks and the Mensheviks all made special efforts to organise working women in this period.

Despite all but one woman on the Editorial Board in Russia being arrested, *Rabotnitsa* was produced for 23 February. It quickly sold out as did the other 5 issues which were distributed. It was widely read in the factories and groups of women organised around it, many joining the Party as a result. The outbreak of war in August halted the production of *Rabotnitsa* but the foundations laid then made

WOMEN SET RUSSIA ABLAZE

future work by the Bolsheviks among women workers much easier to establish.

The mobilisation of soldiers and production for the war effort led to enormous deprivation in the cities and villages of Russia. As early as April 1915 there were riots by women demanding bread, and these continued sporadically right through to 1917. The specific role of women workers in the February revolution occurred because of the very acute way the war had affected them. Between 1914 and 1917 the number of women employed in the factories increased still further because of the conscription of men to the front line. In the country as a whole the percentage of women increased from 26.6% to 43.2%. These women workers were on the whole, new to the cities and the working class.

CONCENTRATED

In Petrograd itself the number of women working in factories doubled, rising by 68,200 during the war to 129,800. There were thousands of women workers concentrated in large factories - up to 10,000 women in one plant - with less than three years experience by 1917. Often their husbands, sons and brothers had been conscripted for the war. Minimal food rations were often available only by queuing for up to 4 hours a day - sometimes even then the food ran out. Women earned about half the wages of men, were concentrated in textiles and chemical industries where hours were long and conditions poor. They often suffered physical and sexual harassment from the bosses and their lackey foremen.

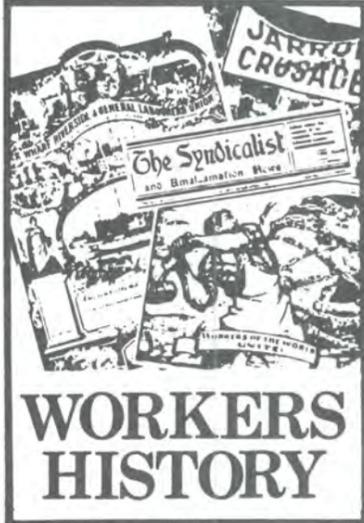
The intensity of the oppression of these women led to explosive rebellions. In general the strikes involving predominantly women workers had economic aims, whereas by late 1916 more of the strikes in the male dominated engineering and metalworking industries were for political ends. This reflected the longer tradition of organisation of the male workers, some with Bolshevik and Menshevik organisers long established within their ranks.

By February 1917 the class struggle was intensifying. But although there were many strikes in Petrograd during January and February, none of them sparked the whole city in the way the women were to do. In preparation for the Women's Day celebrations

Bolshevik, Mensheviks and the Mezhrailonka group (an inter-district group of socialists committed to neither the Bolsheviks or the Mensheviks) planned propaganda and educational meetings for the day.

In the Vyborg District on 20 February some workers called for a strike, but all the socialist organisations argued that the class was not ready for a mass strike because of inadequate political preparation or contact with the soldiers. V Kayurov, a local Bolshevik leader, met representatives from women workers on the eve of Women's Day and urged them to:

"act exclusively according to the instruction of the party committee".



The action was intended to be limited to factory meetings in order to make propaganda. The socialist groups all underestimated the mood of the women workers in the factories. However the lack of control by the political leaders over these women did not mean that the action was totally unprepared as some Bolsheviks seemed to think.

"The largely female staff of the Vasilevsky Island trolley-park, sensing general unrest a few days before February 23rd, sent a woman to the neighbouring encampment of the 180th Infantry Regiment to ask the soldiers whether they would shoot at them or not. The answer was no, and on the twenty-third, the trolley-car workers joined the demonstration." (Stites, *The Women's Liberation Movement in Russia*, pg 20)

On the morning of the 23rd

several illegal meetings were held in textile factories in the Vyborg District around the theme "War, high prices and the situation of the women worker!" Anger boiled over at these meetings. One by one they voted to strike, but did not leave their protest at that. Taking to the streets in their thousands the women marched to nearby factories, shouting for the workers, women and men, to join them. The flying picket was dramatically effective, by 10am ten factories where shut with 27,000 workers on strike. By noon it was 21 plants with 50,000 strikers! Many accounts report the women entering factories, banging on the gates, throwing snowballs at windows to get workers out. It seems that where factories did not immediately respond to the call to join the action, more direct methods were used. Flying rocks and pieces of iron were persuasively used at some plants. In the Vyborg District there were 59,800 men and women on strike by the end of the day - 61% of all the factory workers.

Rank and file Bolsheviks played a leading role in pulling plants out alongside the women workers, but many of the leaders were far more reluctant.

INDIGNATION

The Vyborg leader Kayurov wrote later:

"... to my surprise and indignation... we learned... of the strike in some textile factories and of the arrival of a number of delegates from the women workers who announced (that they were going on strike). I was extremely indignant about the behaviour of the strikers, both because they had blatantly ignored the decision of the district committee of the party, and also because they had gone on strike after I had appealed to them only the night before to keep cool and disciplined."

Despite such indignation the Bolsheviks were able to overcome these feelings and seize the opportunity offered to them. Agreeing to build the strike they gave political leadership by raising the slogans "Down with the Autocracy! Down with the War! Give us bread!"

In other districts of the city strikes that day were less extensive, but no less militant. Over the whole city between 20 and 30% of the workers struck, with over 80 factories shut.

The demonstrators from the Vyborg district were determined to reach the governmental centre of Petrograd, but the police blocked their way at one of the bridges. Eventually the demonstrators began crossing the ice of the frozen river Neva. However the police still managed to contain them, albeit with difficulty. A police report of the day explained:

"At 4.40pm crowds of approximately 1,000 people, predominantly women and youths, approached Kazan Bridge on Nevskil prospekt from the direction of Mikhailovskaya Street, singing and shouting 'Give us bread'."

The demonstrations were not confined to those who went on strike - women queuing for bread quickly joined in the action. One manager reported coming out from his bakery shop to announce that there was no more bread.

"No sooner had this announcement been made than the crowd smashed the windows, broke into the store and knocked down everything in sight."

Such acts were widespread, reflecting the anger and desperation mainly of women and youths. The Bolsheviks argued against 'vandalism' and tried to direct the protests by organising meetings and by calling for a three day general strike plus intensified propaganda towards soldiers.

INCREASED

In the following days the number of workers on strike increased steadily. The government sent police and troops in to disperse the demonstrators by any means necessary, but the revolutionary wave was able to meet this challenge by winning Cossacks over and eventually whole regiments joined the insurgents. By 27 February most soldiers in Petrograd had gone over to the side of the insurgents. Workers were arming themselves in their militia, and it was women workers who played a vital role in breaking the troops from the regime. As Trotsky's account reveals:

"A great role is played by women workers in the relation between workers and soldiers. They go up to the cordons more boldly than men, take hold of the rifles, beseech, almost command: 'Put down your bayonets - join us!' The soldiers are excited, ashamed, exchange anxious glances, waver; someone make up his mind first, and the bayonets rise guiltily above the shoulders of the advancing crowd. The barrier is opened, a joyous 'Hurrah!' shakes the air. The soldiers are surrounded. Everywhere arguments, reproaches, appeals - the revolution makes another forward step." (Trotsky, *History of the Russian Revolution*)

ABDICATION

The development of that revolution and the abdication of the Tsar opened up a whole new period for the Russian working class. The Provisional Government that emerged from the February revolution was staffed by bourgeois politicians and in an unstable position, balanced as it was alongside the organs of a different kind of power, the Soviets of Workers' and Soldiers' Deputies. Within the factories workers were emboldened - the factory committees sprang up, control was demanded over pay and conditions. The workers' militia conflicted with the weaker civil militias of the government.

Women workers continued to play an important role. They were the most determined to win an eight-hour day, they sought decent wages and supported demands for equal political rights including suffrage. Indeed the first major strike against the Provisional Government was of 3000 women laundry workers who struck for the 8-hour



Kollontai

day, living wages and municipalisation of the laundries. The strike, in May 1917, lasted 6 weeks and Kollontai was sent in by the Bolsheviks to work alongside the women. The Bolsheviks had quickly responded to the militancy of women in 1917 and set up a Women's Bureau led by Vera Slutskaya. This relaunched *Rabotnitsa* and built up support in the factories, among soldier's wives and led large demonstrations against the war.

The role of women workers in the Russian revolution was magnificent, and taught the revolutionary leadership much. But their very spontaneity meant that they were not always in the revolutionary vanguard throughout 1917. They struck, demonstrated and rioted because of the intensity of the oppression, but this also reflected their lack of organisation, their newness to political and trade union activities. This is often true of working class women - their role within the workforce as a 'peripheral' element, poorly paid, shifted in and out of work depending on the fortunes and needs of capitalism - leads to them being generally poorly organised in unions and political parties. Even where membership of unions is high, women are rarely active in the leadership because of their oppression which denies them time, due to domestic commitments, and obstruction by male leaders.

CONTRADICTORY

This lack of traditional organisation has contradictory results - on the one hand women can be, as the February revolution shows, the most militant fighters because they are unfettered by the conservatism which so often occurs with union organisation. But on the other hand it makes women easy targets for propaganda which may be anti-working class. In the weeks after the February Revolution thousands of working class women were mobilised by liberal bourgeois feminists to demonstrate for women's suffrage and continuation of the war! The Bolsheviks were able to establish a mass base among women by mid-1917 which led them once again to demonstrate against the war, but this took special efforts at organisation and propaganda.

The lessons we can learn from the Bolsheviks and working women in this period are rich indeed. The revolution, as Lenin was to point out years later, would never have succeeded without the mobilisation of the women. Revolutionaries must never underestimate the centrality of relating to women workers. Special forms of propaganda and organisation are needed to win them to the side of the revolutionary Party, but once won, they will be the most brave and militant fighters for they have so much to gain! □

by Helen Ward



Women workers march, Petrograd 1917. The banner reads "Comrades, workers and soldiers, support our demands"

workers power

THIS MONTH IS the second anniversary of the end of the miners' great strike of 1984-5. The strike in February of 3,000 miners in the Selby complex superpit in Yorkshire, revealed that the spirit of that strike has not been extinguished.

The week long strike was in protest against the management's stopping of bonus payments. They halted payments after a walk-out three weeks prior to the week strike, when a top British Coal manager visited the Selby complex.

There is no doubting the fact that the NUM's defeat has led to management gains since 1985. They have ridden roughshod over countless local agreements. They have attempted to impose a far sharper discipline within pits.

More importantly over 100,000 jobs have been lost in the mines and 59 pits closed over the last two years. But a spirit of militancy still exists amongst an important section of rank and file miners.

Indeed, the Selby strike is only the latest in a series of smaller protest strikes which have occurred at pits such as Hatfield Main and Silverwood in South Yorkshire, Durham and South Wales. But this spirit of militancy will need to be built upon if the continued attacks by British Coal are to be resisted.

JOBS AXED

The British Coal bosses, have earmarked a further 45,000 jobs to be axed in the industry. In response to the NUM pay claim of £8.65 across the board, Haslam has said that the Board will not negotiate on pay until a new conciliation scheme is adopted. The new scheme will mean that British Coal will recognise the UDM's scab outfit and not the NUM in areas where they have the majority of members.

British Coal's Wheeler Report, which embodies its long term strategy will, if implemented, mean reducing the workforce in individual pits by up to 20% underground, and 25% on the surface. It also aims to privatise large sections of the industry. For example, in the new Selby complex out of a projected total of 700 new jobs, 480 will go to private contractors. For the new £90 million drift mine at Margam in South Wales, British Coal are using the well known "carrot and stick" method. In return for 800 jobs being offered the management want a compulsory 9 hour shift and six day working week introduced or else they will call the development off. In response to this ultimatum Arthur Scargill said:

"We want the Margam development and we want it desperately. But we don't want to be blackmailed into unfair practices".

RESTRUCTURING

Scargill has further correctly argued, not just against the proposed six day week at Margam, but for a restructuring of the working week from five to four with no increase in hours and any Saturday work not to be compulsory and on premium overtime rates, as against the management's demand that overtime be integrated into the 9 hour shift. Although he won this policy at the executive Scargill was bitterly opposed by his supposed ally, South Wales leader Des Dufield, who was prepared to sell conditions in exchange for jobs.

If British Coal's attacks are to



John Sturrock (Report)

be stopped then the Wheeler Report must be totally rejected by the NUM. Also, while holding out for their full pay claim miners must oppose the management's conditions on conciliation. The NUM, not Lynk's scab UDM is the only miners union. Opposition to all redundancies and pit closures must be linked to a struggle for the reinstatement of the sacked and victimised men and the release of all jailed miners. It is these basic and immediate demands which all NUM members need to put to the fore in the period leading up to the vice-presidential elections on 19 March.

WHICH CANDIDATE?

In these elections miners need to ask, which of the candidates will stand for both a militant campaign against the management's attacks, as well as holding firm against the rightward drift and growing opposition on the Executive of the NUM to any real fight? In particular the Euro-Stalinists of the Communist Party in Scotland and South Wales around Bolton and Reed, and the Kinnockites in the NUM, like Eric Clarke, have formed an anti-Scargill alliance on the Executive. What these elements are saying is that the strike was a defeat for what Scargill represented - militant trade unionism. Their 'new' answer is old hat class collaboration with bosses to get a 'viable' coal industry and a snivelling reconciliation with the UDM.

We have many criticisms of Arthur Scargill. Not least we believe that he is unwilling to decisively break with his fellow bureaucrats and mobilise the rank and file to fight them. However, there are signs that, in order to defend himself, he is appealing to the rank and file in a cautious but significant way. At a major meeting in the North East he told miners:

"We need rank and file partici-

pation at all levels, with democracy and accountability in our unions."

He went on to call for a more representative annual delegate conference. The question of who to vote for in the coming election should be based on assessment of which candidate can further such moves towards rank and file control of the union.

Four candidates are standing for the post. Jim Dowling, the Power Group general secretary, is an open right-winger and no miner should give him a vote. Eric Clarke and Sammy Thompson the Scottish and Yorkshire general secretaries respectively are the clear front runners in the election campaign.

Eric Clarke is both a loyal supporter of Neil Kinnock as well as being closely aligned to Euro-Stalinist George Bolton, the President of his Scottish area. Bolton wrote the infamous article in *Marxism Today* which viciously attacked Scargill's role, mass picketing and militancy in the Great Strike. At a meeting of the candidates at Hatfield Main Colliery recently Clarke expressed his right-wing criticisms of Scargill in coded form, by calling for an end to the "craze of personality". This surely means that Clarke is not that crazy about Scargill's personality!

COLLABORATED

Clarke has called for little in the way of concrete plans to resist management. He collaborated with the Scottish Board in accepting hundreds of redundancies in return for some meagre investment promises. And his bleatings about unity suggest he is in favour of a reconciliation with the UDM at any price.

A vote for Clarke can only mean choosing a vice-president who will not fight but will lay the basis for further retreats. His election will strengthen the anti-industrial action alliance on the Executive.

← continued from front page

In particular - and refuse to be treated as second class citizens. They must make their branches centres of campaigning for the unemployed to link up with each other as the basis for an Unemployed Workers' Movement. Hand in hand with employed trade union activists and Labour Party activists they must fight for a union boycott of JTS and for councils not to take on JTS placements. They must fight for a trade union and Labour Party campaign to abolish

Restart and for Labour to pledge itself to a plan of public works to put all the unemployed back to work at the average national wage.

We must fight to force the entire labour movement to ensure that for millions of young people there is an alternative to slave labour in the Tories' work camps. Not only does the alternative mean allowing the unemployed to suffer continual indignity and harassment, it means opening even further the gulf between organised labour and the ranks of the unemployed.

FOR THE SACKED MINERS - VOTE GEORGE LIPPITT

breach in the union" without stating clearly his opposition to the scab-herding leadership of the UDM and commitment to never let the likes of Lynk back into the NUM. And despite being formally in favour of the reinstatement of the sacked men at a meeting at Hatfield Main he said "the sacked miners' issue was lost the day the strike finished." A vote for Thompson therefore, will not turn the tide in favour of rank and file control in the NUM.

RANK AND FILE

The fourth candidate, Eric Lippitt, a sacked miner from the Midlands Area, is standing openly as a candidate of the rank and file, a candidate of opposition to those in the leadership who are back-peddling, and a defender of the traditions of the Great Strike. He is for the reinstatement of all sacked men and the release of all miners imprisoned as a result of their activities in the strike. He regarded the Executive's refusal to give a recommendation on how to vote to the delegate conference that ended the strike as an abdication of leadership. He is in favour of a campaign to rebuild the union's strength through a fight for the full wage claim. He is for demanding of a Labour government the repeal of all the anti-union laws, for retrospective legislation to reimburse all the NUM funds lost in the strike. Lippitt is also in favour of waging a campaign against the NUM, and argues that they must be kept out of conciliation bodies. He is for resistance to the pit closure programme.

In many ways Eric Lippitt's candidature reflects the militancy and determination which still exists amongst a significant minority of NUM members. We in *Workers Power* are calling for a vote for Lippitt as the candidate who is most clearly committed to the need to rally rank and file miners for a fightback in the traditions of the Great Strike.

The dominance of regional based electoral machines in the NUM are weighting the votes in favour of the two front runners. But rank and file militants need to stand firm for principles and firm against the rightist drift of the majority of the executive, if the NUM is to be rebuilt for struggle. A vote for Lippitt is a step towards this goal.

by Julian Scholefield

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