

*socialist*  
**REVIEW**

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# Taking on the Tories

THE NGA AND THE LAW



## Ripping-off the young

The Youth Training Scheme is now well under way, and is constantly referred to with pride by government ministers as proof of their constructive concern and help for the unemployed. Sybil Cock looks at the harsh realities of the scheme, and the weak response by Labour and trade union leaders to it.

The YTS is an integral part of the Tory offensive. High unemployment makes for smaller wage claims and weaker shopfloor organisation. The YTS has been deliberately designed to aid these objectives.

In an attempt to minimise the effects of the industrial recession, firms have been invited to recruit nearly half a million young workers for a fixed period of one year, with a 'wage' of £25 per week to be paid by the government. In return the firm promises to allow the 'trainee' to spend a quarter of his or her time on 'off the job' training.

This can vary from something at the local FE to phoney training in a cowboy college or in the company's own back room. It can even be a correspondence course! The YTS gets all the credibility it has from this 'training' element, but even employers recognise that it doesn't take three weeks, never mind 13, to train someone to work a supermarket check-out. Most YTS places are being offered in jobs for which no training is needed.

The deal is a very attractive one to most employers. It legitimises and subsidises the payment of very low wages to the young. As one employer put it, '...your cheap labour is my added value...'. The scheme enables them to cut the cost of recruiting suitable staff by giving them a year to decide which, if any, of the young workers to take on permanently, and which to throw back on the dole because they don't exactly fit the job.

### Consensus

The administration of the scheme is itself a boom industry, aided by the government's £100 per trainee management fee. Increasing numbers of private colleges undercut both the pay and the conditions of the public sector.

But it is not only individual employers who benefit — the YTS has a significant political role in Thatcher's consensus politics. Using the trendy jargon of education theorists the 'off the job' component shows young workers how to look for ways in which they can adapt themselves to the needs of the labour market and compete with their mates for the very few jobs there are.

The government tried for a while to com-



pletely ban political and social topics from the courses; now nothing 'controversial' may be taught or discussed.

The intervention of the Manpower Services Commission in education is bound to erode the (limited) gains of comprehensive and reintroduce an overtly class-biased selection system by the back door.

The Tories have cut provision for education and training in schools and colleges and their claim to be providing young people with appropriate skills through the YTS is total fraud. Their aim is rather to rid the labour market of the 'imperfection' of trade unionism, and in particular apprenticeships for the more skilled jobs, which they would like to see abolished.

The naivete of the labour movement in the face of this is breathtaking. Opposition has been made very difficult by the fact that the Manpower Services Commission was welcomed by the trade union movement when it was established because it promised to bring planning and order to a chaotic and anarchic labour market.

Kinnock has recently repeated the widely held view on the left that the UK's decline from imperial splendour into recession was caused by inadequacies in its education

system. He argued that it could somehow lift itself back into prosperity and competitiveness if the labour market was reformed.

The TUC has representatives on the Manpower Services Commission locally and nationally. It abandoned its opposition to the YTS when the proposal to pay only £15 per week and make it compulsory for all school leavers was dropped at an early stage in the plans.

Individual unions' response to the YTS has varied, but only the sectional power of the NGA has been sufficient to put into local practice the national policy of opposition.

At the other extreme the EETPU has completely fallen for the government's arguments and concluded a new agreement with the employers in which the apprenticeship scheme is effectively swallowed by the YTS — at YTS rates of pay.

The CPSA maintained its opposition until September of this year when it allowed 20 trainee places at the British Airports Authority for a topped up wage of £43 per week. In Kent, union opposition forced the local authority to abandon plans for 500 places and NALGO are blocking a number of clerical and library places in Essex.

Thus most of the trade union movement has adopted the TUC's line of pressing for improvements in the YTS deal — shorter hours, higher wages (the TUC calls for £30 a week!) and 'quality' training. Its weakness is exposed by the fact that the majority of instances in which pay is 'topped up' above the £25 per week have arisen when trade union demands have been supported by well intentioned left Labour councils.

### Not popular

In Hackney, for example, 50 trainee building worker places at £47 a week (the nationally agreed young labourers' rate) have been offered with the guarantee of a real job afterwards. The YTS year will count as the first year of an apprenticeship, with 'off the job' at the local FE. Hackney hopes to employ more school leavers on a similar basis. Equivalent schemes are under way in Brent and Haringey.

These schemes are not popular with the MSC. Neither are they likely to last very long. The 'top up' money which is being paid to the select band of YTSers in these islands of socialism will be a prime target for the penalties which overspending Labour councils will incur next spring, and Hackney council employees face hundreds of redundancies.

The picture is not a pretty one. The labour movement has agreed to undercutting wages on a scale that would have been unthinkable ten years ago. The YTS has been welcomed by many in the misguided belief that the government has finally recognised its obligations to provide a decent education and a job for school leavers.

The kids, however, are less impressed at the prospect than those who have organised it for them. Even in Liverpool in mid-October only 42 percent of places were filled — an alarming proportion of them in hairdressing — and careers officers were sent canvassing door to door for the able-bodied unemployed...



# Stop press

The struggle between the National Graphical Association and the law is developing into what could be the most important event in the class struggle for a decade. The outcome of this dispute will have echoes far outside the printing industry.

As we go to press the situation is finely balanced and speculation as to the detail of the future developments is completely unprofitable. There are so many imponderable factors at work that it is very difficult to go beyond the most general statements about future possibilities.

About the development of the dispute so far, however, and about the lessons to be drawn from it, we can be a great deal more definite.

For the NGA this dispute is a crucial one. The union as a whole finds itself under two pressures. On the one hand the industry is changing rapidly. The 'free-sheet' development of which the *Stockport Messenger* is an example is just one instance of the change. Another, more visible, feature is the mushrooming of the high street printingshops over the last few years. Both on the newspaper front and on the side of the general trade the structure of the business is changing rapidly.

The second major pressure is the development of new printing technologies. Outside of the tightly controlled NGA strongholds of Fleet Street these are already in operation.

Traditional printing skills are disappearing and being replaced by new working methods which can make it difficult to organise.

So far as the NGA is concerned the crucial area is that of 'composing'. For most of this century the standard method of going from the journalist's typescript to material that could be put onto a printing press was by means of hot metal typesetting. A machine called the linotype machine actually set up blocks of metal type from which pages were made up. Control over this process was the key to NGA organisation. In Fleet Street it still is.

The normal modern method of composition is for a computer-based machine to produce a photographic print which can be pasted onto a board to provide the basis for a page. That is how this page was set up.

One of the consequences of this is that the skills needed—the ability to keyboard rapidly on a sophisticated electronic machine and the ability to paste up the resulting print-out quickly and accurately—are quite different from the skills of the linotype operator. It is therefore much easier for union-busting

# socialist REVIEW

PO Box 82, London E2

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managements to hire people from outside the well-organised traditional printing trades to win a dispute.

In addition, the new machinery can be dispersed—material can be set by someone working at home and sent to the printworks either by data post or by telephone transmission.

The result is that the NGA finds itself threatened with massive job losses. For example, if a journalist can type his or her copy straight into a computer which will then produce the raw material for a final page, the jobs traditionally done by the NGA will disappear.

It is that sort of threat which has forced the NGA onto the defensive over the last few years. One estimate has it that the consequences for the NGA of losing the fight to control the introduction of new technology will be a collapse of membership from the current 120,000-odd to less than half that.



For the members of the NGA defeat at Warrington means the prospect is redundancy for many and drastically worsened working conditions for those lucky enough to hold onto their jobs. For the union bureaucrats, the best they could hope for would be the steady decline of the union until such a point that it was no longer viable, then to be gobbled up by another union. The worst that could happen would be that the union collapsed and the bureaucrats would be left without a job, let alone the social prestige that comes from being a powerful trade union baron.

The response of the NGA to the developments has been threefold. They have discussed merger possibilities with other unions directly threatened by the new developments, most notably the NUJ. They have also tried to organise new areas of work—the *Stockport Messenger* dispute has its origins in this attempt to organise a newly developing aspect of the printing trade. But the centre-piece of the strategy has always been the defence of the closed shop.

The closed shop is the highest point that pure trade unionism can reach. It means essentially that the union is sufficiently well organised to ensure that it has a say in all aspects of bargaining. It drastically reduces the employers' ability to recruit who they like on what terms they like, and to extend their will over the wages and conditions of those who are employed. It is a class weapon, and that is why it must be defended against bourgeois critics who prattle on about the liberty of the individual: a breach in the closed shop means that all workers suffer. Therefore it is necessary to override the wishes of those workers who are so backward as to accept management anti-union arguments.

Of course, the closed shop is open to all sorts of abuse. The most obvious are the sweetheart deal and bureaucratic domination. In the boom, and to some extent today, some managements preferred the closed shop because it allowed them to have smooth labour relations.

Very often this has taken the form of agreements with pliable union fulltimers whereby the membership of a workforce have found themselves members of a particular union, with their subs deducted at source, without ever having been involved in a fight for trade unionism and thus without any conception of what trade unionism actually means. Such closed shops are invariably dominated by local or national officials and are, as the example of Birmingham NALGO shows, reported elsewhere in this issue, in fact very fragile.

Creatures of one management strategy, they are just as easily victims of another, and can collapse like a house of cards because they do not rest on the collective will of the membership. The officials, therefore, have an even greater vested interest in keeping on the right side of management. Their greatest fear is that management might withdraw the sacred closed-shop agreement and damage the officials' chances of a comfortable life.

The collusion between union officials and management in the maintenance of a closed shop often leads to the second major fault of such an arrangement. Because in any closed-shop situation the loss of a union card means loss of a job, the bureaucracy have a powerful weapon to wield against militant opponents. The threat of losing your union card is also the threat of losing your job and so is an additional powerful weapon against any opponents of the bureaucracy.

These two problems are regularly encountered with the closed shop, for example in areas of the print. But warts and all, the closed shop is an important gain for the working class wherever it exists. Because it has the potential of drastically increasing workers' ability to negotiate with the capitalists its defence is essential for socialists.

Nowhere is this clearer than in the case of

the NGA. The closed shop is one of the major weapons in the defence of jobs. For example, the technology for photo-typesetting the *Financial Times* is physically present inside Bracken House. It is not used and the paper is still set using hot metal. This is *only* because the strength of the NGA closed shop has been sufficient to force the management to agree to a long slow and costly retraining process for the existing compositors, instead of the employment of other people with keyboard skills in their place, no doubt at much lower wages.

It is important to reject absolutely those who claim to be on the left and then go on to argue that the NGA's control of the production process is anti-socialist.

There is no doubt that the NGA is very far from being a model left-wing union. It is true that it only has a tiny female membership and that none of those have ever been allowed to work in the really high-paid areas of Fleet Street. It is also true that you will see very very few black faces in a Fleet Street composing room. These are all very real limitations of the NGA and stem from the craft-based attitudes around which their closed shops are built.

The only people to profit from their destruction, however, would be the employers. If the NGA's organisations are smashed then all workers in the print, male and female, black and white, skilled and unskilled, will feel the effects in terms of worse pay and conditions.

It is because of the magnitude of the problem facing them that the NGA—bureaucrats and rank and file—have been prepared to go so far in the *Stockport Messenger* dispute. Both the bureaucrats who have been prepared to risk the precious funds of the union to defy the court and the rank and filers who have travelled miles to risk police violence and possible arrest are clearly committed to keeping the closed shop.



But that commitment does not mean that the union bureaucrats are prepared to fight in a manner that can win. Their major concern now is to get themselves off the hook.

If we look at the history of the dispute we can see that the bureaucrats have tried every ruse to get away from a fight. The fact is that the employers have not given them the chance.

The *Stockport Messenger* dispute has been running for some months in one form or another. The first group of workers to be threatened by the law were the NUJ members on a sister title who refused to handle copy for the disputed paper. They backed down faced with the law. The NGA was not prepared to use their muscle then.

Even when the dispute reached new heights in the last three weeks of November, with the NGA mounting mass pickets and facing considerable violence from the police, the NGA leadership were only too ready to scuttle off to ACAS to try to patch up a compromise deal.

As it turned out, the pressure from the membership was too great to allow them to settle for anything less than the full demand; negotiations broke down over the reinstatement of the six sacked NGA members at the heart of the dispute.

When, on Friday 25 November, the Manchester High Court moved to seize the NGA funds to pay for the contempt fines, the NGA leadership were in the Court of Appeal within three hours. And the walk-out in Fleet Street was equally problematic. The NGA tried to maintain the fiction that the stoppage was 'spontaneous', and certainly tried to restrict it to 48 hours.

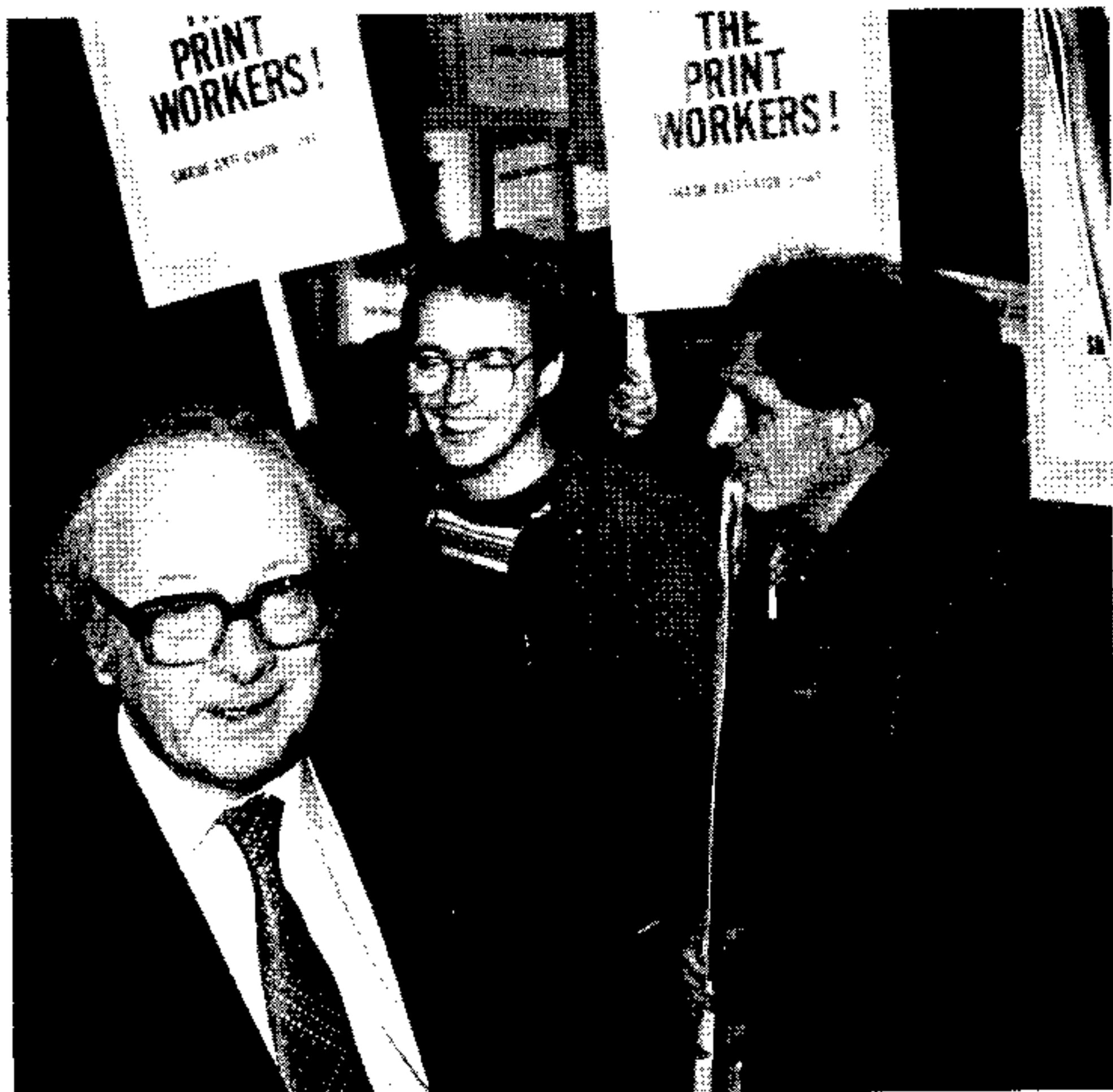
Even faced with a clear management attack on the union organisation, with the Newspaper Publishers' Association (NPA) threat to sue the union and to demand no strike pledges, the executive still failed to call for all-out action. Instead it was left to local Fleet Street chapels to deal with their own employers. The result was a messy and confused situation with some papers being printed and others not. Even on Fleet Street itself, the NGA leadership has refused to recognise that the key to winning the dispute was generalising it.

The 'clever' plans to call out the general trade and the provincial newspapers separately added further to the confusion and made it that much more difficult to call for support from other groups of workers.

The only explanation for these tactics is that the NGA leadership wanted to back off from a fight but was not able to do so without conceding the whole of the employers' case. The undoubted industrial strength of the NGA was only to be used to improve the chances of a compromise deal.

It was management who forced the pace. It would be wrong to see the whole thing as a conscious ruling class plot, or even a conspiracy by the NPA or Rupert Murdoch to break the NGA. What happened was that management seized an opportunity to attack the points of weakness the NGA leadership had revealed.

The dispute was started by one capitalist, Eddie Shah, probably with no thought of the implications overall for the class struggle. It has been the logic of the dispute that has led to



**Joe Wade: not a left-winger**

the wider confrontation rather than any deep-laid scheme.

The evidence is that there are divisions of opinion amongst the ruling class. The NPA has manifestly been unable to agree a firm line. The decision to sue taken on 26 November was a victory for the hard line. The fact that a number of managements then backed down the day after and re-employed their workers without securing no-strike pledges cracked that stand, and the pressures of competition then forced the others, eventually even Murdoch, to back down on the Monday. True, they have retained the threat of legal action, and should the dispute escalate it is quite possible that the hard-liners who have sensed blood in the NGA's weaknesses will once more be in a dominant position.



The same is true of the ruling class. They would like a victory over the unions, providing it does not cost too much. They are not prepared to lean on Shah or the NPA to smooth things over.

In other circumstances, the ruling class has of course acted collectively to do that. In 1972 the Official Solicitor appeared from nowhere to argue on behalf of the five Pentonville Dockers that they should be released despite their refusal to give the court any assurances that they would give up picketing. And the court was prepared to believe him. That was because the whole government and the whole CBI was straining every nerve to head off

what looked like developing into a general strike.

This time round things do not look so risky for the ruling class. True, the Tories have suffered a series of minor setbacks since they won the general election.

None of these has been sufficient to shake them, but they have been enough to make them keen on a quick victory in the one area in which they feel confident that they can win: taking on the unions. And their own right wing would be made very happy if they could smash the closed shop in one of its more notorious strongholds.

True, the Tory government is not the ruling class, and if decisive sections of British capital thought the situation merited it they would either lean on Thatcher and company to do a deal or sweep them aside and replace them with people who would. But the ruling class has no such immediate fears. They do not believe that the issue has reached such a pass as to make it necessary to take drastic action. They can see that there is a great deal to be gained from a victory over the NGA. It is clear that the whole success of the 1980 and 1982 Employment Acts is in the balance.

While the *Stockport Messenger* affair was building up there were two quite contrary legal developments going on. On the one hand Mercury took the POEU to court, won its case and the union backed down.

On the other hand the Shell management went to court against its tanker drivers and secured a judgement. But that judgement has never been put into effect. The Shell management say quite openly and repeatedly that they do not intend to press for the use of the law because it would only make the situation worse.

A victory against the NGA, besides making life a lot easier for printing employers, would make sure that in future the threat of legal action would make a POEU-type response almost automatic.

Conversely, a victory for the NGA could put new backbone into the POEU and other half-hearted opponents of the Tories. There is a lot at stake in this dispute, and not just in the print.

No one should underestimate the strength of the NGA. They have not so far suffered any crushing defeats. They still control decisive positions throughout the printing industry. They are a very powerful and well-disciplined body. There is no doubt that if they come out they can stop the printing trade and there is no doubt that any dispute will be solid. They can shake the bosses.



But the very sectionalism of the NGA which gives it that strength is also its weakness when it comes to generalising the struggle. The leadership believe that their admittedly very well-trained industrial troops can be used like a real army and called out to order. This may be sufficiently well-founded to allow them to stop the print.

But the longer it takes, the messier it is, the more people go out and then back in, and then back out again, the more difficult it is to build any campaign of support *outside* of the print. The more messing around there is, the more it will seem a private affair of little concern to other workers.

And the fact is that winning support outside of the print will be vital to winning the dispute. The obstacles are already enormous, and the limitations of the NGA will make them all the greater.

The first problem is that the battle will not be won on the picket lines of Warrington. However big and militant selected mass pickets are, the lessons of the Grunwick dispute have to be remembered. That was a defeat because the forces of the state outlasted the pickets.

In set-piece confrontations this will always be the case. The police are a special body of armed men designed and trained for just this

sort of thing. They have all the support and organisation necessary to win such battles. True, we can swamp them for a time by our sheer numbers, but we cannot keep it up indefinitely. Our forces have to go back to work.

The best that such mass pickets can do is to act as a focus and a base for attempts to spread the struggle beyond the confines of the one picket line. In the end Grunwicks was defeated because the local labour movement was not strong enough and well-enough organised to convert their undoubted sympathy with the strikers into solidarity action. Faced with the law, the postal workers called off their blacking.

Warrington, if it remains the sole focus, will in the end be a bitter, diminishing and demoralising struggle which will act as a substitute for real solidarity action.

The other model, the one that can lead to victory, is that of Saltley Gates in the 1972 miners' strike, where the mass struggle on the picket line was used as a focus to win strike action from thousands of engineers in the Birmingham factories.

Readers of this journal should need little reminding that things have changed somewhat, and for the worse, since 1972. What was difficult in the early 1970s has become *very* difficult a decade later.

In the early 1970s the trade union leadership was just as reluctant as it is today to give support to lawbreaking. But then there was massive unofficial pressure, including strike action, which forced the TUC to act. In 1972, for example, when the five dockers were imprisoned, the TUC did not act until the unofficial movement was well underway. Then they called for a one day general strike *only* because that was the only way they could see of heading off unofficial action.

Today, of course, the TUC is just as terrible. Before the crunch came on 25 November the General Council expressed sympathy with the NGA but would not even give financial support to the threatened union.

After the court had seized the union funds and the NPA went on the offensive, the leadership of the TUC was still hesitating. Sirs and Duffy were predictably calling on the NGA to back down. Murray was working flat out to try to organise a compromise. No one, not even Arthur Scargill who has been pro-

claiming his desire to fight the Tories over the closed shop since 1979 and has already ordered his martyr's crown, was prepared to call for action.

That, of course, is entirely predictable. The TUC, left and right, are against the law, but none of them have any intention of putting their own union organisation on the block in defence of the NGA.

The only thing which could force them to change their minds would be massive pressure from below. The problem is how to build it.

In 1972 the dockers immediately went out and picketed. The first, and most important, battle was to stop Fleet Street. Even in 1972, with generally a very high level of working class confidence, that was not an easy task and actually hinged on a small number of political dockers winning the argument with like-minded printers.

This time round, the NGA show little sign of being prepared to do that. The very discipline and strength of the union, and the fact that it has in the past won a number of battles on its own strength, acts against it here. There is little tradition of unofficial action in defiance of the leadership.



The NGA, on Fleet Street, is so very well organised that they seldom bother to picket during their own disputes since they are convinced that the prospects of scabbing are remote. It therefore requires a major leap of political consciousness for them to organise flying pickets.

The NGA shows no signs of being able to generalise on its own behalf. The leadership are only prepared to talk to other bureaucrats and the rank and file lack the experience of this sort of struggle.

If we look at the other forces inside the trade union movement we can see that the number of people ready to argue for this sort of generalisation is very small.

Certainly the Labour Party will play no role. The best that Kinnock has been able to manage is a long silence followed by a complaint about the law. The official line appears to be that the government should step in and bring the two sides together. Eric Heffer, left wing candidate for the job of leader, has actually called for support for the NGA, but has been very clear that they must remain within the law.

The Labour party has been marginalised in this dispute. All the brave talk about overcoming the gap between politics and economics which the Labour left have used in their claims to be building a 'mass campaigning party' is empty rhetoric. Just as in 1972, the Labour Party remains rooted in winning elections and has nothing to do with the reality of winning battles in the here and now.

Outside the NGA, of course, the problem is even more acute. The Broad Left strategy is essentially based on winning elections. Change the leaders of the unions, they argue, and you change the unions. The most recent example of that in action was the POEU,

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where the Broad Left captured the leadership of the union only to fall apart at the first real test and some of its members to vote with the right wing in backing down before the law.

It is useful to contrast the NGA, which has fought so much harder, with the POEU, since it illustrates why the Broad Lefts in the unions are not prepared to fight too seriously on this issue.

Both of the unions have suffered relatively lightly so far in the downturn, because the skills they organise retain substantial economic power.

The NGA is a union dominated by the right wing. In a recent election the right wing candidate, Dubbins, beat the left-winger Jerrom, for the position of general secretary.

But that leadership is at least based on some sort of rank and file activity. For example, the NGA beat the provincial newspaper proprietors in a bitter strike in 1980. Less than six months ago 24 NGA members drove the *Financial Times* into the ground.

The POEU is quite a different matter. The leadership is made up of people formally very much to the left of Dubbins, but they have no real base. Their election victory was not the result of a successful struggle by the membership, and they have not led such battles.

The union is very uneven, with the big city branches being much more militant than other areas. The leadership, whatever its formal political positions, reflects that unevenness. They could not fight the courts because they did not believe they could carry their members with them.

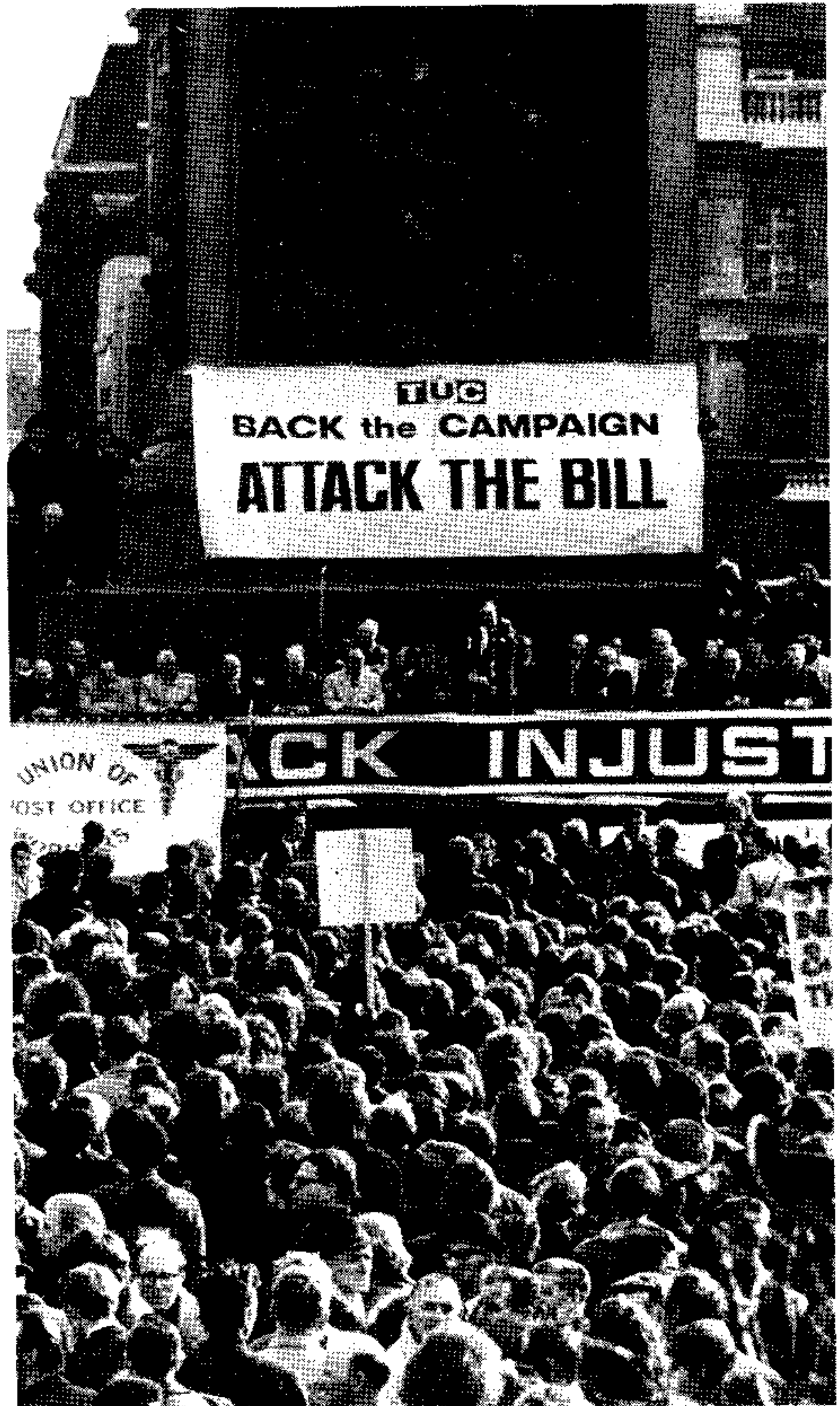
That is the position of the other lefts in the TUC. Although they will talk and vote against the law at the TUC they are not prepared to take action to put their money where their mouth is. Scargil has not called for solidarity action from the miners. Moss Evans has not called on the dockers and transport workers to black the movement of paper or ink. The POEU Executive has not even instructed its members to pull the plug on Eddie Shah's phones. However much they might talk left, none of them have been prepared to act to generalise the struggle.

That has meant that the right wing has made the running. The constant delays in reaching a decision about what sort of support to give the NGA means only one thing. The right wing has won for Len Murray extra time to twist NGA arms harder and harder. The TUC is trying to stitch up a deal.

Nobody would pretend that winning support outside the print will be easy. The fact that the NGA choose to fight in such a messy fashion means that there is no clear print stoppage to point to as an organising focus. The general mood of demoralisation and defeat will not disappear overnight.

No doubt turning the sympathy of that minority into active support will be a difficult task, but it is the only way to win the dispute.

There is certainly a layer of militants outside of the printing industry who want to fight alongside the NGA. The response to the mass picket on the night of 29-30 November showed that where the work was done people were prepared to take the issue seriously enough to travel to Warrington overnight.



1971: The rank and file forced the TUC to get off their chairs

But there is a very real danger in concentrating on Warrington. It is certainly not there that the battle will be successfully concluded. Victory lies with activity in the workplace, where the energy and enthusiasm of those who attended the battle of Warrington can be transformed into a more generalised struggle (of solidarity and blacking) against the government and its laws.

No one can pretend that that is easy. It is not. But the obvious temptation for the NGA bureaucracy—and for their backers in the TUC bureaucracy—will be to rest content with increasingly symbolic, ineffective

and frustrating confrontations at Warrington. That would be a terrible trap for militants wanting to fight on the issue.

For example, even Arthur Scargill's personal presence at Warrington would not be crucial (all he sent was a message on the 29/30 November)—only whether he could get his members to stop production.

What counts as crucial is work in the workplace. Unless that is done, and done quickly, then the ruling class will not only have passed anti-union laws through parliament, they will have shown that they can make them stick in the class struggle itself.

# CND—A second wind?

Two months ago we argued that however big the October demonstration turned out to be, CND would collapse shortly thereafter. **Pete Binns** looks at what has actually happened.

We were wrong — or at the very least overhasty. While many of the factors we pointed to still continue to operate, a whole range of new ones are now more clearly apparent, and they have materially altered the situation — at least in the short run.

Over the last few weeks confrontations between the police and anti-Cruise demonstrators — above all from the peace camps — have escalated to quite unprecedented levels. Thousands have already been arrested in Whitehall, Trafalgar Square, Greenham Common and dozens of other places up and down the country since 22 October.

In most cases demonstrators have, it is true, allowed themselves to be picked up without a fight, but the gradually increasing strong-arm tactics of the police have increased the anger and frustration of the protestors.

In terms therefore of both the extent of the activity, the numbers involved, and the quite unprecedented level of confrontation with the state, there can be no doubting the extent of the movement however shortlived it may prove to be.

Yet before 22 October it all looked very different. The general atrophy of the local CND groups went hand-in-hand with the declining impact of the peace camps. Public opinion polls were indicating significant falls in support for both unilateral nuclear disarmament and opposition to Cruise missiles. Heseltine felt so confident in having won the argument that he disbanded his anti-CND propaganda unit. How then are we to explain the recent upsurge in activity?

## Grenada

In part it is explicable by the actions of the US government in Lebanon and Grenada — particularly the latter. The fact that 8,000 people demonstrated in London against the invasion last month is an indication of the size of the opposition that it has engendered.

The arrival of Cruise missiles in this atmosphere has not only increased the extent of the opposition to them, but has made this opposition a more generalised one; the questions of nuclear weapons and American imperialism becoming more closely linked in the minds of the activists.

On top of that there has been a high degree of ineptness on the part of the government in dealing with the women at Greenham. The very openness of the base has meant that the hundreds of jumpy, trigger-happy troops crawling all around the giant coffin-like

crated missiles have been clearly visible on our TV screens. Heseltine's comment that women entering the base could be shot has fuelled the anger and determination of the demonstrators as well.

Over Grenada and Cruise Thatcher found herself facing in opposite directions; on the one hand distancing the British government from US foreign policy, on the other leaving the American government with sole control of the Cruise missiles based on British soil.

The fact that the CND leadership has been moving to the right and that as an organisation it was withering on the ground before the Autumn did not prevent huge numbers turning up at the 22 October demonstration, and it has not prevented many activists from getting involved since then. Reagan and Thatcher have saved CND's bacon.

## Greenham

To see how possible it was for these two things to be combined one does not have to look further than Italy. For the demonstration that took place in Rome on 22 October completely dwarfed the one in London. Estimates have put it at anywhere between half a million and a million people. Yet this huge turnout occurred as a result of largely spontaneous movements.

Certainly nothing comparable to CND exists in Italy, but this obviously provided no barrier to the numbers attending. And in Britain the fact that CND had been doing very little and getting poor results from what it was doing before the Autumn did not prevent the recent upsurge either.

If the Greenham camp looks like posing long-term problems for the military, it will be attacked, broken up and dispersed by the forces of the state — either directly or through the encouragement of organised criminal and right wing elements to attack the camp thus allowing the police to 'intervene'. In reality only the mass involvement of the working class can provide the means for stopping Cruise, and camping out in the middle of a field in rural Berkshire will not help to get it. But arguing this point in the present conjuncture (however shortlived that may be) will, if anything, be even more difficult than it has been hitherto.

The right wing of the Labour party has been able to exploit this situation to their own advantage quite well. They have been helped by recent opinion polls which have indicated that only six percent of the population favour admitting Cruise without the 'dual key', and have stressed the lack of British control virtually to the exclusion of everything else.

They too have generalised the argument, linking Cruise with the US invasion of Grenada — but from a very right-wing, indeed chauvinistic, viewpoint. For Denis Healey what was wrong with the Grenada

invasion was that the Queen was not consulted, and therefore 'we' need an institution to make sure this does not happen with Cruise, hence the need for the dual key. As if Thatcher is any more our friend than Reagan is.

Were this restricted to the Labour right it might not be so bad. Unfortunately it is not: Foot and Kinnock have reiterated the same message, and Doug Hoyle MP seemed to be summing up the Labour consensus in the Commons' debate on Cruise when he declared '... we have now become the 51st state of America, so much so that our democratic rights as free citizens to demonstrate are being trampled underfoot at the instigation of President Reagan.'

It is important to note quite how rapidly this move to the right has been taking place among some of the most influential 'supporters' of CND. First of all the demand for unilateral nuclear disarmament has been quietly forgotten while the 'freeze' — which legitimates the existing nuclear arsenals — was put in its place. Now even this demand seems too radical. Instead of the freeze we now seem to have an acceptance by quite a wide consensus that the freeze is itself 'unrealistic' and needs replacing by the acceptance of Cruise — so long, of course, that Reagan will share the 'dual key' with his arch partner in the struggle against the Eastern bloc, Margaret Thatcher.

This crude and dangerous national chauvinism has been seen as a convenient short cut to establishing the case against Cruise by all too many on the left. A particularly nasty example is the *Morning Star* which has quite consistently been pushing such a nationalist line. On 1 November it headed its front page with a massive cartoon depicting a finger about to press a button. On the sleeve of the button-presser was the stars and stripes and on the button a union jack. The headline announced: 'Whose finger on the button?' The next day we were entertained by yet another cartoon on the same theme; this time it showed a clockwork Thatcher with a huge wind-up key in her back labelled 'Made in USA'. She is saying: 'We do not need a dual key, one is quite enough'.

## Terminal decline

At one level this right wing generalisation of Cruise and the invasion of Grenada fits the period well. It is based on the nationalist prejudices of what is probably a clear majority of the population, and if the Communist Party's terminal decline were not so far advanced it might have recruited significantly out of it.

After all, the two periods of the largest growth of the CP in the fifty and more years since it became a reformist party, were in the latter years of the Second World War and in the early 1960s. In the first of these periods it out-jingoised the Tories and recruited tens of thousands of workers on the basis of left wing (and not so left wing) patriotism. In the second of the periods it benefitted from the collapse of the Bevanites in the Labour Party and was able to draw into the party the right wing and bureaucratic elements left over from the demise of CND as a mass



movement in 1963.

The parallels between both of those periods and the situation today is obvious, though the decline of the CP has gone too far today to permit them much benefit from it.

Besides, the present upswing in activity of the movement opens up the possibility of a quite different sort of generalisation. The right wing argument, after all, rests on the assumption that there is something intrinsically superior in having Thatcher's finger on the button rather than Reagan's.

## Capitalist

But when the policeman who is beating your head in is a British policeman, when the court that sentences you is a British court, when the newspaper that insults you and tells lies about things you have personally experienced is a British newspaper, inevitably you find yourself up against the *British* capitalist class in all its various forms, and the very thought that you are doing this just so as to give more power to the spokeswoman for this very class becomes

more and more ridiculous. So also do the pacifist ideas about how to defeat Thatcher's war drive.

Or rather they *can* seem more and more ridiculous. But they only *do* seem more and more ridiculous if this point is put and argued for; and there is no way this can happen by abstract arguments from the sidelines.

This might seem an elementary point, but it is important to spell out what it means because it is all too easy to dismiss the current upswing in the movement for all the wrong reasons. Just because linking hands round a base, sitting down in the road or demonstrating support for a case taken before the American courts will not stop Cruise, this is *no reason whatever* for failing to support anything which is drawing people into activity on these issues.

Of course when there was nothing much happening in CND one could do very little more than use it as an arena of debate (and usually not even that) but today the situation is quite different.

To give an example. During the Vietnam

war, while we argued that only workers' power could stop the British ruling class from helping the US war effort, this did not stop us from participating in — indeed in organising — massive street protests in Grosvenor Square which we knew very well could not in themselves end the war. We were quite right to do so; we could not hope to influence the new layer of activists involved except by sharing their experiences with them, pushing every situation to the limits and then arguing with them about what was needed to go beyond those limits — even if we ourselves could not go beyond those limits in practice there and then.

So long as the current upturn in CND activity continues we must apply essentially the same method today. This does not mean that we should all trog off to our nearest peace camp — the camps are, and always will be, essentially passive, inward looking, isolationist and elitist — but this is certainly not the case with the demonstrations called against Cruise.

At the same time we have to recognise big differences between the period of the Vietnam war and today. In October 1968 we did not have to argue very hard for the need to involve the working class; the movement was still bubbling over with the events of May '68 in France and all we had to do was to point to them.

## Cruise

To make the connections today many arguments are needed before the links are established firmly in the minds of the activists we encounter. Only consistent and patient argument over a more prolonged period of time will win them over.

This suggests that one of the more fruitful areas of work will be with students. Many of the newer activists who are enthusiastically throwing themselves into the battle against Cruise are students, and where SWSS is able to take a lead in mobilising a periphery to participate in these events all efforts should be made to do so. We are not talking here about the hundreds of thousands who are prepared to do little more than bear witness against nuclear weapons every Autumn at Hyde Park, but rather the twos and threes, on occasion the odd minibus load of contacts and members from one or another college who are really prepared to voice their anger on the street and who we can seek out as individuals to argue our politics at length with.

We have no idea how long the present upturn in the struggle will last. Certainly we have no grounds for optimism on this score at all. There is every reason to believe that it will be very temporary and that if police repression is stepped up it will be shorter still — it might even be all over by the time this article appears in print.

There is as yet no sign of the upturn in the struggle translating itself into changes within the ideas and strategies of CND and the peace camps, and therefore no reason to doubt as yet that the pessimistic conclusions that we have drawn for the future of CND in previous issues of *Socialist Review* were anything other than correct but somewhat premature.



Thousands oppose Cruise despite organisational failures

# PLO: Pawns in the game

Recent bitter conflicts within the Lebanon, and particularly within the PLO have confused many socialists. Here Phil Marshall looks at the background to these events.

'Crisis in the Middle East' has a new meaning when there are 40 American warships in the Eastern Mediterranean and batteries of top Russian missiles in Syria. The threat of superpower confrontation is real and Washington and Moscow are worried.

'The problem here is that unlike Eastern Europe there are no ground rules—war can start by accident,' says an American diplomat.

The subject of the superpowers' interest is again Lebanon. This tiny country—about half the size of Wales with a population of some four million—is currently occupied by forces from six armies as well as the United Nations troops.

But it is the fighting between Lebanon's own militias which has caused the greatest confusion over recent months—the Druze have fought with the Phalangists, the Communist Party have fought with the Islamic fundamentalists and the Palestinians have fought with each other. It has been even more difficult than usual to find a way through the Lebanese labyrinth.

It is the chaos itself that is the most important clue to what is going on. Lebanon has always been dominated by its more

powerful neighbours—to the south Israel, backed by the enormous military resources provided by its American allies—to the north and east Syria, one of the traditional centres of power in the Arab world.

For years these two powers have worked to destabilise a country already divided by local feuds and rivalries. In recent months their efforts have become more Machiavellian.

The Zionist movement has long had ambitions in Lebanon. Its more aggressive strategists have argued that southern Lebanon should be absorbed into a 'Greater Israel' with the waters of the Litani River seen as a special prize.

One view has argued that Lebanon should be controlled by a strong Maronite government, friendly to Israel, which could break up alliances between the majority Muslim sects—the Shia, Sunni and Druze.

When Sharon's troops advanced on Beirut in the summer of 1982, it was with the intention of installing the extreme right-wing Phalange in power to fulfil just this aim.

Another aspect of this approach is the attempt to break Lebanon down into its 'ethnic-religious' elements. Israeli strategists have argued that their intervention should create 'autonomous zones' or 'statelets' for the major Lebanese groups—the Maronites, Shia Muslim and Druze. In this racist vision the whole region might then be made up of 'ethnic states', dominated, of course, by the Jewish state of Israel.

Israel failed to install the Phalange in full control in 1982. The structure upon which

Defence Minister Sharon hoped to build a client Lebanese regime was too rotten to support another generation of Maronite millionaires in power.

For the last year the Israelis have thus been engaged in an extensive destabilisation campaign—trying to court leaders in both the Druze and Shia communities, plying them with guns and money and looking for potential leaders for Israeli-backed 'autonomous' local administrations which might keep Lebanon permanently fragmented.

If Lebanon is not to be under centralised Israeli control, it is argued, then let it be under no central authority at all but indirectly under Israeli influence.

When during the summer Druze militias drove the Phalangists out of the Shouf mountain area near Beirut, the two sides often fought with Israeli weapons.

Israel has long armed the Phalange and had been giving weapons to 'selected' Druze. Israel was also suspected—by both sides—of having passed on false intelligence to precipitate the conflicts.

Syrian policy has differed little from that of Israel. Damascus has also long held ambitions to control Lebanon, which was historically part of Syria under the Ottoman Empire and is strategically of great importance occupying a long stretch of territory along Syria's western border.

But the claims of Syrian President Assad are also closely related to the ambitions of the Baathist regime to be the pre-eminent Arab nationalist focus in the region.

In the Arab world, nationalism means, first, Arab nationalism—an ideology which has had an influence and appeal similar to reformism in Western Europe. Following the effective collapse of Nasserism in Egypt, Baathism became the most significant Arab nationalist current, with Baath parties



taking power in Syria and Iraq.

Both made rhetorical appeals to Arab unity, the struggle against imperialism and Zionism and to 'Arab socialism'. Like the other brands of Arab nationalism—in Libya, Algeria, South Yemen—they have produced rigid state capitalist bureaucracies and a high level of internal repression.

Assad's ambition has been to assert Syria as the leading Arab national force and the extension of his control over Lebanon—part of the Syrian 'nation'—has been seen as a necessary step.

This has been the basis of Syrian policy since Assad came to power in 1971 and as Egypt (through the Camp David agreement and subsequent isolation) and Iraq (through war with Iran) have fallen by the wayside Assad has become more confident.

Today Syria has close links with the Maronite leader Suleiman Franjeh, the Sunni Muslim leader Rashid Karamah and the Druze Walid Jumblatt, as well as a network of clandestine relations with almost every political group and militia including the Phalangists.

### Bloodletting

Syria would like to instal a pro-Damascus government in Beirut. Failing that Assad will ensure that Lebanon remains unstable.

There seems to be common ground between Israel and Syria. If neither Tel Aviv nor Damascus can dominate Lebanon completely, then let there be no Lebanon at all.

It is the plot and counter-plot necessary to keep the Lebanese parties at each other's throats that explains much of the present bloodletting and has drawn the superpowers closer to confrontation in the region than at any time since the 1973 war.

There is also much common ground in the Syrian and Israeli attitudes to the Palestinians. Israel wishes the elimination of the PLO—as shown by the astonishing brutality of the 1982 invasion and siege of Beirut.

Syria requires the elimination of large parts of the PLO—leaving whatever remains aligned with Damascus and President Assad as the keeper of the Palestinian cause.

The present Syrian regime has opposed the PLO from the beginning. The Palestinians had received limited support from the pre-Assad regime but when the Baathists came to power in 1971 they soon adopted a negative attitude to the movement.

The PLO radio station in Damascus was closed and its cadres were harassed. In 1976 Syrian troops entered Lebanon—ostensibly to attack the Maronite militias—and turned instead on the PLO and their Lebanese leftist allies.

In Tripoli Assad has transformed an inter-Palestinian conflict into a Syrian assault on the PLO. In May 'rebel' PLO leaders grouped around Abu Musa and a number of 'radicals' associated with the pro-USSR/pro-Syria group in Fatah began a campaign against the Arafat leadership, accusing it of bureaucracy, corruption and abandonment of the founding principles of the PLO.

Not surprisingly many Palestinians sympathised. The PLO leadership was



remote, privileged and compromised by dealings with the richest of the Arab states and through them the United States. For a few weeks the rebel leaders were able to draw together large numbers of activists on the platform of radical reform of the PLO.

But as the months passed the rebels found themselves increasingly identified with the Syrians, who gave their units free access to areas of Lebanon closed to the Arafat 'loyalists', offering supplies and ammunition and, when battles started, tanks and artillery support.

Today the rebels are seen by most Palestinians as an extension of Syria and a stick with which Syria's Assad is beating Yasser Arafat. The huge majority of Palestinians support Arafat, whose numerous faults they are currently willing to overlook.

Arafat is probably more popular now than for many years. The West Bank has seen a series of demonstrations in his support, despite the threat of the occupying Israeli army, and even in Damascus the Palestinian camps have mobilised for him.

Arafat is seen as 'Mr Palestine'—as the symbol of Palestinian nationalism—and for many Palestinians the threat to him is a threat to the whole movement.

In Tripoli large numbers of Palestinians who had rallied to the rebel banner have defected to the Arafat camp. Increasingly, rebel Palestinian troops have been replaced by Syrian ones and openly backed by Syrian-operated artillery.

The conflict has become a Syrian-Palestinian one. Interestingly, the two largest 'radical' organisations in the PLO—the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine (PFLP) and the Popular Democratic Front for the Liberation of Palestine (DFLP) which are in the process of fusing, have abstained on the fighting but issued statements criticising Syria for its intervention.

Assad's eagerness to be rid of Arafat is connected to his wish to be in sole possession of the 'Palestinian card'—the right to act on behalf of the Palestinians.

The need to control the Palestinians has become more pressing as Assad has seen Arafat move closer to an agreement with Jordan's King Hussain on the project for

establishment of a West Bank 'autonomy' in federation with Jordan.

While Arafat's popularity rises, the fundamental weakness of his politics becomes ever clearer. His conception of the PLO is that of a national movement combining armed struggle with diplomatic manoeuvring to bring pressure on Israel and its allies for a Palestinian state.

To this end the PLO has accepted arms and finance from the Arab regimes to the extent that it has become wholly dependent on them—and indeed has become a mirror image of them.

This nationalist line argues that the PLO should abstain from participating in the struggles of Arab workers against their own rulers and quite explicitly rejects the socialist strategy of working to build revolutionary parties in the Arab countries.

The Arab working class has been growing steadily—most notably in Iraq, Syria and the Gulf countries, and crucially in Egypt where a powerful workers' upsurge almost brought down the Sadat regime in 1977.

Meanwhile the PLO has become more intransigently nationalist, turning its back on the one potential force for change in the region.

The PLO has thus developed as a set of groups closely tied to the Arab regimes from which at the same time they have tried to assert their independence. Now Arafat has been caught in the obvious trap, with the Syrians organising an important block inside the PLO based on the Damascus-backed Palestine Liberation Army, the Saiqa guerrillas and a number of pro-Syrian grouplets. These have led the assault on Tripoli.

For socialists the Lebanon-Palestine events present a bleak scenario. The working class is nowhere on the stage at present. In Syria the workers' movement has long been cowed. In Israel the working class retains its traditional attachment to the Zionist cause.

In Lebanon a genuine working class hardly exists. Sectarian rivalries and nationalism backed by the imperialist powers dominates the scene.

Not until the workers' movement in Syria, Egypt or one of the other Arab states emerges in a more confident form can we hope to see the balance changed.

# 'Saving the Socialist Republic?'

Tory proposals to get rid of the GLC and the Metropolitan councils have now been published. That all socialists should oppose the proposals is clear. But on what grounds, and how should a fightback be organised? Gareth Jenkins takes a critical look at the Labour Left's response, and at the campaign they are organising.

In Early October the government began fulfilling one of its pre-election pledges. It published proposals for the abolition of the Greater London Council and the Metropolitan County Councils (Greater Manchester, Merseyside, South Yorkshire, Tyne and Wear, West Midlands and West Yorkshire).

The reason it gave was that this tier of local government is superfluous (these areas already possess councils of one sort or another) and so has set itself goals that are wasteful, expensive and bureaucratic.

In its place the government will set up joint local authority boards, not directly elected, to cover the fire service, transport and the police. These will take over on 1 April 1986. The hand of central government will be greatly strengthened. It will control budgets and rate precepts for at least three years, and decide on staff numbers.

The arrangements for London are slightly more complicated. The Inner London Education Authority will remain in existence for the time being, but will be run by nominees of the Borough Councils and the City of London. Its long-term survival, however, will depend on its performance being acceptable to central government.

New bodies to deal with job-transfers and redundancies, to administer the GLC debt and superannuation fund, and to advise on strategic planning, will come into being. Other functions such as highways, waste, what's left of housing, arts and sport, will devolve onto the boroughs. The metropolitan district councils will also take on all these functions except housing, which they already have.

That, then, is what the government wants. There are enormous parliamentary obstacles in its way, and it is by no means clear that it will succeed. Similar attempts to abolish the ILEA during the last Tory administration, founded on the rocks of parliamentary procedure.

Most of the government's concern about bureaucracy is, of course, utter humbug. What it is really after is simply cutting

spending on the social services supplied by the GLC, and the MCCs. It is not interested in giving better value for the same service.

It is obvious that more, not less money would have to be spent if each separate borough or district council had to duplicate the work formerly carried out by the 'super-authorities'. All economies of scale would be lost.

By central control of the budgets and rate precepts the government will be able to starve local services of money much more effectively than they do at present. No longer will these large councils be able, even if they are willing, to cock a snook at central government directives by raising revenue out of extra rates.

In addition, there is a good deal of political mileage for the government. All these councils are Labour-controlled, and no doubt the chance of removing Ken Livingstone seemed an irresistible vote-catcher with the *Standard*, *Daily Mail* reading public. (Ironically, if the government gets its way, it will give Livingstone an extra, unelected year of office.)

The proposals have raised protests even from Tories. Some may be genuinely concerned about the real problems of re-allocating local government functions; others, more cynically, about the loss of comfortable careers.



**Ken Livingstone**

However, even the genuine protest is suspect. Tories who oppose the government are in effect saying that cost-cutting is *already* being achieved with the *present* system; don't cock it up for the sake of vote-catching; don't turn local government into an unworkable shambles: leave the Labour 'overspenders' to hang themselves through electoral unpopularity.

In other words, they don't disagree with the basic strategy of cutting spending, only with the wisdom of the government's approach.

The Labour case against the proposals is,

as one might expect, rather different. It concentrates on the contradictions between the government's stated aims (greater efficiency, better use of resources) and the likely result (fewer services and jobs). It also makes great play of the need to preserve local democracy and accountability, pointing out that the chief fault of the proposals is that services will no longer be controlled by elected representatives, answerable to the rate-payer.

Since we are going to hear much more of this argument during the months to come, it is worthwhile examining it carefully. For it has certain implications for any campaign mounted by the threatened councils and the Labour Party.

The first point to note is that local government is no more democratic than national government. They are structured in identical ways. There is no control over representatives; decisions reflect the workings of unelected council bureaucrats; government cuts tend to be passed on in the form of higher rates. As the abstention level in local elections suggest, most working class people are unpersuaded about the 'virtues' of local democracy.

That local government is the state writ little should be crushingly obvious. But it suits Labour to gloss over the reality because it is in the business of pretending that fundamental change comes through the ballot-box.

## Scarce resources

In addition, Labour's stress on the need to preserve what is at most a bare abstraction — the preservation of local democracy — permits a slide to the right. By insisting on the discipline of the electorate (as against an abundance of unelected appointments) it is borrowing an argument from the right, who have always claimed that 'excessive' spending by Labour-controlled authorities is against the 'democratic' wishes of the rate-paying voters.

So, for example, part of the GLC's accountability argument is that the type of single function non-elected body which will take over tends to spend and cost too much. Such bodies 'do not need to balance competing claims on scarce resources, nor face an electorate on a record of spending and cost.'

This is a strange argument for a left-wing council. In effect it is saying that it is better at spending less to provide more in order to satisfy the cost-conscious voter. One of the bodies it implies as having 'overspent' is the London Ambulance Service. These comments would not be out of place from a Tory.

Now, one should not exaggerate the point.



Elsewhere in its reply the GLC makes very clear how services will be reduced as a result of the proposals and how jobs will inevitably be lost.

But the truth is that the argument always comes back to the question of 'democracy' and that in turn allows the GLC to look in two directions. One, to cover its left flank, is about damage to social provision and to employment. The other, designed to pull in a broad spectrum of opinion (including Tory opinion if possible), is that the present system really is the most efficient, unbureaucratic and least wasteful way of managing resources.

### 'Fares fair'

What is conspicuous by its absence is the obvious fact that these resources should be massively expanded to cater for people's needs. The scarcity is taken for granted; the only question is whether local or national government is better at dealing with what little exists. But of course to challenge this concept of resources might alienate 'moderate' (ie Tory) opinion.

All this in turn dictates the kind of campaign of opposition we are likely to see develop. On the one hand, there will be the attempt to prove the government wrong out of its own figures (a battle of the experts involving very few). On the other, there will be the emphasis on electoral pressure politics. Since nobody can be against democracy, the hope is that everyone (except irrational, spiteful Westminster Conservatives) will fight against the abolition proposals.

That 'everyone' is the voter, Ken Livingstone hopes that the proposals are 'so transparently bad' that millions of Londoners will mobilise against them. And what does mobilisation entail? To quote Living-

stone:

'When Londoners realise what's at stake they will mobilise and focus pressure on their MPs and on the House of Lords.'

For a man who believes in extra-parliamentary activity, this is rather small beer. He also seems to have amazing confidence in the ability of the unelected House of Lords to champion the cause of democracy.

This type of campaign bears a depressing resemblance to the Fares Fair Campaign. Faced with the High Court ruling to restore high bus fares, leading GLC campaigners assumed that commuters would be so enraged by the 'transparent badness' of the legal judgement that they would refuse to pay the extra in their 'millions.' The sorry fate of Dave Wetzel, GLC transport committee chairman, who was voted off the bus by the passengers he was trying to mobilise, knocked that idea on the head.

The truth is that the millions of Londoners are powerless *as voters*. The only people who can make any difference to the government's proposals are those who are collectively organised at their place of work; transport workers, firemen, council employees, teachers and so on. It is the action of these thousands which counts.

Yet if the GLC attitude is anything to go by, they will be thought of as just one of the constituencies in the broad spectrum of public opinion. The trade union leadership will also be keen to go along with this. During the campaign to save the ILEA a few years back, the teacher unions were quite willing to sign a truce with the employer (who was happily squeezing jobs and conditions at the time), on the grounds that the defence of democracy comes first.

The GLC might answer some of these criticisms by saying that it is not its business to interfere in trade union concerns, that it has to concentrate on the 'political' side of

things, namely its electorate. It is up to the unions to deal with the 'narrower' economic category of workers. This division between 'politics' and 'economics' is exactly what one would expect from reformists, and in the subordination of workers' interests to those of the council, ie the employer.

And if the leading left wing council in the land, the one with most to lose, is intent on following such a policy, the other councils under threat seem unlikely to improve on it.

Our attitude as revolutionary socialists is quite different. In fighting the Tory plans we have absolutely no interest in preserving a local part of the state machine. We oppose the proposals for one reason only — because they are a threat to jobs and conditions.

This is not being 'economistic' or non-political. It is to recognise the plain fact that unless those directly in the firing line take action to defend their immediate interests then the 'politics' of the matter — saving social services and amenities — does not stand a chance.

### Complexity

Of course that does not mean ignoring calls for opposition just because they come from Labour councillors. But what it does mean is attempting to translate them into rank and file activity that is *not* tied to the political aims of these councils.

That is essential. There is, after all, a chance that the government will fail simply because of the complexity of the operation. But given the council's concessions about their responsible management of resources, the pressure on them to continue the rundown of jobs and conditions will increase. Only independent working class activity will be able to resist what these 'democratic' employers will then be asking by way of sacrifice.

# Closed shop in crisis

The Tory council in Birmingham has stopped collecting union dues through check-off and is trying to smash closed shop agreements. **John Deason** investigates the background and the unions' response.

A year ago Birmingham NALGO branch, faced with a long running battle against privatisation, decided to tackle the bureaucratisation of its own branch structure and establish a proper shop stewards organisation.

Throughout NALGO there is very little shop steward organisation. It is officially claimed that 30 percent of NALGO branches have shop stewards but, as was the case in Birmingham, even those 30 percent have stewards in name only. The stewards are not elected by, nor are they accountable to, individual sections. Neither do they enjoy many sectional negotiating rights.

In the case of Birmingham, the shop stewards were in effect the old department representatives under a different name. They were elected on a one per 60 basis with no relationship to different sized departments. The structure owed more to its origins in the downward growth of the Whitley system of joint management/union representative committees than any real steward organisation.

Worried by the lack of sectional accountability and the dominance of the Branch Executive, militants in the branch successfully won three changes:

1. a smaller branch executive
2. monthly branch meetings to make policy
3. the formation of shop stewards committees not based on numbers but on sectional representation.

## Privatisation

The intention was to build on the already-established sectional bargaining over things like flexitime arrangements and some local wage bargaining for groups like social workers. Militants, encouraged by SWP members and supporters, recognised they could not take on Tory privatisation plans if they relied on full-time branch officers and bureaucratised stewards. These were drawn ever deeper into facility time off the job and away from the members.

Their forebodings were to prove horribly accurate.

In May 1982 the newly re-elected Tory council announced privatisation schemes on a grand scale. On the manual side this immediately led to 350 redundancies amongst the refuse workers as the NUPE and TGWU officials 'headed off' privatisation by tendering for their own jobs!

In addition the council paid vast sums to

private consultants to suggest areas for privatisation and greater efficiency (i.e. cuts). £120,000 was paid to Price Waterhouse Associates to investigate Social Services. £60,000 was paid to Coopers and Lybround to investigate the small (250 workers) Architects Department.

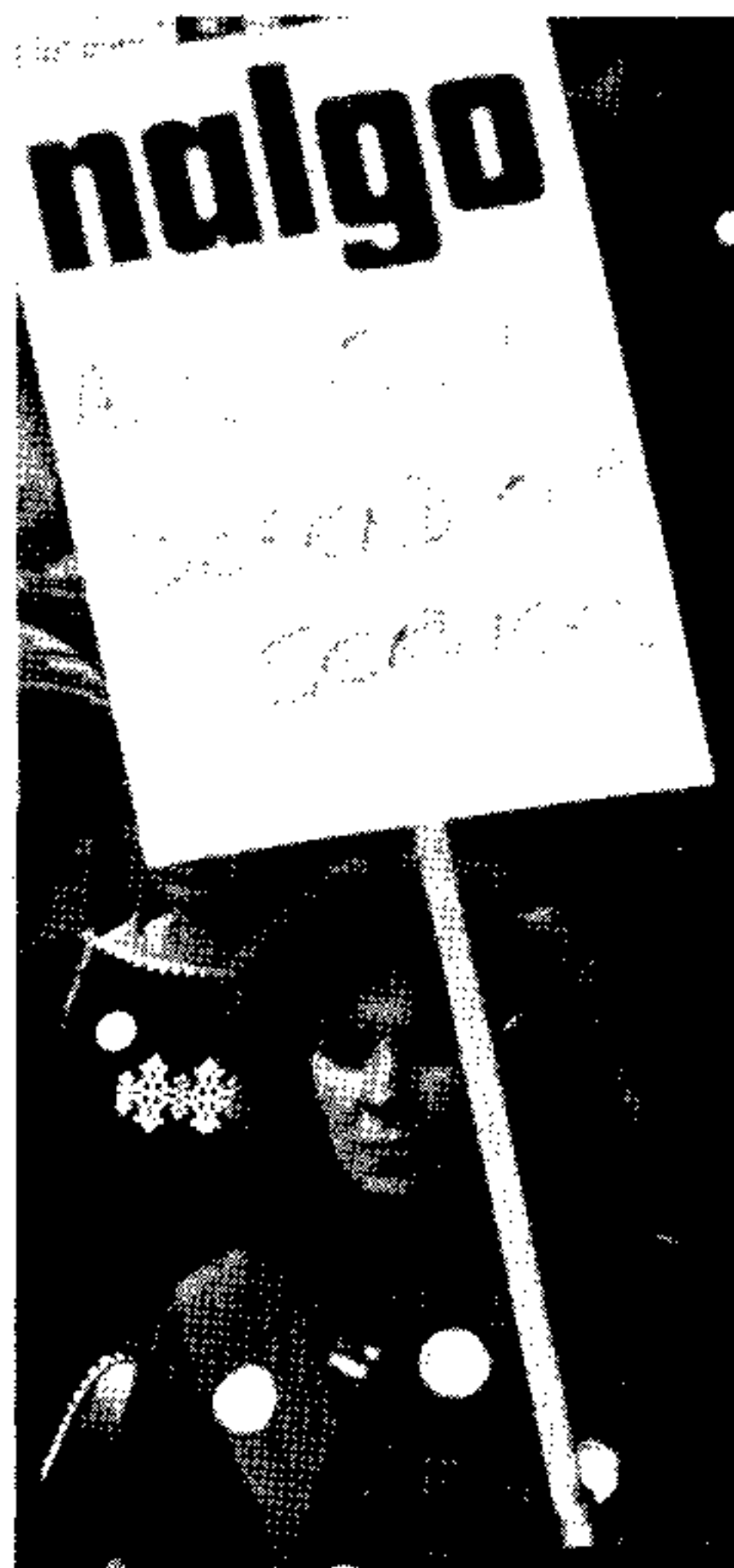
Resistance to the consultants was low in the Architects Department, but in the Social Services, where the steward organisation was stronger, there was a much tougher adoption of branch policy not to co-operate with the consultants. As the consultants attempted to interview individually Basic Grade Social Workers, Washwood Heath and Northfield Social Services offices were picketed and the consultants denied access. Three social workers refusing to be interviewed were then sacked on 21 November last year. The response was immediate—3-4,000 struck immediately. The next day 8,000 out of a branch membership of 9,500 stopped work for the mass meeting — senior management NALGO members scabbed.

The instant response by Social Services was some testament to the growing steward organisation in that section, and throughout the branch the momentum was there for an all-out strike. However, the full-time official, District Organisation Officer Sid Platt, a Labour left, defused things by arguing for selective action. He wanted just 60 Social Services workers to stay out, backed up by key individuals in other departments, and a levy. It was a familiar bureaucrats' recipe for avoiding confrontation.

All 1,200 Social Services members stayed out and Platt reluctantly had to agree to recommend that the stoppage be made official. But the problem of Platt's partial strategy remained. Most of the NALGO branch's chief stewards (departmental convenors), all on more than 60 percent facility time, agreed with Platt. So too did the branch officers (100 percent facility time). It was the chief stewards, branch officers and Platt who ran the dispute. There was no elected strike committee based on accountable sectional stewards.

The strike lasted three weeks and it was bitter. Pickets were knocked down by scabs driving in. One scab car was burned out and super glue found its way into scabs' car doors etc. Throughout Social Services argued for escalation into an all-out strike — branch policy was to escalate 'gradually'. Divisions were made worse by strike pay policy. Social Services strikers were on £20 per week strike pay but selected groups like the Cashiers and Housing that were called out were promised full pay.

After three weeks a 7,000 strong meeting at Villa Park football ground narrowly voted to accept a sell-out formula from Platt — reinstatement of the three in return for co-operation with the consultants. The striking Social Services workers were out-voted. They argued for an all-out strike by the



whole branch.

This sell-out set the scene for the offensive against the closed shop that was to follow.

Senior management NALGO members had scabbed through the strike. Jim Docherty, Group Leader of Centre 9 Social Services and a NALGO member, went as far as to take out a private injunction against fellow NALGO members picketing his office. They broke away and applied to join MATSA, the white collar section of the General and Municipal Workers Union — so much for a NALGO so-called 'closed shop' that includes senior management. Twenty four people actually resigned from NALGO, claiming 'victimisation' by lack of co-operation from other NALGO members.

The council used this as their cue to step in. In July this year they terminated the Union Membership Agreement and stopped the check-off for union dues collection. The council had already given notice of this intention under a 12 month 'notice of termination clause' which the previous Labour council had insisted on. But defence of the individual freedom of 24 scabs, and managers to boot, suited Tory ideologues.

The result of this offensive is frightening. Membership has fallen drastically. NALGO Head Office claim no accurate figures are available yet. Social Services stewards estimate that the membership of 9,500 has fallen to 4-4,500. The same branch officials that went along with the sell-out tactics of Platt all threw the towel in and resigned. Cosy 100 percent facility time jobs are one thing but a basic fight for union membership — that's another!

At present dues are being collected by stewards and the branch is without officers. It is being run by an executive of senior stewards. Management has disciplined stewards collecting cash dues with written warnings. Now most dues are being raised through bankers orders. The stewards didn't feel sufficiently confident to take on and establish the right to move freely about and collect money. There was one short stoppage in defence on Dave Hughes, a Social Services Buying Department steward, but generally the divisions and demoralisation caused by the sell-out of the earlier strike have had their effect.

Even in the more militant Social Services Department union membership has fallen by half, many expressing total demoralisation with 'the union'. Several of the other, better organised departments have lost confidence in a centralised branch structure. The Treasurer's Department shop stewards are currently balloting their members to seek an alternative to Birmingham NALGO membership. They want their own NALGO branch. If that is not on, they want to join the TGWU.

### Thatcherite

Departments previously involved in strikes are understandably suffering from demoralisation. Worse, in other departments, not previously involved, dangerous pockets of consciously anti-union alliances with departmental bosses are springing up. This particularly applies to the Personnel Department. It is a heavy price for the sell-out of the Social Services strike. But it also demonstrates how much previous union membership, built on sweetheart facility time agreements for branch officers and check-off closed shop for the membership, was built on sand.

As with the Tories national sense of tactics of how far to press legal shackles on the unions, so too with this example of the Tories locally. No doubt some of the Birmingham Tory councillors would love to break all trade union organisation in the council, but their sense of class priority (i.e. their assessment of the balance of class forces) prevails in their tactical judgement. Amongst the manual workers the Union Membership Agreement has been scrapped, but the check-off is still being maintained. No doubt this 'concession' to the full-time trade union bureaucracy is in return for their lack of effective fight against the privatisation. They are faced with the privatisation of all school cleaners, the scrapping of all school meals, with some 2,000 dinner ladies to lose their jobs. Some 550 jobs have already been lost in the City Engineering and the Amenities Departments.

It remains to be seen whether other Tory councils follow the Birmingham example. Birmingham council now have £40 million in reserves due to refunded grants from central government in return for their savage cuts in services. It is a brilliant example of Thatcherite housekeeping that this £40 million cannot now be spent on services or it will be lost on central government grant penalties! The Birmingham Tories have managed to cut the



rates by 15p in the pound last year and a similar cut is planned this year. The price, of course, is hungry school kids, as well as lost jobs, and broken closed shops.

But however far other councils follow suit in linking privatisation to attacks on the closed shop, the lessons from Birmingham are pertinent for us all. Too many existing closed shops are by virtue of Management Personnel Departments who want pliable full-time branch officers (or full-time convenors or Lodge Secretaries) with whom to deal with problems at one remove from the office or shop floor. It's a closed shop organisation that suits efficient collection of union dues for the bureaucracy, but implies neglect of basic shop steward organisation.

And it is therefore built on sand.

A proper closed shop is built on strong, accountable sectional steward organisation. One without the other is liable to both trade union bureaucratisation *and* management offensive. The Employment Act gives greater scope to those employers wanting to have a go. Battles round the closed shop will certainly be on the increase. They will be battles that cannot be won by officials *worried* by the loss of union revenue but *terrified* of rank and file shop stewards. Trade union cretinism never won anyone to the closed shop. Confident rank and file militants infused with socialist ideas about collectivity and collective discipline did, and still can.

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# Liverpool: a new dawn?

Liverpool council is the most vociferous opponent of Tory plans. Alan Gibbons analyses their strategy for fighting back.

Fifteen thousand people marched through the streets of Liverpool on Saturday 19 November. They were responding to a call by the Labour-controlled city council to demonstrate against the policies of the Tory government.

The Liverpool Labour Party took office in May on a policy of no cuts and no rate rises. It has taken on 600 new council workers and plans to reduce council rents by £2 a week and begin a massive new housebuilding programme. This action has set the council on a collision course with the government. Appointed commissioners may be used by the Tories to implement the cuts over the heads of the city council.

To some on the left, the electoral successes of the Liverpool Labour Party — hardest of the 'hard left' councils — confirms that with the right programme the masses will flock to the traditional party of the class. It is a myth which must be scotched.

The sectarian divide which persisted well into this century in the area and the casual nature of the labour force meant that the Labour Party did not take office for the first time until 1955. During the fifties one right wing Labour councillor, Jack Braddock, presided over a regime based upon boss politics of the worst sort.

Behind the electoral victories lay a notoriously weak grassroots organisation. The ward meetings were tiny. Three wards, including Braddock's own in Everton, registered no members at all! It was at the expense

of this tradition of boss politics that the Liberals were to rise so dramatically in the seventies, keeping Labour out of office for the last ten years.

During the ten years of Liberal control the working people of the city learned the hard way that the Liberals, and later the Alliance were a complete sham. Council rents soared. Services declined. Five thousand jobs were axed. Led by the appalling Sir Trevor Jones, the council treated striking typists in truly Victorian fashion and outstripped the Tories in their enthusiasm for privatisation.

The electorate in general and trade unionists in particular were thoroughly disenchanted with the Liberals by the time of this year's May elections. The Liberals' decline was magnified by a simmering row over the allocation of seats with their Alliance partners. This came to a head during the General Election when Liberal and SDP candidates stood against one another in the Broadgreen constituency, helping Militant supporter Terry Fields win the seat for Labour. In short, local conditions meant that the national swing to the Alliance was reversed in Liverpool.

While the Liberals did their worst, a new layer of Labour activists was emerging. Garston MP Eddie Loyden described himself as a 'shop steward in parliament' and Eric Heffer became a leading figure on the left.

More importantly, for the purposes of this article, supporters of the Militant Tendency found it relatively easy to take over the depopulated wards, and to secure prominent positions in the local Party. A substantial group became councillors and one, Terry Fields, became an MP. At one stage, before some energetic manoeuvring, four Militant supporters, Fields, Derek Hatton, Terry

Harrison and Tony Mulhearn were adopted as prospective parliamentary candidates. Mulhearn is now President of the District Labour Party and Hatton is deputy leader of the city council.

The Militant Tendency in Liverpool is a different breed from the 'children of 68' who are prominent in many London left councils. They have a working class base and firmly repudiate rate rises to pay for their schemes. They also steer well clear of the more exotic fantasies of the trendy new left.

Among the leading figures in the local labour movement who support Militant are POEU secretary Phil Holt, NUT secretary, Felicity Dowling, NGA official Ray Williams, the convenor of British American Tobacco, Chris Williams and the convenor of Eric Bemrose, Jimmy Wilson. There are Militant supporters in prominent positions in the civil service, the fire service and the local authority unions.

Merseyside Militant spokesman Richard Venton claims that there are 600 Militant supporters in the area who sell 5,000 copies of the newspaper. Allowing for a generous degree of exaggeration, that such a claim can be made in the press indicates a measure of strength.

## Broad Left

It is clear that Militant constitutes a substantial organisation with roots in the labour movement. It has largely replaced the Communist Party in the lower reaches of the trade union bureaucracy. Its support is built not upon its dubious credentials as 'Marxists' but on its unstinting work maintaining the local Labour Party and winning 'influential' positions in the trade union machine.

Many Militant supporters are on one hundred percent facility time and perform a role indistinguishable from other Labour Party members in similar positions. In dispute after dispute they have argued strongly for selective action and against all out strikes. The post office engineers, civil servants and Toxteth DHSS disputes are only the most recent examples. The strategy here is of a robust left reformism allied to Broad Left control of the trade unions. It is a strategy which has been particularly appealing in an area which has not previously gone through the experience of a left Labour council.

This Broad Left, electoralist strategy works against the development of a clear, class perspective. In the *Liverpool Labour News* issued to every household in the city a week before the 19 November march, Tony Mulhearn wrote: 'We are asking every person — pensioner, worker, housewife, student, unemployed — to show your strength of feeling and support your Party. This is not just another march. *This is a people's demonstration.*' (His emphasis).

The *Militant* newspaper itself has been equally woolly in explaining how the confrontation with the Government can be won. It speaks of more marches, lobbies of parliament, appeals to the electorate and 'vigorous campaigning.'

Labour Party Young Socialists' secretary, Ray Murray argues: 'We will mobilise our

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# LIVERPOOL CITY COUNCIL JOINT STEWARDS COMMITTEE



supporters, particularly in the local authority unions. There will be protests and demonstrations and we will also be looking for backing from other Labour authorities who find themselves in the same position.'

A vital and obvious omission is any serious argument for industrial action. Instead we have vague references to the trade unions supporting 'their' council. The council workforce is cast firmly in the role of stage army, responding to the call of the generals on the city council.

This question of the independence of the trade unions from the Labour Party will be of central importance over the coming months. The Militant-inspired Labour Group is very keen on the idea of a 'partnership' between the Labour Party and the unions. One of its major efforts over the last few years has been to wrest control of the Trades Council from the Communist Party and draw it much more into the orbit of the Labour Party. It appears eager to repeat the operation in its relationship with the council unions. During the struggle against the Liberals' privatisation plans the council unions formed a local authority Joint Shop Stewards Committee. The JSSC was committed to all out strike action in the event of any section of the council workforce being privatised. As it turned out, the JSSC was unable to fulfill its promise.

When the Liberals privatised a small, weak, section, the market cleaners, the JSSC called a series of mass pickets of the Fruit Market. No detailed work was done in the workplaces and attendances dwindled from 100 to a mere handful. Finally the JSSC called a mass meeting to propose action. A mere 1,500 turned up out of a possible 30,000. The JSSC had to face up to defeat and the Fruit Market operation was privatised.

Resistance to the privatisation of refuse collection appeared similarly doomed until Labour took office in May and shelved the plans. Many of the activists on the JSSC breathed a sigh of relief. Instead of analysing their own weaknesses and planning to rebuild shop stewards' organisation in each site, depot and office, a large group of stewards have set their sights firmly on the city council as their longed-for saviours.

Labour activists on the JSSC have argued hard to turn this understandable response to a recent defeat into unconditional, and uncritical backing for the council. When Derek Hatton arrived to address the JSSC recently, the debate was interrupted to introduce him. 'We can't keep him waiting' said several stewards reverently. Militant supporters have even gone so far as to try to censure Communist Party members because they belong to an organisation which stood against Labour in the June election!

## Climbdown

The drive to tie the trade union tail to the Labour Party dog culminated on 23 September in a gathering of 850 local authority stewards. This was not an exchange of experience, or a discussion of tactics. It was a Labour Party rally, called as the leaflet puts it: 'In conjunction with the Liverpool City Council JSSC'.

Council leader John Hamilton, deputy leader Derek Hatton and councillor Tony Byrne were the key speakers. The Tories were roundly denounced and the assembled stewards were told they must back 'their' council. Significantly, Derek Hatton reminded the audience that if the workforce didn't back the councillors, they would be unable to sustain the struggle. This is precisely the argument which was used to

justify the climbdown by the Lothian Labour council when they seemed to be on the brink of a major clash with the Government.

Rubbing shoulders with the Labour speakers on the platform were Liverpool MPs, full time officials and JSSC executive members. Tony Byrne announced that 'conflict is inevitable.' What none of the platform made clear was what council workers should do. The workers were to be summoned to action unspecified, at a date unknown, at the behest of the city council. One SWP member pointed out during question time that the city council could prove its future intentions by paying in full the claim of the residential social workers. It was, as another SWP steward commented, 'like farting in Church'. SWP members have since been accused of sectarianism for daring to make such critical noises.

There are tremendous dangers in making loyalty to the council your first duty as a trade unionist. However sincere the Labour Group's intentions, it remains the employer. And within a capitalist state councils always tend to come into conflict with the workers they employ. There have been a number of bitter arguments over unfilled vacancies, during which councillors have made it crystal clear that they don't necessarily fill vacancies 'just because they are there'.

During the six month long strike by the typists the regular refrain from the Labour councillors was: 'If we were in office we'd pay your claim in full'. They haven't. The council's heavy-handed attempts to shift work from the Breckside Park bins depot provoked a two-day strike. The introduction of a 35 hour week has been quietly forgotten. Some of the better Labour Party members who work for the council have found themselves justifying practices they would have

condemned from the Liberals.

The residential workers' action is a case in point. Though the Liverpool city council passed a worthy resolution supporting the claim, it hasn't agreed to pay it in full. Derek Hatton thinks it enough to declare that the council will pay whatever is agreed with the employers nationally. Councillors have told bemused residential workers: 'Why are you hitting *our* homes? Why don't you go and do it to a Tory council? After all, we support you.'

A leading councillor has threatened to withdraw facility time from a social services' steward for publicly criticising the council's stance. The council has also refused to observe the level of cover requested locally by NALGO, leaving homes unattended.

Social Services chairwoman Heather Adams told the *Liverpool Echo* that she considered any escalation of the action 'irresponsible'. The response of some Labour Party members in NALGO has been to argue to limit the action in order to avoid embarrassing the council. 'Why are you always attacking *our* council?' one Labour Party member asked an SWP steward for the residential workers. Even when their interests actually conflict with their support for the Labour Party, few trade union activists have so far drawn the conclusion that they should maintain their independence of the employer.

The council leaders have often conceded under questioning that they will need a campaign of strike action if the Tories send in commissioners to replace the elected council and implement the cuts. There is, however, a problem. As the struggle against privatisation under the Liberals testifies, *calling* for strike action is not enough. The precondition for successful action is a confident workforce, steeled in a series of small battles to defend wages and conditions.

The conduct of the city council during its first six months in office has tended to prevent the emergence of a workforce which is ready to fight. Attendance of the JSSC is much lower than during the campaign against privatisation. The atmosphere of demoralisation left over from the defeats of the Liberals' last days and the present reliance upon the Labour Council do not bode well. The City council may hold large rallies of shop stewards in works' time, but there are few site, section and departmental meetings to inform, organise and encourage the workforce. When Labour calls on its stage army, it might not respond.

It is not worth speculating on the various scenarios which could emerge in the confrontation between the city council and the Government, though it is quite possible that right wing and 'soft left' Labour councillors might tip the balance in favour of surrender when the chips are down. Suffice it to say that the politics of the Militant Tendency which guides the council in no way equips it to overcome the difficulties it faces.

Militant supporters offer two conflicting arguments in support of their strategy. They are members of the Labour Party because: 'it is the traditional party to which the workers will always turn.' However, when challenged on Labour's past record, they argue Liverpool will be different. This just will not

do. The Greater London Council surrendered over cheap bus fares. The 'socialist republics' have levied huge rate rises. Southwark has used the police against residential workers. The Labour Party leadership betrayed Clay Cross council in 1973 despite good, fighting resolutions from the conference and the NEC. Lothian backed down in 1981.

This is not irrelevant to the Liverpool case. It means that even if a genuine fight does develop, it could well be isolated and defeated by the Labour leadership.

When the Clay Cross council was under Tory attack in 1973 Harold Wilson left it high and dry, arguing: 'the law of the land, however unfair, however oppressive, must be obeyed until it is repealed.'

One of the pressures forcing Wilson to the right at the time was the defection from the party of Dick Taverne, the former Labour MP for Lincoln, who was re-elected as a 'democratic' MP. Can we really expect any better from Neil Kinnock under the much greater pressure from the right of a 25 percent vote for the SDP/Liberal Alliance at the General Election? Kinnock has already snubbed Liverpool by sending a letter refusing to speak at the 19 November march and rally, because of 'unbreakable' commitments in South Wales.

The Labour Party in Liverpool can't shrug off the fact that it is a section of a national party subject to its discipline. And it is a party which is moving steadily to the right. Just last month Newcastle on Tyne Labour Council agreed to cuts which will destroy 1,800 jobs, increasing the pressure on Liverpool.

Irrespective of what the Labour Party does, nationally or locally, the workforce has no choice. Either it fights, or it suffers a massive attack on jobs, wages and conditions. The workers have the most to lose from a defeat. The greatest obstacle to them winning an important victory is the loyalty of many of their leaders to the politics of Labour. An all out strike by the city's 30,000 council workers, drawing on support from private sector workers could stop the cuts.

The condition is that the action is under the control of a rank and file prepared to act independently of the councillors and full time union officials when they begin to hesitate. It is to the extent that the workforce moves towards such a strategy and away from dependence on the Labour Party that it will be successful. The only set of ideas challenging Labourism are those of the small but very real forces of revolutionary socialism.

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## Bashed by the Labour Left

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Southwark has a left Labour council. Steve Campbell examines how they respond to their own workers.

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On 27 October, late in the evening, the Southwark Children's Homes complex in Sidcup, Kent was invaded by the Instant Response Unit (SPG) called in to help teams of management scabs clear the kids out.

The events of that evening, before, during and after the SPG involvement was a catalogue of assaults on the kids and the systematic and deliberate vandalism of the homes in order to make them completely uninhabitable.

So far the response of Southwark Councillors has been to condone the actions of management and the SPG that night, refuse an independent inquiry and to say that they would again be used if necessary.

The old die-hard right wing Labour administration was replaced in the May 1982 elections by one which was avowedly left wing. Many in the Labour Party saw that as the culmination of a determined and exhausting battle within the constituency and ward parties. It was proof that real advances could be made within the reformist structures.

Southwark was by no means unique; it was the brief summer of the Labour left both locally and nationally.

Southwark Council's use of the IRU/SPG against the residential workers with all the

violence it entailed may be as yet unparalleled, but it is no bizarre aberration. It is a classic example of a reformist ruling group's response when faced with workers fighting for their own interests.

'A new dawn in industrial relations' was proudly proclaimed in May 1982. There were exhortations to 'trust us' and fight the Tories together.

Southwark Council has one of the very biggest Labour majorities in the country so there is no excuse for the way they have behaved.

From the outset of the new-look Council, Southwark NALGO bore the brunt of the old-style response. The new administration attacked NALGO's 'no cover for vacancies' policy with all the vigour of the old, but it took residential workers' action to take the lid off. At the start of the Residential workers' industrial action the council voiced its sympathy for the claim, offered local negotiations — itself Southwark NALGO policy — and accepted the industrial action by removing agency staff, not seeking to break the admissions' ban or make NALGO members work more than their contractual 39 hours.

In practice 'sympathy' for the claim meant writing to the National Employers asking them to get on with negotiations *but without referring to the actual substance of the claim*. In other words they would not commit themselves to even saying how far the claim ought to be met. As for any notion of accepting the full claim, there was not a murmur.

Attempts by NALGO to find out what a starting offer might actually be, met with a

blank refusal, and demands that the union drop its industrial action as a precondition of sitting down to talks, whatever they may turn out to contain.

Yet the only acceptable basis for local negotiations is management agreeing to the claim in full and NALGO not dropping the industrial action.

The Chair of the Social Services Committee herself admitted in a local newspaper that such a demand was unreasonable.

Residential workers saw the effectiveness of the industrial action quickly negated by the Council and Management in the appointment of mobile staff. Encouraged by the prospect of a local settlement they escalated their action.

Within the first week or so of the dispute the new mobile workers were mostly recruited into the union and then instructed not to allow themselves to be transferred between units stopping management's attempts to get homes covered. A number of homes closed due to the lack of cover.

Rotas were then 'stacked' following Lambeth's example. This meant cover running out in many homes towards the end of each week.

Finally Residential workers escalated to only working 'social' hours, on the basis of: 'We don't get the pay for it so we won't do it'.

During the dispute much emphasis had been placed on all other NALGO members taking industrial action in support of the residential workers' own action, and it then laid the foundations for the successful anti-victimisation strike of 24 October.

Like most branches, solidarity action across Southwark NALGO was hitherto generally unknown and weeks into the dispute other branch members were completely unaware of the action and the reasons for it.

However, through arguing for and winning supportive industrial action, it was possible to build for a walk out in the event of a victimisation.

The possibilities of a victimisation were very real indeed and focussed on the rantings of sections of the Labour Group against the NALGO action. A councillor directive, which appeared as a staff notice, gave management the power to take on the residential workers.

### Stacking

Kids were to be moved and homes amalgamated (ie closed). Staff were to be offered redeployment or be taken off the payroll. They were also to work to management rather than union rotas, drawn up to enable stacking to operate. If they refused they were again to be removed from the payroll. Scab 'volunteers' were to be recruited from within the Council and from outside bodies to take over workers' jobs and run the homes.

It is difficult to imagine a more anti-union stance from *any* Council let alone from a 'left wing' one supposedly in the vanguard of the fight against the Tories and committed to a myriad of left causes.

For two weeks nothing happened. Then the Council went on the attack against the residential workers on 24 October, using

redeployment. They were confident that the NALGO stewards were out of touch with their members and that the Council could smash the branch. Councillors boasted openly in Labour Group meetings that this was their intention. It is here that the residential workers' dispute connects with wider issues of the Tory cuts. Much play was made of the forthcoming axing of the Rate Support Grant (RSG) and the 'inevitable' job cuts this would entail. The effect on Southwark is particularly devastating. The RSG virtually disappeared, leaving a massive deficit of £33 million.

Instead of even talking about fighting the Government, let alone any ideas of a strategy based upon the stewards' organisations, these middle-managers of Thatcher (UK) Ltd took a very different line.

It went, or rather goes, like this; the books have to be balanced. The manual workers have taken enough in the way of redeployment and job loss (true). It is now the turn of white collar staff crudely characterised as a privileged, selfish, highly paid management strata. Further, we have to take on NALGO 'as a branch' if we are to break the back of their organisation and thus be able to do all

this with the minimum of fuss.

Thus our 'socialist' employers embarked on a strategy of union smashing and divide and rule within the workforce as a means of maintaining their position. The events of the week beginning 24 October can only be understood in these terms, of deliberate calculated actions and *not* of some 'mistake'.

On Monday 24 October residential workers in homes without kids were summoned to HQ and given an ultimatum — accept redeployment or be taken off the payroll. All 32 present refused redeployment and were immediately taken off pay. The stewards issued a strike call which had an unprecedented response across the branch. Somewhere in the region of 1800 walked out on immediate strike, establishing picket lines the length and breadth of the Borough. Social Services and Housing Departments went on indefinite strike.

The effect on the Council was equally unprecedented. The Labour Group caved in that evening and issued two instructions: to reinstate everyone without loss of pay and to commence local negotiations forthwith. The Council had been taken off guard. Some Councillors claimed to have been misled.



Ted Knight

Next day a mass meeting of 1000 NALGO members carried on with the implementation of branch-wide escalated action. Negotiations then began, but from the outset all manner of obstacles were thrown in the path of those talks. In certain homes in the Hollies complex cover 'problems' arose that night because of management's refusal to cover themselves — a 'management strike'. Late on 26 October the Labour Group withdrew from all negotiations.

In the afternoon of 27 October teams of management scabs attempted to cajole the kids at the Hollies into leaving. They refused. Failing to persuade them management now resorted to force. Kids were dragged out of the homes where most have lived for years, some by the hair. Some local kids who arrived broke a couple of windows round the back of the admin block which the scabs used as their HQ. Otherwise both kids and workers were calm.

Then the police were summoned. Squad cars and a fleet of IRU/SPG vans tore into the campus. The SPG were equipped with riot shields etc. One later admitted to having been told to 'expect a bloodbath'. There was no 'riot' and no violence except from the scab team. The kids were taken off in SPG vans to police stations. Two adolescent girls were illegally strip-searched, presumably to humiliate them. There were two arrests and the units were raided by police and management. The homes were then systematically wrecked.

Why were the negotiations stopped, and

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why the wrecking?

The reality was that the majority of the Labour Group never had any intention of really negotiating locally. The 24 October strike threw them into disarray and a minority were able to say 'end this mess and get on with talks'. The fact is that NALGO branches in Southwark and Lambeth and

elsewhere have been strung along on 'local negotiations' by the Association of London (ie Labour) Authorities — ALA — as part of their plans to set up their own independent negotiating structure apart from the London Tory Employers. Ted Knight and the other ALA members whipped Southwark back into line — there was much talk in the Labour Group of breaking ALA 'solidarity' by actually going local.

Secondly the Council has planned to shut the Hollies complex within 3-5 years. By smashing the place they speed this up, hope to gain savings through undermining the proper negotiations and hope to damage the workers' confidence. Throughout the entire week management had been systematically lying to NALGO branch members about the action in order to weaken the solidarity shown on 24 October.

The Chair of the Social Services Committee admitted publicly that the police had been briefed for 36 hours prior to their use — ie during negotiations. She also admitted that Councillors knew that the SPG would be involved before the police were actually called in. Not only did Councillors not withdraw the police with this knowledge in mind, but they defended their use, even for the future. All in the interests of the kids!

This was from the people who condemned the use of the SPG in the Brixton riots and who supposedly have a Police Committee to monitor police behaviour.

Their actions that week were a deliberate exercise in union bashing and preparing for job savings worthy of Tebbit. But these are no Tories.

This is the face of left wing Labourism in 'power', prepared to use all the force of the state to maintain their position by attacks on their workers — many of whom are their own party comrades. This is the logic of reformism. What has happened in Southwark on a tiny scale has been repeated by reformism in larger and more tragic arenas throughout the world over decades.

## BOOKMARX CLUB

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# NATFHE race disgrace

NATFHE, the college lecturers' union, has been publicly accused of collaboration with police racism for its failure to defend a black member sacked from Hendon police school. The NATFHE leadership, especially the Broad Left, deny the charge. Meanwhile, four members of the branch that did defend the sacked lecturer are accused of conduct detrimental to the union. **Norah Carlin** explains.

The case of John Fernandes, sacked by the Metropolitan Police Cadet School last December, may be a complex one, but the complexities have been multiplied many times over by the conduct of the people who run the National Association of Teachers in Further and Higher Education. The basic issue is the wrecking of every attempt by a local branch to fight the victimisation of one of their members, by a bureaucracy formally committed to anti-racist policies but with no intention of allowing fine words to be turned into 'controversial' action.

The Metropolitan Police Cadet School is a further education college associated with, but not part of, the police professional training school at Hendon. Lecturers at the

The course included an explicit anti-racist element — an important point, for without this 'multicultural education' can reinforce racist attitudes by its stress on the 'alien' cultural origins of immigrant communities.

It would, of course, be quite wrong to suppose that the 'problem' of police racism could have been 'solved' by anti-racist teaching. The problem lies in the nature of the system the police are there to uphold. The idea for the course came from the police themselves, and was clearly a piece of window-dressing intended to look good in the Scarman Report. The last thing they wanted was for cadets to be confronted with criticism of their own racist attitudes, and as soon as this began to happen they demanded changes in the syllabus.

In September 1982, cadets were withdrawn from the explicitly anti-racist phase of the course by the head of the professional training school, Commander Wells, and put on a 'decision-making' course instead. This was despite the opposition of the course lecturers and without consulting the Kilburn Poly academic board. For NATFHE members, this raised important issues of academic freedom, for although the Police School is something of a peculiar institution, it is not alone in having outside bodies who would dearly love to interfere with course content. Parallels include day release students' employers, the Manpower Services Commission (which has tried to ban 'political discussion' from its courses) and

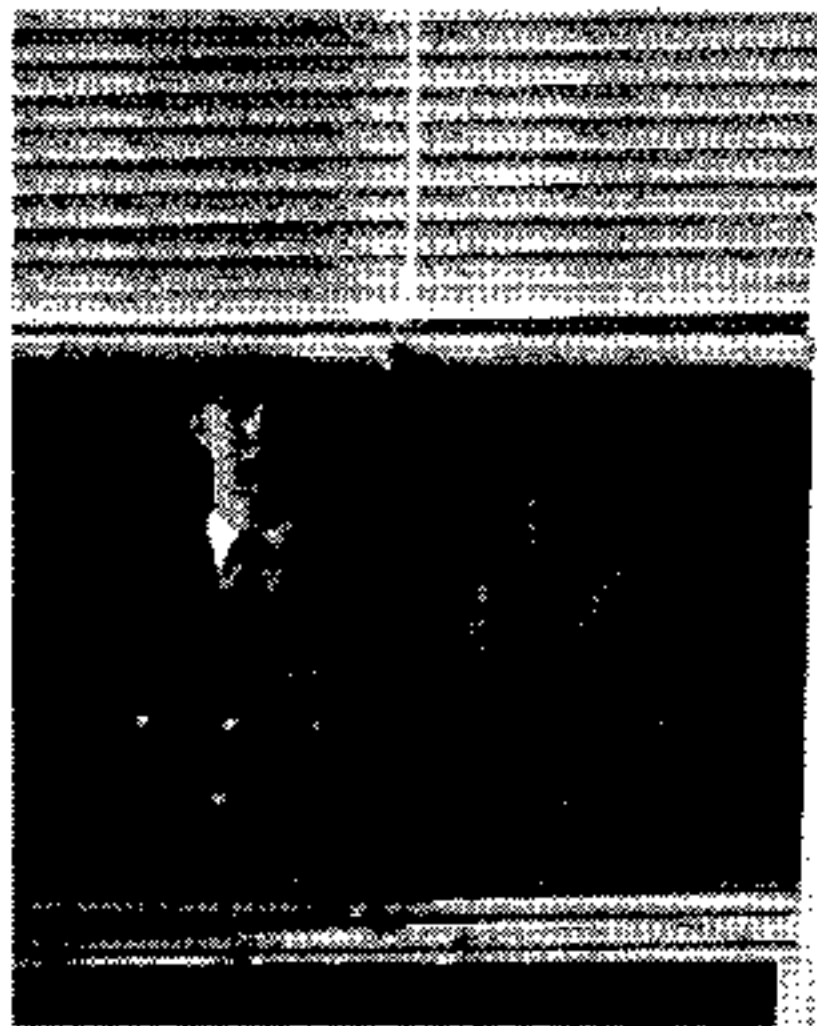
about how they saw black immigrants, John Fernandes had made it clear that he intended to use them in a research project which might be published, and gave the usual guarantee of personal anonymity — a procedure regularly followed by educational researchers. Commander Wells has since admitted that his internal enquiries have shown the essays were genuine, despite disgraceful accusations in *Private Eye* and elsewhere.

At the time, the Commander's immediate reaction was to demand that Brent Council remove Fernandes from the Cadet School, and when they declined to do so he ordered him off the premises at a few hours' notice.

Kilburn NATFHE branch, which had already been involved in the negotiations for the reinstatement of the anti-racist course, reacted with a half-day strike (for which they had to, and did, obtain a majority vote of branch members) and a picket of the Cadet School. The branch has supported Fernandes consistently ever since, with regular meetings, support for further pickets, and repeated evidence that a majority of the members have supported the actions of the branch committee.

Kilburn branch (despite its name, the college is not a higher education institution but a further education college teaching a wide variety of courses and students) has a good record of action against cuts and redundancies, and has from time to time taken up political positions — on Ireland, for example — which have embarrassed the NATFHE bureaucracy. It is not a 'Trotskyist cell' as has been claimed, but a branch of active rank and file trade unionists. That this is something of a rarity in NATFHE nowadays, is evidence of the general demoralisation rather than of some kind of conspiracy.

The Labour-controlled Council of the



**Cadets at Hendon Police College jeer at Fernandes defence pickets**

School were employed by the London Borough of Brent, and paid indirectly by the Home Office, to teach O and A Level syllabuses under the academic supervision of Kilburn Polytechnic's academic board.

At the time of the Scarman Enquiry, following the 1981 riots, the police decided to introduce multicultural education at the School. The course was designed and taught by a team of lecturers at the School, headed by John Fernandes, a black sociology lecturer who had taught there for some years.

Tory councillors in many areas.

Despite two months of attempted negotiations between Commander Wells, the Cadet School staff, and Kilburn Poly NATFHE branch, to which the staff belonged, the anti-racist teaching was not reinstated. In mid-November, John Fernandes appeared on Channel 4's *Eastern Eye* programme and extracts from racist essays written by cadets on the course were read out.

In inviting the students to write essays

London Borough of Brent reacted by agreeing to press for the reinstatement of John Fernandes and the anti-racist course, and announced that if this was not achieved it would withdraw all its employees from the Cadet School and redeploy them elsewhere.

The way in which NATFHE headquarters reacted, however, was disastrous. From the start, they saw John Fernandes and 'bad publicity' as the problem, rather than the action taken against Fernandez. From the moment that Brent Council suggested the

redeployment of staff, they insisted that the main issue was the defence of members who did not wish to be redeployed, and exploited divisions among the Cadet School staff. By February they had set up a separate NATFHE branch at the School in an attempt to cut off Fernandes (who could not attend meetings on the premises as he was still banned) and the rest of Kilburn branch. They also announced that the dispute ought not to have been handled by Kilburn branch at all, but by the Borough Liaison Committee, which includes members from other colleges in Brent.

John Fernandes was accused in the union journal of unprofessional conduct, and in press releases and letters to the *Guardian* from headquarters of having failed to act through proper channels. National Executive members and officials publicly stated their disbelief in Fernandes's evidence that he had given copies of the racist essays to Commander Wells (though several Kilburn members backed this up) because the Commander denied it. In the Executive's view, the case should have been taken to the National Standing Advisory Committee on racial discrimination — a policy advisory body of which few members were aware before the Fernandes case, to which branches had no direct access and which could only offer advice to the union's decision-making bodies.

NATFHE was said to have a 'good record' of opposition to racism (in fact, a few anodyne policy statements) while not only failing to defend a member against racist victimisation, but actually attacking him in public!

### Anti racist

The Broad Left in NATFHE have found it increasingly difficult, however, to go on supporting the union leadership's attacks on Fernandes. At a conference on anti-racist education called by NATFHE this autumn (which would never have taken place in the form it did without the Fernandes' affair) the union's vice-president said that the Hendon issue 'is simply that of two strong-headed persons', Wells and Fernandes, and that 'John Fernandes is fortunate that he has not been sued by the police for publishing the cadets' essays.'

The result of all the bureaucratic manoeuvring in the early months of 1983 was that nothing was done by the union officials, the new Cadet School Branch, or the Borough Liaison Committee to get John Fernandes reinstated. In April Brent Council went ahead and instructed its employees to withdraw from the school. Nine lecturers (in addition to John Fernandes) did so, while sixteen followed an official NATFHE instruction to continue working.

As far as the lecturers who remained at the Cadet School are concerned, NATFHE has negotiated the transfer of responsibility for the School to another borough, Barnet, with only sixteen posts remaining, four of them temporary (there were 28 lecturers employed at the Cadet School before the dispute). The police are now to have control over the content of courses, in association with Hendon

College of Technology, and there is to be no anti-racist teaching.

The ten still employed by Brent have been offered redeployment. Kilburn branch has insisted all along that if this happened, the members should be found suitable alternative jobs (and not, for example, shunted into YTS schemes) and that there should be no overall loss of jobs in the boroughs. But the Borough Liaison Committee, verbally so anxious to 'fight' Brent, has accepted a premature retirement scheme with redundancy which may be used to create vacancies. The fact that Brent Council has recently lost its slender Labour majority makes the outcome even more uncertain.

Kilburn branch has been accused of having caused a loss of jobs in Brent, by its support for the withdrawal of staff from the police college. In fact the withdrawal and redeployment took place only because NATFHE failed to fight for John Fernandes's reinstatement, leaving Brent Council in the role of champion. As for the premature retirement/redundancy scheme, the fact is that NATFHE has negotiated such schemes all over the country to avoid confrontation over spending cuts, and Kilburn remains one of the few branches still steadfastly opposed to this concession.

The latest development, the complaint against four members of Kilburn branch committee, is serious because it may result in the suspension or even expulsion of the members. The complaint has already been allowed to pass through the normal 'filter' for individual complaints, the elected regional officers, despite the fact that the body that elected them, the Regional Council (directly representing the branches)

has repeatedly passed resolutions in support of John Fernandes and Kilburn branch.

The rule book is being used to stifle and even punish action in defence of a victimised black member and actual anti-racist teaching while members of the union bureaucracy at every level posture as 'good trade unionists' and 'anti-racists in principle'.

There must be a campaign among NATFHE members to halt the complaints procedure, and to publicise the reasons for NATFHE's miserable and shameful showing in the affair. Public condemnations of the union for 'institutionalised racism' — an alternative tribunal composed of well-known anti-racist experts has been suggested to coincide with the NATFHE hearing — will perpetuate the battle of words without getting to the root of the problem.

The actions of the NATFHE bureaucracy have indeed resulted in a victory for racism — Commander Wells for one has every reason to be pleased with the union's performance. John Fernandes himself has suffered disgraceful personal hostility and abuse. But the way the union is run — from the top down, in the interests of maintaining the structure rather than defending the members — cannot be changed by public condemnation and embarrassing bad publicity. Betrayals of this sort can only come to an end when pressure from below forces the replacement of that kind of leadership by the strength of the rank and file members.

It is going to be difficult to organise such pressure from below in the present period, when many of the members are passive and demoralised. But the hard fact has to be faced that there can be no effective substitute.

## CONFERENCE REPORT

# Death of a party

Last month the Communist Party of Great Britain held its biennial congress. Pete Goodwin attended the congress.

There was a certain ghoulish anticipation among outside observers about last month's biennial congress of the Communist Party. It even extended to the official handout produced by the party's press department:

'Has the Communist Party got a role to play in rebuilding the Left in Britain or is it a spent force that is not relevant to modern British politics? The answer to this question will be largely determined by the outcome of this year's Congress.' They were not exaggerating, for the background to the congress boded badly indeed.

Communist Party membership and influence reached its peak at the end of the second world war and has declined ever since. Until recently, however, there were interruptions in the decline. The party re-

cruited in the early sixties out of CND, and in the early seventies out of the battles against the Heath government. But over the last decade the decline has not only massively accelerated, it has also become relentless.

### Communist Party membership

1973	29,900
1975	28,519
1977	25,599
1979	20,599
1981	18,458
1983	15,691

Alongside declining membership has gone increasing tension between different wings of the party. Ever since 1968, when the CP leadership condemned the Russian invasion of Czechoslovakia there has been a pro-Russian opposition within the party.

One bit of this opposition split in 1977 to form the New Communist Party. But the bulk remained and in the years since have grown in strength relative to the leadership. At the last congress in 1981 they mustered

some 40 percent of delegates in support of the Russian invasion of Afghanistan, in condemning Solidarnosc and in criticising the *Morning Star* for lacking sufficient coverage of 'the achievements of the socialist countries'.

At the other extreme of the party, from the early 1970s there were those who wanted to push the party's break with Moscow even further, and to orient the party towards the new 'movements' (particularly the women's movement). These became the most unrestrained Eurocommunists.

Balancing between these two extremes has been the party leadership, headed by Gordon McLellan.

Over the past year, however, the balancing act has broken down. A section of the leadership, notably *Morning Star* editor Tony Chater and industrial correspondent (former party industrial organiser) Mick Costello, have decided to come off the fence and side with the pro-Russians.

### Morning Star

This seems to have been prompted by the leadership's failure to discipline *Marxism Today* over articles which they felt offended their friends in the trade union bureaucracy, and by the continued decline in circulation of the *Morning Star*. This has meant the paper now really is on the verge of bankruptcy. Chater is trying a desperate escape from that, by opening up the *Morning Star's* printshop to commercial work from its trade union allies.

This move by Chater and Costello resulted in the extraordinary spectacle earlier in the year of Chater proposing his own nominees for the People's Press Printing Society (which owns the *Morning Star*) against those of the CP executive. And, with the aid of the votes of the pro-Russians, getting them elected.

With that it really did look as if the November congress of the party would be a blood bath, at which the pro-Russians, with their new *Morning Star* allies, might actually take over the party. It was something we had anticipated in *Socialist Review* after the last congress, and, as we said then, it 'would signal the completion of the party's transformation into a sect'. The sheer viciousness of the published pre-congress debate with the *Morning Star*/pro-Russian faction openly challenging the leadership with apparent confidence, fuelled expectations of a dramatic outcome to the congress.

Events at the congress, however, proved to be rather less dramatic than expected. Debate was still acrimonious and polarised but rather less vicious than the published pre-congress discussion. More important, despite their new allies in the *Morning Star*, the pro-Russians remained stuck at 40 percent of the delegates. Every challenge they made was defeated roughly three to two. What the defection from the leadership of Chater and Costello did produce was McLellan and the leadership majority getting off the fence in the other direction.

Now they firmly and skillfully threw in their lot on the Eurocommunist side, including throwing Chater, Costello and other pro-Russians off the executive.



Costello and one of his allies, Hicks

No doubt the Eurocommunists would like to believe that this means the pro-Russians have been decisively defeated and that at long last the party has a clear 'role to play in rebuilding the left in Britain'. But the reality is quite the opposite. Even with the congress going better for the leadership than they might have expected, all it succeeded in demonstrating is how much a 'spent force' the CP now is.

What was striking about it was that for all the acrimony in the disputes certain things went absolutely unquestioned. The fact that in the recent Labour leadership election a majority of the CP members on the Transport and General Workers Union executive managed to vote for Roy Hattersley as deputy leader was not an issue. The virulently anti-political stand of the Communist Party in the lack-lustre second People's March was accepted by all.

### Kinnock

In short, whatever disputes there were between the Eurocommunists and the pro-Russians they were certainly not disputes on right-left lines. They were disputes about different emphases in the same basic politics whose position on the left-right spectrum is virtually identical with that of Neil Kinnock.

And that political position is, of course, the fundamental reason for the Communist Party's decline. If your politics are the same as the Labour left (or the Labour leadership!) why not join the Labour Party? The pro-Russians at least have a reason for the separate existence of the CP. McLellan and the Eurocommunists have none.

That fundamental problem still stares them in the face after the congress. It means they still persist in an electoral strategy which gathered a humiliating low of 11,598 votes for 35 candidates in 1983. For to abandon

putting up candidates would break the pretence of the need for their independent existence.

If the pro-Russians at the congress had won then surely the Eurocommunists (and many of the party's union bureaucrats) would have joined Labour. But the actual outcome of the congress will not postpone the process very long.

Chater remains in control of the *Morning Star* with the backing of nearly 40 percent of the party. The new CP executive cannot in the near future dislodge him from the editorship. The constitution of the People's Press Printing Society, and the fact that Chater can still probably muster a majority of its shareholders, should ensure that he keeps control. But that will be control over a paper on the verge of bankruptcy, likely to actually go bust in the coming year.

The fact that it goes bust in Chater's hands will not stop the damage to the morale of supporters of the party leadership. Without a daily paper, they can even less pretend that they are in the big league.

At the same time as being left with the problem of a bankrupt daily paper out of their control the McLellan leadership has to think what to do inside the party about the pro-Russians. The logic of his coming off the fence at this congress is that the leadership will take disciplinary action against some of the pro-Russians. But that would end up driving the whole lot of them out. And the CP is simply in too weak a state already to drive out perhaps 40 percent of its membership and lose its links with, for instance, Ken Gill's TASS.

So the Eurocommunist victory at the 1983 congress has only very temporarily postponed a dramatic outcome to the Communist Party's terminal decline. That decline however has now gone so far that when the final drama comes it will produce scarcely a ripple in the real world.

# The myth explodes

The defeat of the Peronists in Argentina came as a shock. Mike Gonzales explains the background.

Somewhere in the world, the stuffed corpse of Evita Peron is still on show. Like the movement it is supposed to symbolise, it is disintegrating. The latest crack to appear on Evita's death-mask reflects the defeat of the Peronists in the general elections of 30 October. Raul Alfonsin, the Radical Party candidate, won an absolute majority (52 per cent) in the Presidential election. His opponent, Italo Luder, managed to amass only 40 per cent of the votes.

Before the elections, all expectations were that Peronism would win the election—the only debate was about the size of its majority. The Peronist movement, it was argued, had 'always' commanded a majority of the popular vote.

That may once have been true, at least as far as the working class is concerned. But not even the best-managed public relations campaign could conceal the betrayals, the corruption and the gangsterism that had marked the history of Peronism.

If there is a single, overwhelming explanation for the defeat of Peronism, it is the willingness of these politicians and union leaders—who claimed to speak for the working class—to negotiate with a military regime that had murdered 30,000 men and women.

## In power

There are a number of reasons for Alfonsin's election victory, reasons which also explain why a ruthless military government suddenly announced last year that elections would be held. At the heart of them all is the economic question.

When the military seized power in March 1976, they did so with a clear economic programme essentially similar to that of Pinochet in Chile. The government they overthrew had been in power since 1973, first under Peron until his death (1974) and then presided over by his second wife Isabel and her consort Lopez Rega.

This three-year interlude between military governments had been marked by massive inflation and economic recession. Workers' struggles proliferated around the country, primarily demanding wage increases that would hold off the collapse in living standards.

The response of the Peronist government, accelerated after Peron's death, was to impose increasingly draconian internal security measures.

Two laws of 1975 effectively restricted the right to strike and presented the armed forces with freedom to organise a huge campaign of repression.

The justification for the move (overseen, incidentally, by the mild-mannered and colourless Italo Luder) was the intensification of the armed struggle.

The urban guerrilla organisations which had grown up during the resistance to previous military regimes enjoyed a high level of support. Soon after Peron's return to Argentina in 1973, a mass rally of support for the armed organisations gathered 50,000 people in a Buenos Aires football stadium.

What was confusing for the outsider was that, apart from the ERP (whose background was Trotskyist), the rest of the armed struggle organisations described themselves as Peronist.

AS the economic situation worsened through 1975 and early 1976, Argentine politics were dominated by the activities of a number of different organisations, often directly in confrontation with one another, all of which called themselves Peronist.

The Montoneros, the main armed organisation, controlled both the Peronist Left and the Peronist Youth. In many ways it was their decision, late in 1974, to return to the armed struggle, which sealed the fate of the Argentine working class.

The guerrilla war, while it provided the justification for the military control of Argentina which was progressively established over the following year, was conducted in complete isolation from the mass struggles of workers which reached such a high level during the same period.

While the measures adopted both by the government of Isabel and later by the military government after 1976 were ostensibly directed against 'terrorism', their real objective was the destruction of the organisations of the working class.

In this way they were aided by a Peronism in government which savagely turned on its own mass working class base.

The extent of that savagery was only partly explained by the depth of the recession that the Argentine economy was undergoing. Equally important was the attitude of the trade union bureaucracy, a bureaucracy modelled more on Jimmy Hoffa's gangster unions than on the British TUC.

These chiefs of the official Peronist unions (gathered in the CGT), had already shown under the previous military regimes that they saw their own rank and file as the main enemy. While they had periodically negotiated with one or other military ruler they had turned on the leaders of internal rank and file movements with unremitting violence.

In 1969 and again in 1971, Argentina experienced an extraordinary period of working-class agitation, as a mass rank-and-file movement of workers spread from Cordoba through all the major industrial cities of the country in a chain reaction.

In Cordoba in 1969, for example, workers occupied the factories and took over the

streets, forcing out the police and holding the army at bay. In the course of struggle, they threw up new institutions of power and challenged not only the military regime, but also the domination of the existing trade unions, whose ideology was Peronism, and whose leaders were the backbone of the Peronist party.

This was the spectre that haunted the Peronist government and the army in the worsening economic crisis of 1975. And this was the major threat perceived by the trade union bureaucracy under Lorenzo Miguel, Peronist union boss and leader of the Metalworkers Union. The Peronist programme for recovery was all too familiar—austerity, unemployment, subordination to foreign investment. And if that did not marry too well with its rhetoric of nationalism and workerism, then force would take the place of ideology, under the guise of the battle against the armed organisations of the left.

In case there were any doubt about the complicity of the Peronists with the armed forces, one fact will serve to represent many. Lopez Rega, Minister of Social Security and the main influence on President Isabel Peron, was very keen on ouija boards. More importantly, he was a virulent anti-communist, with close contacts with the extreme right of Franco's Spain and other fascist and nazi organisations.

It was Lopez Rega who formed the AAA, the Argentine Anti-communist Alliance, which became the main instrument of government repression after the 1976 coup. But it was formed a year *before* the coup, by Lopez Rega and elements of the Peronist Right. Its members were, in the main, serving members of the police and the armed forces.

## House arrest

Despite the rhetoric there is a clear continuity between Peronism and the military regime of 1976. When the coup took place, Isabel was placed under house arrest and the Peronist trade unions were made illegal. But it was not their leadership who suffered the terrible repression that followed. Few of them figure among the 30,000 who have been kidnapped and slowly and agonisingly murdered in a series of secret prisons. The guerrilla organisations were efficiently and systematically destroyed. And the new government set in train an economic policy designed to ruthlessly pare down Argentine industry and provide beneficial conditions for capital. Unemployment rose, and wages fell until they represented in 1978, 38 per cent of the 1974 levels for skilled workers and 29 per cent for unskilled.

The impetus of previous struggles maintained a high level of working class resistance. There were strikes in the motor and power industries in 1976, on the railways and in the banks in 1977, a general strike call mobilised 30 per cent of the labour force. Repression was harsh. Strike leaders invariably joined the lengthening lists of the 'disappeared'. Yet the movement continued, as successive economic plans did nothing to halt the astronomical levels of inflation.

Investment in industry fell continuously, and by 1980 even the multinationals were moving out of Argentina to the 'safer' haven





**Juan Peron: raised workers' living standards in the boom, then cut them**

of Brazil: Volkswagen, Fiat and GM sold out their plants, for example.

The final irony was that the appalling repression moved the Carter government to stop government aid in 1977, and the Argentines then developed trade links with Russia and Eastern Europe. The price of the lucrative deal was that the so-called socialist countries undertook not to raise the question of human rights in Argentina at the United Nations!

By the beginning of 1981, Argentina was again deep in the throes of an economic crisis. Its foreign debt had risen to almost \$4 billion, and bankruptcies and closures involved \$3000 million-worth of investment. Despite repression, rising levels of workers struggles coincided with a growing movement of protest against torture and murder symbolised by the 'Mothers of the Disappeared' who kept a silent vigil every Thursday in the Plaza de Mayo in Buenos Aires.

The fall of Viola and the rise to power of Galtieri late in 1981 did not mark a significant change. But Galtieri was the favoured candidate of the Reagan government, and when he came to power was quick to sever relations with Russia and promise Argentine military support for the US in Central America, in exchange for renewed military and financial aid.

Against such a background, the attempt to rally falling middle class support around an invasion of the Falklands/Malvinas becomes understandable—as does the momentary reluctance of the US government to support Thatcher's attempt to use nationalist fervour in exactly the same way.

But where did Peronism stand? To some extent, it had once again established a hold over the working class movement. As so

often before, Peron and Evita became a symbol for working class resistance.

When Peron first came to power, in 1946, the post-war boom enabled him to build a working class base of support by raising living standards and providing full employment. By the end of his second government, however, in 1955, Peron the workers' friend had long since disappeared from the stage of history. His last three years as President had been marked by inflation, recession and repression of workers' protests. Yet, in the years that followed, that was skilfully concealed and Peronism became the vehicle for working class protest and resistance.

Even after the experience of 1973-6, it was still the Peronist anthems and slogans that rang round the football stadiums on Sundays, in defiance of the military.

Like the Catholic church in Poland, it provided a vague, cross-class focus for resistance, rooted in nationalism and populist rhetoric, yet it was so vague that it could embrace fascists like Lopez Rega, gang bosses like Lorenzo Miguel and, until their destruction, the Guevarist guerrillas grouped in the Montoneros.

Between 1976 and 1983, Peronism divided, as it had so many times before. There were Peronists among the rank and file leadership of working struggles—yet their leaders, or some of them at least, were negotiating directly with the military for recognition, along with the Communist Party of Argentina. And it was Peronists who argued that, once elections were announced, by-gones should be by-gones and there should be no revenge against the military for their tens of thousands of murders.

Protest against the violations of human rights came from a party which was founded

at the end of the last century and which had ceased to have any real power twenty years ago—the Radicals. Alfonsin was a leader of one faction of the party which refused categorically to negotiate on the question of human rights.

Their economic and political programme were not discernibly different from the Peronists. Both, under the stern eye of the IMF, proposed austerity measures of the kind now being implemented with difficulty in Brazil. Both accepted the need for a wage freeze and a fall in the standard of living.

Both looked for support among the middle class who, having originally supported the military in 1976 because of their fear of the working class, now turned against their champions as the economy collapsed around them and inflation hit the ceiling.

The Falklands defeat was one element—but only one—in this general disillusionment. But it was the insoluble economic crisis, and internal disagreement within the armed forces, that moved the military to announce elections.

Peronism had been discredited for three reasons. Its leaders, especially its trade union bureaucrats, had negotiated with the military. Its leadership had given its uncritical support to Galtieri's military adventure in the Malvinas on nationalist grounds. It had been willing to compromise on human rights in exchange for a share of power.

When the elections came, Peronism was divided into 34 different factions. Luder was a compromise candidate, finally selected just six weeks before polling day. He lost. That much is history. But the implications go far, far deeper.

Since 1955, Peronism has claimed the leadership of the working class movement, and has been merciless with those who threatened its political hegemony. The result has been a political confusion among the left that has had tragic consequences.

## Peronist

The struggles of the Argentine working class have been heroic and exemplary—yet their coordination and political leadership have, until now, remained with a Peronist leadership which has cynically used the power of the working class as a bargaining counter in its pursuit of power.

Under Alfonsin's government, it will attempt to do so again. If it succeeds, then history will certainly repeat itself, and the energies of tens of thousands of workers will be wasted.

The other possibility is that the collapse of Peronism will provide a space in which a politics can emerge that is clearly revolutionary, not rooted in internal power struggles within the bourgeoisie, but taking its lessons from the embryonic experience of workers' power shaped in the Cordoba risings of 1969 and 1971.

For such a new politics to emerge, however, will require a definitive break with the politics of Peronism, in its left, right and guevarist variants and the growth of a revolutionary movement rooted firmly in a working class that has repeatedly, and at enormous cost, shown its readiness to challenge for power.

# Is Sinn Fein moving left?

The Sinn Fein annual conference (Ard Fheis) attracted much publicity because of a change in leadership. Some say that Sinn Fein are moving to the left. Pat Stack examines this claim.

The victory of Gerry Adams and his supporters at the recent Ard Fheis hardly came as a surprise. It has been clear for some time that the young Northern Irish leadership were dominating the policy and direction of the movement, not to mention the press headlines.

The former leadership of Ruari O'Bradaigh, and Daithi O'Connell, were clearly losing control of the organisation.

This change in leadership of the organisation is not just a change in faces at the top. There are quite clearly differences between Adams and O'Bradaigh about the direction in which the Republican movement should go.

The famous bullets and ballots strategy is clearly identified with the Adams camp, so are the electoral successes. Adams and his followers are seen to be to the left of the old leadership.

Yet to identify the disagreement between the two sides as left versus right, as much of the British left have done, is to misunderstand the argument. For a clear understanding of that we have to go back to the founding of Provisional Sinn Fein/IRA.

In the mid-1960s the IRA was a small organisation with few roots in the Northern Nationalist population. Its sole political aim was to rid Ireland of the British.

Its traditional ideology was a right-wing nationalist dream of creating a self-sufficient nation of small farmers, shopkeepers and factory owners.

It had at the beginning of the decade been involved in a disastrous military adventure known as 'the border campaign'. This involved attacks on military and police targets in the North. The campaign was at times farcical and was very damaging to the Republicans.

## 'Left turn'

In an attempt to combat this damage Republicanism took a 'left turn'. This was a peculiar mixture of traditional Republicanism and 'popular front' Stalinism. The movement developed an absurd and mechanical stages theory.

Socialism would be achieved in Ireland in three stages.

First limited agitation around civil rights in the North. This would draw Catholics and Protestants together.

The newly united working class of the North would then find common cause with workers in the South. The border would cease to exist.

The third phase, open confrontation between Irish workers and Irish bosses, would then take place. From such a struggle would come the 'United Irish Socialist Republic'.

All this was a nonsense, of course. The strategy came a cropper at the first stage, when the Civil Rights Movement was attacked by Loyalist mobs, and the Orange State tried to smash it.

Far from unity ensuing the Catholics were driven back into their ghettos. The IRA had either to abandon their strategy, or turn their backs on the besieged Catholics of the North.

Ruari O'Bradaigh and his followers emerged as the major opponents of the strategy, and in 1970 split away to form Provisional Sinn Fein and the Provisional IRA. Their opponents, then known as the Officials, are today the Workers Party, a major reformist force in the South.

## Reformism

It is worth saying that at the time of the split many tried to characterise it as a left/right division, with the Provos being cast as the right wing. Many of the public utterances of the new provisionals were virulently anti-Communist.

Yet in truth the split was between traditional Republicanism on the one hand, and a movement towards parliamentary reformism on the other.

O'Bradaigh's Sinn Fein was little more than a cheer leader for the new IRA. However for all its looking back to tradition, Sinn Fein, in the North at least, would be forced to abandon much of its anti-Communist stance.

For the first time in its history Sinn Fein/IRA was a predominantly urban organisation. The bulk of its recruits come from the poor working-class ghettos of Derry and Belfast. Gerry Adams and Danny Morrison, Joe Austin, etc were all typical of such recruitment.

For the unemployed youth of the cities talk of small shopkeepers and farms meant little. The anti-Communism gave way to talk of socialism. Not a socialism to fight for today, but a socialism that would be implemented *after* the battle to get rid of the British had been won.

Armed struggle would be the method of winning this first battle. The high point of Republican history had been 1918-21, when the IRA had fought an all-out armed confrontation with the British.

This was the period the Provisionals aspired to and hoped to emulate. However in 1921 the *whole of Ireland* (except for the Northern Protestants) had been involved in the confrontation.

The IRA boasted of having an active service unit in every parish. Yet even then an all-out military victory was not possible. To talk of such a victory today clearly flies in the face

of reality.

The whole of Ireland is not involved in today's struggle, instead the Provisionals can only look to the beleaguered nationalist population of the North.

They make up one third of the Northern Ireland state, and face not only the might of the British military, but also the potential hostility of Loyalist para-militaries, who would in certain circumstances get the active support of many of the Protestants, who make up the remaining two thirds of the population.

The problem was fast developing into a military impasse. The Provisionals, with their genuine mass support amongst Northern Catholics, their discipline, commitment, and military expertise cannot be defeated militarily by the British. Yet neither can they defeat the British in a purely military struggle.

How then did Republicanism face up to this problem? For a long time they pretended no problem existed. They tried a number of military strategies: military targets, economic targets, indiscriminate bombings, bombings on the British mainland, assassination of political enemies.

None could come anywhere near solving the fundamental problem. When all else failed there was (and still is in some circles) talk of a war of attrition lasting 20, 30 or even 40 years.

The dilemma was as old as Irish Republicanism itself, and Gerry Adams was one of the first to admit that it existed. Yet for some time neither Adams nor any other Republican seemed to have a solution.

The Hunger Strike, and in particular the election victories of Bobby Sands, and Owen Carron, provided Adams with a strategy which he hoped would confront and solve the problem. The strategy was 'bullets and ballots'.

'With the Armalite in one hand, and the ballot paper in the other we will win,' went the slogan.

## Terrorist

In one sense of course the two elements of the strategy are quite compatible. To paraphrase Lenin: 'The terrorist is the reformist with the gun in his/her hand.'

Like those who say, 'Vote for us and we will give you socialism,' the terrorist says, 'Put your faith in *my* ability, courage, and know-how and I will achieve your freedom *for you*.'

Yet of course there are certain strains and contradictions between the two, and most importantly the strategy as first envisaged suffered very real restrictions.

One of the reasons the Provisionals were able to grow so rapidly in the first place was that bourgeois democracy was of little or no use to the nationalists in Northern Ireland.

The Catholics suffer from being an automatic minority. Thatcher proved this once again — by refusing to budge on the hunger strike after Sands' election she showed that in parliamentary terms they are an unheard minority.

For 'ballots and bullets' to have any impact on the impasse it will have to be extended to the South. If any successes are to



**Gerry Adams—the left face of Sinn Fein**

be made in the South the policy of abstention from the Dail will have to be reconsidered.

There are two problems for Republicans, both as yet unresolved. Which takes precedence, bullets or ballots? And should you abstain or take seats in parliaments (particularly the Southern one)?

Behind all the talk of left/right splits this is the real dilemma. Nor is it merely a tactical question. For Republicanism to ask such questions is to step into a minefield.

To understand why, it is necessary to look at a central, and semi-mystical, commandment which acts as the cornerstone of the Republican tradition.

It goes like this: 'In 1916 the Republic was declared following the Easter Rising. In 1918 the *only* genuine all-Ireland election took place. Sinn Fein won an overwhelming

majority. At a later date they handed power to the army council of the IRA.

Therefore the IRA are not just freedom fighters. They are also the sole legitimate representatives of the Irish people.'

The mythology therefore answers both questions. The Army Council will decide whether bullets or ballots take precedence, not Sinn Fein. Secondly, seats can't be taken in fake parliaments when a legitimate government already exists.

This mythology had proved vital for Republicans during the lean years of almost total isolation. The problem is that it offers no way out of the impasse.

Adams recognises this, and is carefully trying to undo some of it. The fact that Sinn Fein will take their seats in the European

Parliament next time round, is clearly a test of climate 'experiment' before tackling abstentionism seriously.

To do this he has to assert Sinn Fein's independence. Hence on *Newsnight* recently he more or less denied the Army Council's sovereignty, whilst traditionalist Jimmy Dunne reaffirmed it.

As the bullet and the ballot become less comfortable bedfellows, criticism of armed action increases. One of Gerry Adams' top men, Martin McGuinness, recently described a 'no warning' bomb planted by INLA as 'indefensible'. Not the reaction one would normally expect from Sinn Fein.

It has not been their practice to condemn INLA activities in public, whatever they may have felt privately. Given that the Provos have themselves in the past carried out 'no warning' bombings, the question must be asked whether such a condemnation would also be made of them. It is more likely that this was Adams' way of telling the militarists in his own ranks what limitations the bullet and ballot strategy places on them.

Those who seek to interpret all this as a move to the left must be careful. Sections of Republicanism have broken with the mythology before. Those who did so survive today in the shape of Fine Gael, Fianna Fail, and the Workers Party.

### **Ultra-left**

Indeed, one is struck by how much of Adams' own strategy resembles the early days of the Officials. Both have a stages theory. Both try to capture positions in the Southern trade union bureaucracy. Both try to build their base round good local representatives, and through community centres. Both warn of the dangers of the 'Ultra Left' and most importantly both *reject* working-class self-activity as a means of changing things.

Of course there are differences, especially concerning the North. Adams supports the armed struggle. The Workers Party are fanatical opponents of it.

Yet the pressure remains. The traditionalists have no solutions to the problems. But the more Adams seeks to find solutions, the more he will appear compromised. At the end of the day, either he will fall in behind the traditionalists, or he will become involved in the 'respectable' politics of the South.

If he chooses the latter course, then all the pressures of electoralism will force him and his supporters to drop some of their verbal socialism for the more traditional Republican philosophy.

Solutions to the dilemma do not lie within the tradition that both sides use as their starting point.

For the solution to the problem lies in the one alternative neither can consider. The working class, Catholic, and Protestant, North and South, taking power into their own hands.

For that a different type of organisation, a revolutionary socialist party is needed, a party with different traditions, looking to a different history, made up of workers, and seeing them as central to change, not just in Ireland, but also internationally.

# Marx and the German workers movement

Marx and Engels never lost their interest in the German workers' movement. Phil Spencer looks at the difficulties Marx had to overcome.

By the middle of 1850, the great revolutionary wave that had swept across Europe since 1848 had finally come to an end. As is so often the case, this fact was not universally admitted on the left at the time.

Marx found himself isolated in the sizeable emigre community in London, where he himself had ended up in 1848. The great majority of his German comrades insisted that the movement was not dead and that it could be revived by dint of some successful conspiracy of their own making.

Marx was adamant that this kind of politics was both useless and even harmful to the prospects of the real movement. In September 1850 the Communist League split, the majority preferring to carry on with their intrigues than face the hard realities. Marx decided to separate himself entirely from this crowd of adventurers, conspirators and police spies.

With the exception of the superb pamphlet he wrote to defend his comrades charged in the great show trial of communists in Cologne in 1852 Marx withdrew from open political work for the rest of the decade. As he wrote to Engels in February 1854:

'The public isolation in which you and I now find ourselves pleases me very much. It is entirely in accordance with our position and principles.'

Marx settled down to his great theoretical work, laying the foundations of his mature theory, the first major statement of which emerged in the *Critique of Political Economy* completed in 1859.

While Marx beavered away in the British Museum and sought desperately to keep himself and his family from starving, in Germany the movement gradually began to recover from the hammering it had taken from triumphant reaction. In Marx's enforced personal and political absence other figures came to the fore. By far the most important of these was Ferdinand Lassalle.

Some seven years younger than Marx, Lassalle was a typical product, intellectually and politically, of the 1840s. Early on a follower of the Young Helegians, he stood in 1848 on the extreme left wing of the democratic radicals. He did not play a great part in the events of that year mostly because he had been imprisoned already for slandering the Crown and was only at liberty for a few months before he was behind bars again. In

this brief period he made Marx's acquaintance and came over to communism himself. On his release Lassalle found himself one of the few political veterans of 1848 still in Germany. The field was wide open.

Lassalle was a very energetic and ambitious man. He made it his business to correspond with Marx, recognising the latter's political eminence and, to be fair, his intellectual superiority. But it seems fairly clear that he tried both to ingratiate himself with, and use Marx for his own political purposes.

On Marx's side, while he took a fairly instant dislike to Lassalle's intensely romantic and egotistical personality, there was the recognition that, for all his faults, here was a comrade of undoubted energy and organising ability. Lassalle above all was the man on the spot.

Towards the end of the 1850s, as the German economy began to develop, there was a distinct change in the social and political atmosphere. The bourgeois liberals finally began to reassert themselves in the newly formed Progressive Party. Among the workers there was a growth of activity, most notably in the form of workers' educational associations.

## Main planks

Lassalle threw himself into the burgeoning movement. He seized every opportunity to publicise himself and the socialist cause in that order in the still very restricted political situations. He still remained very conscious of Marx's presence. He invited Marx to visit him in Germany in 1861. The visit was not a great success and only seems to have fuelled Marx's growing dislike for him.

Undaunted, in the summer of the following year, Lassalle wrote to Marx suggesting that the two of them put themselves at the head of the movement. Precisely what this meant in practical terms was, to say the least, unclear and Marx brusquely turned down this proposition.

Lassalle went ahead on his own. In May 1863 he formed the General Union of German Workers (the ADAV) and embarked on a whistle-stop speaking tour to publicise the new party. Wherever he went he was greeted with huge audiences which he filled with enthusiasm for the socialist cause.

He also took great care to ensure that a section of the new party was set up in every town that he visited. There can be no doubt that Lassalle's great talents as a propagandist and as a political organiser played a vital role in launching the young workers'

political movement at this time.

Marx was becoming increasingly critical of the political base of this movement and of the direction in which Lassalle was now steering it. It was increasingly clear that there was a political conflict between their ideas. Lassalle had an essentially autocratic approach to the workers' movement. He saw himself as its natural and undisputed leader, uniquely qualified and entitled to map out its strategy and tactics. He had decided, even before launching the new party, that it must do more than keep its distance from the liberal bourgeoisie (a point he may well have learned from Marx in the first place).

It was possible, he thought, to go further and to approach the liberals' own enemy, the Prussian Junkers, and indeed the absolutist Prussian state, for some kind of informal alliance against the enemy.

The two main planks in the new party's political platform were accordingly structured around this strategic goal. The first demand was that the state should give financial assistance to workers' co-operatives—this was supposed to be a challenge to the right and the need of capitalists to employ and manage workers. The second demand was for universal suffrage, so that the new party could outflank the Progressives.

Now Marx was not, as it happens, totally hostile to the idea of workers' Co-operatives. Indeed, he welcomed them to the extent that they demonstrated in practice that there was no real need for bosses to organise production. Workers were perfectly capable of managing this for themselves. But to make this a central focus at this time when workers did not even have the right to organise themselves into anything like unions to fight bosses who already employed them in increasing numbers, seemed idiotic. Worse than this, Lassalle steadfastly refused to agitate for the repeal of the draconian anti-combination laws which were designed to prevent organisation.

Marx began to suspect that Lassalle was up to some shady business, which indeed he was. Even before the ADAV had been founded Lassalle had begun to have secret negotiations with the new Prussian Chancellor, Bismarck. In fact Marx never knew how far Lassalle had gone. Papers that came to light some 60 years after the event revealed that Lassalle had more or less offered the workers' movement on a plate to Bismarck.

He boasted of the new party as his 'kingdom' and claimed that if Bismarck would just conclude a deal with him, he would turn every class conscious worker in Germany into a loyal and obedient subject of

the Crown. Bismarck already held most of the cards and did not need Lassalle half as much as Lassalle clearly needed him and no deal was made. But Marx already had enough idea of what Lassalle was up to to decide to break off all relations with him.

Lassalle died in August 1864, before he was able to do much more damage, the victim of an idiotic, highly romantic duel fought over some personal slight or other. Marx wasted few tears over his death, though he did regret the loss of a man of Lassalle's energy and organising talents. But he had now had his first experience of opportunism within the workers' movement.

The roots of this opportunism lay in Lassalle's elitist attitude to the workers' movement and in his parallel accommodation to the power of the state. Lassalle never saw working class self activity as the basis and the aim of socialist politics. For him, workers were a kind of political fodder, a stage army, and he was the general. The state was above the class struggle. It could be used and negotiated with, and perhaps ultimately taken over to bring about socialism for workers, from above.

To Marx this was always an anathema. His earliest political writings had shown that the state as the product of class society was not neutral or independent of it. Later, under the impact of the Commune, he would state even more categorically his lifelong opposition to any idea using the state as it exists to introduce socialism on behalf of workers.

### Split off

Despite his break with Lassalle Marx remained attentive to real developments in the German working class movement. Indeed, he leapt rather over-optimistically at the chance of influencing the ADAV in its disarray over the sudden and dramatic loss of its charismatic leader.

He managed to get himself nominated for the presidency of the ADAV in December 1864 even though he had no real prospect of returning to Germany in either the short or the long term. Not surprisingly, his candidature was unsuccessful. Very few people in Germany even knew who he was at this time. After a couple of further abortive attempts at communication, Marx decided to turn his back on the ADAV when its new leader, Schweitzer, came out openly for Bismarck's policy of uniting Germany under Prussian hegemony.

The rest of the decade was largely taken up for Marx with his involvement with the new International, but he did now have one or two followers in Germany itself. Wilhelm Liebknecht who had become a devoted follower and friend in London in the 1850s had returned to Germany (and now began to work hard to spread Marx's ideas. With August Bebel, Liebknecht was able to achieve considerable influence in the largely artisan-based Union of German Workers' Societies (UGWS).

In 1868 this Union adopted the first part of the International's own Rules (drafted by Marx himself) as its own declaration of principles. The following year, half of the ADAV split off to join the UGWS to form a new

party, the Social Democratic Workers Party (the SDAP). The political basis of the new party was rather confused. It was by no means inspired by Marx, although it was obviously more open to his ideas than the Lassalleans. In any case, Liebknecht and Bebel had to do without any real help or advice from Marx for quite a while as the International consumed most of his time and energy.

These were decisive years for Germany. In 1867 Prussia had taken one massive step along Bismarck's path by smashing its great rival Austria at the battle of Sadowa. Three years later it was France's turn as the Empire of Napoleon III crumbled at Sedan. The political map had been dramatically rewritten and the mighty new German empire held the centre of the European stage.



Lassalle

It has to be said that Marx was not a particularly helpful guide to his followers in the early stages of these developments. He seemed not to take seriously the prospect of Prussian hegemony until it was more or less complete. His well founded hatred of the French emperor blinded him temporarily to the other, Prussian danger. Once the French had been routed and the aggressive intent of the new German empire was made clear by the annexation of Alsace and Lorraine, Marx again turned his attention to the German movement.

To their credit, Liebknecht and Bebel stood firm on the principles of the

International in denouncing the annexations, when many others were caught up in chauvinistic excitement. They were imprisoned for their pains; but the principled stand they took at this time was an invaluable one for the future of the movement.

After the war, the German economy gathered momentum, spurred by the political unification. The workers' movement remained largely unscathed by the wave of reaction that descended elsewhere, particularly in France after the defeat of the Commune. Universal male suffrage had been achieved, without the need for a dirty Lassallean compromise, in North Germany before the war, and was extended throughout the new empire in 1871.

Both the SDAP and the ADAV grew

steadily and there was a growing pressure for the parties to unite to take advantage of the new political situation. In 1875 they agreed to form a new party. Marx was opposed to what he called this 'precipitate step on our part' and subjected the unification programme to a devastating critique. *The Critique of the Gotha Programme*, as it was known after the location of the unification conference, is in fact a major statement of some of Marx's basic political positions — on the class nature of the state, on the transition to socialism, and on the difference between the socialist state and communism. Marx began by refuting in advance the

charge that is often hurled at revolutionaries—that he was only interested in sectarian point-scoring.

'Every step of a real movement is more important than a dozen programmes. But,' he went on, 'it is my duty not to approve even by diplomatic silence a programme which in my opinion is thoroughly reprehensible and demoralising ... If it was not possible to go further than the Eisenach programme (the basis of the old SDAP) and in the present circumstances it is not then they should simply have concluded an agreement for action against the common enemy.'

The first part of the *Critique* is essentially a restatement of Marx's old quarrel with Lassalle. Marx dissects at great length the

today could do with rereading Marx on this question.

Finally Marx again nails the opportunistic formulation, directly from Lassalle, that 'in relation to the working class all other classes are a single reactionary mass.' This Marx describes as 'a Lassallean quote of the purest ilk ... the reason for such gross falsification can only be that he (Lassalle) wanted to extenuate his alliance with the absolutist and feudal opponents of the bourgeoisie.' This was not the first time that ultra-left language concealed a rotten opportunistic politics.

But the *Critique* was not just a rewrite of Marx's debate with Lassalle. Marx's own politics had developed in the years since Lassalle's death. Two experiences in particular had impelled him to a more radical political understanding: the First

was at least formally affiliated, in defiance of repressive legislation. Before his courageous stand in 1871, Leibkecht had been accused by Marx of being a 'great German first and a workers' leader second.'

Now the new party was beginning life by making potentially disastrous concessions to nationalism.

'In contrast to the *Communist Manifesto* and all earlier forms of socialism, Lassalle approached the workers from the narrowest national point of view. His approach is followed here — and this after the work of the International. It is perfectly self-evident that in order to be at all capable of struggle the working class must organise itself *as a class* at home and that the domestic sphere must be the immediate arena for its struggle. To this extent its class struggle is national, not in content, but as the *Communist Manifesto* says, "in form." But the "framework of the present day national state," eg the German Reich, is itself in turn economically "within the framework of the world market" and politically "within the framework of the system of states."

'And to what is the internationalism of the German workers' party reduced? ... Not a word of the *international* role of the German working class! And this is how it is meant to challenge its own bourgeoisie, which is already fraternally linked with the bourgeoisie in all other countries!

'The international activity of the working classes is not in any way dependent on the existence of the International Working Men's Association. This was only the first attempt to create a central organ for such activity; an attempt which will be of lasting success because of the impetus it gave but which could not be continued in its *initial historical form* following the fall of the Paris Commune.'

And Marx damned the new party with Bismarck's own praise — 'the German workers' party has renounced internationalism in its new programme.'

### Flea hop

The cornerstone of the *Critique* and the major reason it is still essential reading today, is the revolutionary theory of the state and Marx's sharpest attack yet on the statist political foundation of reformism. If Marx had fallen out with Lassalle on this question when the latter was still alive, the experience of the Paris Commune had deepened his own approach to the matter.

The Commune had demonstrated in practice that revolutionaries could not just take hold of the existing state machine and wield it in their own interest. It had shown that it was essential to smash it and form an entirely new and different kind of political power: the 'Dictatorship of the Proletariat'.

'Between capitalist and communist society lies a period of revolutionary transformation from one to the other...in this period the state can only take the form of a revolutionary dictatorship of the proletariat.'

'The German workers' party — at least if it adopts this programme — shows



shoddy Ricardian economics of his old adversary, in particular the idea that there is an 'iron law of wages' which means that in absolute terms workers' living standards must fall to a bare minimum. As he had shown in *Capital* this is a relative not an absolute question. It is in relation to the wealth that workers create that their living standards should be compared.

Marx goes on to demolish the old Lassalle panacea for 'workers' co-operatives with state aid.' Unfortunately this idea seems to resurface again and again in the workers' movement—possibly some of the revolutionary mandarins in County Hall

International and the Paris Commune.

The former had reinforced the fundamental internationalist thrust of revolutionary socialism. It had proved that workers could transcend national divides, that solidarity between workers of all countries must and could defeat reactionary chauvinist prejudices.

The Lassalleans of course were notorious for their capitulation to great Prussian chauvinism. But Marx had also already had cause to rebuke some of his own followers' tendencies. Engels had reproached the old SDAP with having only a 'purely platonic relationship to the international' although it

that its socialist values do not even go skindeep, for instead of treating *existing* society as the *basis* of the existing state ... it treats the state as an independent entity ... The "present society" is capitalist society ... the various states of the various civilised countries, despite their motley diversity of form, do have this in common: they all stand on the ground of modern bourgeois society although the degree of capitalist development varies.

'They thus also share certain essential characteristics ... The question then arises: What transformation will the state undergo in a communist society ...? This question can only be answered scientifically and even a thousandfold combination of the word "state" and the word "people" will not bring us a flea hop nearer the problem.'

### Idiotism

Marx had in fact defined, nearly half century before the first successful socialist revolution, the central issue that divides revolutionaries from reformists of all hues. This was not, and never has been, an abstract or purely theoretical question. For here is Marx laying out the revolutionary position in the form of a critique of a document that was to form the political basis of the first mass workers' party.

The rest of Marx's critique was taken up with the distinction between the 'first phase of communist society, given the specific form in which it has emerged after prolonged birth pangs from capitalist society ... (and the) 'more advanced phase,' or between the socialist and communist stages.

Here Marx was concerned to expose the restrictions the reformist, Lassallean vision had of the future. Because they had no real understanding of the economic basis of capitalism, the reformists could not understand that 'right can never rise above the economic structure of a society and its contingent cultural development.' Only in the more advanced stage, when the productive forces have been completely liberated from the constraints of capitalist competition, and the never-ending search for profit, 'only then can society wholly cross the narrow horizon of bourgeois right and inscribe on its banner: From each according to his abilities, to each according to his needs.'

Such long-term prognoses however were more important for the vision of a future society. In the here and now Marx was confronted with the hard truth that the unification of the two wings of the German workers' movement did take place, and on the basis of the Gotha Programme. Marx could end his *Critique* with the ringing declaration: 'Dixi et salvavi animam meam' (I have spoken and saved my soul). But he had to come to terms with the less than perfect political realities of the situation. He did not therefore break off all relations with the new party, but continued to try to influence it in the right direction

In 1879 he took up his pen once again to write a *Circular Letter* to his supporters in Germany. This was to be his last major intervention in the German movement and

was in effect his political testament to it. It was inspired by what he saw as the retreat of the party from a revolutionary position before the repression of Bismarck's Anti-Socialist Laws.

Threatened with deportation from the capital, Berlin, Liebknecht announced in the Reichstag that the SPAD was a party of reform, was opposed to 'revolution-mongering' and would obey the Anti-Socialist Law.

In his stinging rebuke to the 'parliamentary idiotism' of his followers, Marx identified in advance what were to become the major elements of an enduring reformist cancer in the German party: its persistent weakness on the question of internationalism; its adaptation to the state; its lack of confidence in working class self activity; and its ultimate deferment of revolution in favour of an existing reformist practice. He wrote:

'In the view of these gentlemen, the Social-Democratic Party is *not* to be a one-sided workers' party, but a party open to all sides ... It is to prove this, above all by divesting itself of rough proletarian passions and by placing itself under the leadership of educated, philanthropic bourgeois in order to "learn good form" and to "develop good taste" ...

'In order to dissolve the last trace of fear on the part of the bourgeoisie it must be shown clearly and convincingly that the red bogey is really only a phantom and does not exist. But what is the secret of the red bogey if not the fear felt by the bourgeoisie of the inevitable life and death struggle between itself and the proletariat ...?

'Abolish the class struggle and the bourgeoisie and "all independent men" will not hesitate to go hand in hand with the proletarians. And who would be cheated then if not precisely the proletarians?'

### Propaganda

'We know all these phrases very well from 1848 ... Instead of a determined political opposition — general mediation; instead of the struggle against the government and bourgeoisie — the attempt to win them over and persuade them; instead of defiant resistance to mistreatment from above — humble submissiveness ... The Social Democratic Party is not to be a workers' party; it is not to incur the hatred of the bourgeoisie or anyone; above all it should conduct energetic propaganda among the bourgeoisie, instead of stressing far reaching goals ... it should rather devote its whole strength and energy to those patchwork reforms which could provide the old social order with new supports ...

'These are the same people who under the guise of unflagging activity, not only do nothing, but also try to prevent anything happening at all.'

Some commentators have suggested nevertheless that Marx failed to come to grips with the problem of reformism in the workers' movement even in this last letter,

either because he was sentimentally attached to 'our party' as he called it, or because the phenomenon of reformism had not yet fully developed.

There is some truth in this criticism. The German party was clearly not then wholly infected with the reformist cancer that manifested itself so spectacularly in 1914 when it capitulated to German nationalism and voted war credits for the imperialist world war. But then even Lenin was stunned into temporary silence by this gross act of betrayal. It is also true that Engels never pushed for the publication of either the *Critique* or the *Circular Letter* after Marx's death, and that his own Introduction to Marx's *Civil War in France*, could be read as making some concessions to reformism on the question of legal and illegal work, and on insurrection.

It is also true that even in the *Circular Letter* the tendency is for Marx to see reformism as an alien ideology imported into the party solely by bourgeois personalities and that the solution is to keep certain individuals out (not that there is anything wrong with this idea of course).

But Marx did go out of his way to stress that the practice of the party could easily become reformist while the theory remained formally radical. This is precisely what happened to the German SPD after Marx's death. As the party grew it developed real material roots in the society to which it was formally opposed. The whole phenomenon of bureaucracy which was spawned in this first mass workers' party was only to be understood much later, by Lenin and by Trotsky. It was only later that revolutionaries began to understand that a mass, representative party would inevitably in 'normal times' reflect the consciousness of the mass of non-revolutionary workers; and that the construction of vanguard, Leninist parties would become essential.

All this means is that Marx, like all of us, was a product of his own times. Others since have made and will continue to make new contributions to the socialist movement. But when all is said and done, Marx's own intervention in the German labour movement was inspired by a revolutionary spirit. In his last writings this spirit rang out as clearly as ever:

'As far as we are concerned, after our whole past only one way is open to us. For almost 40 years we have stressed the class struggle as the most immediate driving power in history and in particular the class struggle between the bourgeoisie and the proletariat as the great lever of the modern social upheaval; therefore it is impossible for us to ally ourselves with people who want to eliminate this class struggle from the movement. When the International was formed, we expressly formulated the battle cry: the emancipation of the working class must be the work of the working class itself. We cannot ally ourselves therefore with people who openly declare that the workers are too uneducated to free themselves and must first be liberated from above by philanthropic big bourgeois and petty bourgeois.'

# Swamp as art

David Edgar's new play *Maydays* has been winning praise from the liberal establishment. Pete Goodwin went to see it.

David Edgar is a political playwright who has spent much of his working life associated with the revolutionary left. *Socialist Review* began its life in 1977 with a lengthy two part article by Edgar surveying political theatre from what looks like a very hard-headed revolutionary socialist viewpoint. And before that, in the early seventies Edgar had written occasional cultural articles for *Socialist Worker*.

His new play, *Maydays* is also very directly political. It is held together by the story of Martin Glass: son of a liberal clergyman, public schoolboy CNDer in the early sixties, rather hearty anarchist student in the late sixties, Leninist (member of 'Socialist Vanguard') from 1970, expelled 1974 and then moving rapidly rightwards. By 1979 he is a bright young ideologue for the Tory ultra-right up to his neck in something rather like the Freedom Association, the 'Committee for the Defence of Liberty.'

And Martin Glass' story is painted on an even broader canvass. Alongside it we have the story of Pavel Lermontov, young Russian officer involved in suppressing the Hungarian Revolution of 1956, turned dissident by the experience, imprisoned and finally exiled, where he finds himself lionized by that same right wing group that has welcomed Martin to its heart.

On the face of it then, a very ambitious play, and, with the odd exception, theatrically absorbing — all three and a half hours of it.

So far as the politics of the play are concerned, two things should be said on the positive side. First of all David Edgar has clearly not lost the ability he displayed in *Destiny* to expose the hard right wing from within. The dramatic climax of the play comes when Lermontov turns from the after dinner speech prepared for him by his authoritarian cold war warrior 'friends' and turns on the 'Committee for the Defence of Liberty's' well-beeled guests. He has realised that their aim is solely to crush their own 'dissidents', and he wrecks their banquet by telling them so.

Secondly, it should be added that the play concludes on some sort of note that the 'struggle goes on'. A women's peace camp in the West, a handful of dissidents carrying on their clandestine work in the East.

But having given that positive side two other things need to be said.

Firstly, showing up Pinochet-loving Tory rightists as being two-faced in their 'support' for Russian dissidents is pretty easy meat. And sympathy for women's peace camps or Russian dissidents is, of itself, not likely to

shake up Edgar's audience very much.

Whether it does so depends on what goes alongside it. And in the case of *Maydays* what goes alongside it is a prolonged rubbishing of revolutionary socialist politics in general and the revolutionary party in particular. In this Edgar is travelling the well-trodden *Beyond the Fragments* path. No doubt, like the other travellers, he believes he is making some new and still left wing examination of the 'post-68' experience. In practice, along with most of the others, what he comes up with is more or less the same old trite jibes that the liberal establishment has been using against revolutionaries for years.

So all of Edgar's revolutionaries just happen to be middle class or students. Very convenient. Every one of his characters has parental complexity that draws them into left wing activity. Martin's father lost out selling his South African shares after Sharpeville, his ex-communist teacher joined the party in 1945 feeling that he had missed out on the Spanish Civil War. When American radical Cathy gets upset another character conveniently explains:

'Her dad was in the Party in the thirties. Lot of guilt there. Lot of mess. Hard to snap your fingers, will it all away.'

Even Lermontov has a Party father disgraced and imprisoned by Stalin to explain his dissidence.

It all adds up to something very near the

Cold War Freudians' theories that revolutionary activity was to be explained by peculiarities in your Oedipus complex.

Then we have the portrayal of 'Socialist Vanguard'. Its standard-bearer in the play, James Grain, is an intelligent Dave Spart:

'We are not to be confused with the Socialist Alliance, from whom we split, or the Left Opposition who split from us, or Workers' Struggle, who split from them, or with the League for Revolutionary Socialism who never split at all...'

He is also a slightly menacing figure, given to quoting Trotsky on 'human dust'.

Martin joins Socialist Vanguard in an almost religious conversion. 'I want to join. I never want to think, or feel, or be like that,' he suddenly blurts out. We see nothing of him in Socialist Vanguard, simply the moment when he is quite arbitrarily and cold-bloodedly expelled by James Grain, who punctuates his conversation with Martin with jibes at the 57 varieties of revolutionary paper seller who happen conveniently to be around.

It is cardboard caricature and the cardboard has been much recycled.

But it is this rubbishing of revolutionary politics that is going to stick in the minds of the audience, rather than the exposure of the cold war warriors. For all its skill that exposure simply serves to comfort the audience that at least they haven't travelled that far right.

The effect of *Maydays* is therefore a smug and conservative one: reinforcing one end of the BBC consensus. The liberal end of it no doubt, but the BBC consensus nevertheless.

I wonder if that is really what David Edgar intended?





## Grenada before the invasion

The analysis in last month's *Socialist Review* of events in Grenada struck just the right balance between a stance of anti-imperialist opposition to the US invasion which, of course, all socialists must take and the hard realistic assessment of the nature and achievements of the Bishop regime. This must also be made if anything is to be learnt and if we are to avoid the head in the sand idealisation of Third World revolutions in which so many of the left indulge.

Reagan's ludicrous propaganda has been adequately exposed elsewhere but, having spent three weeks in Grenada just prior to the coup, I found his claims particularly laughable.

I spent a day with a NJM member at the Sandino Construction Plant which supplied basic material for the airport and the housing programme. I also visited the International Airport at Port Salines, the completion of which was awaited eagerly all over the island.

The construction workers were totally bemused by Reagan's insistence that this modest attempt to make Grenada more attractive to tourists was in fact part of a Russian plot.

My guide made no bones about the fact that the Cuban technicians and labourers were armed and had, like most other Cuban adults, received military training. It was clear they would fight if the US invasion feared since March 1979 took place.

The achievements of the revolution were by no means insubstantial. During its four year existence much was achieved in the fields of health, women's rights and education. The theme of 1983 was 'Year of Political and Academic Education' and the slogan 'Every child in school' seemed to follow us everywhere.

When I was there the slogan had almost become a reality. Primary education had been massively expanded and the Committee for Popular Education was through its voluntary evening classes, rapidly improving the adult literacy rate.

Equally, the limitations and deficiencies of Bishop's revolution were glaringly obvious. Bishop's time was increasingly occupied with 'begging tours' of 'socialist countries'. At home, the airport project depended upon voluntary labour to meet its targets.

The government newspapers, *The New Jewel*, was full of advertisements for jumble sales, dances etc to raise money for the airport.

Quite simply Grenada was still an extremely poor country and expansion could only come about through the increased exploitation

of existing resources of raw material and labour. Slogans like 'Production means Freedom' and 'Produce More' vied with the educational slogans for space on the walls of St Georges. The result was the spectacle of a 'people's government' extolling the virtues of 'self exploitation' in the pursuit of 'workers freedom'.

The airport further illustrates the dilemma of the government. Its purpose was exactly what Bishop claimed it was — to attract tourists. Tourism would become the major foreign exchange earned. Grenada was to become dependent on the very people whose dominance it had spent years trying to escape.

The revolution of 1979 was the work of no more than 100 NJM members. This puts the finger on the major problem facing the government. Its popularity was largely passive. The lack of involvement, of attachment, alienated many people from the NJM. Bishop faced the job of persuading people who had not made the revolution that it was really in their interests to support it.

This task was made more difficult by the lack of democracy. The Parish Councils and educational Committees did not represent workers' democracy. They were like their Cuban equivalents. They eased popular acceptance and implementation of policies decided by the Bishop group.

The frequent comments of Grenadians that in 1979 the 'politicians changed but life did not' expressed a certain scepticism. The sight of the large smoke-glassed 'politicians' cars' emphasised the gulf between governors and governed.

## REVIEWS

### Class struggle, but no party!

Politics in Britain

Colin Leys

Heinemann

World Review 1984

Pluto Press

£7.95

'The crisis in Britain is so far advanced that much of the familiar ground covered by the textbooks in the past has become increasingly irrelevant ... *Politics in Britain* is distinguished by its stress on the link between politics, economics and social structure, and by its use of a historical approach...'

So says the publisher's blurb and it is a fair enough description. Certainly the notion of crisis is

The mass of people were excluded from the decision-making process and deprived of any real power. Hence the isolation of the government. And hence the internal wrangling that led to the coup.

Criticism of any anti-imperialist struggle does not come easy, particularly when you have witnessed it at first hand. But it is necessary because the manufacture of sentimental myths breeds nothing but a feeling of impotence and despair.

S Terry  
Camden

## Too hard on CND

I have been a subscriber to *Socialist Review* for a long time, and a sympathiser with the practical aspect of SWP politics, but it has become clear recently that the increasing sectarianism of your interventions is leading you into a dead end. I was surprised at the small number of books you are selling (as indicated in the Bookmarks' report). In fact, I can see you disappearing from the scene altogether, and for all my disagreements with your State Capitalism analysis, I won't be happy to see that happen.

To give one example: the anti-Freeze campaign in CND. What you don't seem to take into account is that the Unilateral Disarmament slogan has been misunderstood because of its being cast in the form of an appeal to the British Government. 'What about the other side?', people ask. If one tries to explain that the other side has in fact proposed general nuclear disarmament one is accused of having fallen prey

to propaganda. Doubtless the ignorance of the public response presents a problem, but the way to counter it is by emphasising that CND is part of an international movement that is putting pressure on all governments, and which will if necessary take the situation into its own hands.

This is as much as saying that the peace movement has the task of being the bearer of a revolutionary political transformation. This may seem an absurd claim in the light of the present consciousness of CND, but the peace movement has no other way of achieving its aims than by becoming the framework within which new organs of direct democracy (proletarian democracy if you like) take shape.

The task of revolutionaries in CND and the peace movement generally is not to lead sniping campaigns against this or that conciliatory slogan which is adopted as a result of communication failures. It is to provide an alternative leadership by making the movement aware of how such communication failures are inevitable whenever it continues appealing to people simply in their role as voters for established institutions like the national or EEC parliament.

The question of 'the other side' then inevitably crops up. CND and its international allies have to be made aware of their character as the prototype of a new system of government, if necessary using non-Marxist vocabulary, because we are not trying to sell a 'line'.

The SWP's present tactic of Cassandra cries from the sidelines and predictions of the imminent demise of CND could in fact be the prelude to the SWP's own demise as a force that needs to be taken seriously. Please don't allow this to happen.

W E Hall  
Athens

central to Leys' book. The second chapter, *Britain in Crisis*, sets the scene for all that follows. More than that, the book is about class struggle in modern Britain, not merely about politics and the class structure, is relatively free from sociological or 'academic Marxist' jargon and firmly rejects the still dominant mystification of 'value free' political science.

The final chapter begins:

'Unless a solution is found to the problem in Britain it is obvious that the political system will be radically altered: and a solution will also require political changes no less profound... a period of crisis implies that the

options have narrowed: society cannot go on in the old way.'

Very true.

I would like to leave it at that but cannot. The contrast with a much earlier 'crisis' book, Trotsky's *Where is Britain Going?* (1925), will explain why. Trotsky was mistaken about various things — a too 'reductionist' view of the decline of British capitalism, for example — but he was exactly right about the main things. First, that the boss class would be driven to confrontation (as was to occur one year later); second, that the outcome would depend on the struggle within the British workers' movement between the reformists and the

revolutionaries (the CP at that time); third, that the outcome, for good or ill, would determine what happened, what was possible, for a long time, that a defeat of the revolutionary left would be disastrous for the whole workers' movement. And it was.

A purely historical matter? Not at all. Leys scarcely mentions the role of the labour bureaucracy at any stage. For him the struggle inside the labour movement is a matter simply of ideas. His view of the Labour Party left — 'the Labour movement seemed for the first time to be potentially on a collision course with British capital (1981)' — demonstrates it. He has no conception of the role of a revolutionary party.

Quite the opposite. I quote in full his description of us:

'The Socialist Workers Party, with about 4,000 members in 1981, was originally distinguished by some interesting departures from orthodox Trotskyist ideas, and was particularly attractive to intellectuals in the late sixties. In 1977, however, its leadership determined to convert it into a party of the Leninist type. Subsequently it contested by-elections with derisory results. Although in 1981 its weekly newspaper *Socialist Worker* sold about 30,000 copies, and although it had played an effective part in some 'common front' movements such as the Anti-Nazi League, it seemed handicapped by centralism and dogmatism.'

That alleged 'centralism' and 'dogmatism' is simply a determination to hold fast to revolutionary politics against the gadarene stampede of ex-revolutionaries to the right, itself a reflection of a (temporary) downturn in the class struggle. And a

determination to stand fast, to intervene in the here and now in the many struggles that occur, and to pull together a core of committed militants for the future — the same future that Colin Leys expects. Except that he is not willing to commit himself to the revolutionary left now.

That criticism apart, it is a very useful book, and one that should be pushed as against the establishment works that Leys criticises. He is a transparently honest writer and that alone merits support. More than that. Everyone can learn something from *Politics in Britain*.

*World View 1984*, successor of *World View 1983*, is useful, irritating in its omissions, and politically very soggy.

Useful factually. The publishers

call it 'an authoritative, scholarly and reliable yearbook that also provides an alternative, critical view of the world. I would quarrel with that on a couple of points: to find the population of East Germany (DDR) I had to practically search the book from end to end, and the British statistics are vastly inferior to those given in Leys' book. OK, it is a useful book but really we could have been spared the soggy, autonomist (ie autonomous from the class struggle) pieces which disfigure it. Autonomism, in the present political situation, is a movement to the right, a shift away from working class politics.

That said, try to get your local library to buy the book. It is certainly the best of its kind.

Duncan Hallas

approach of Carr and Schapiro and the British academic establishment, left and right, in their study of Russia.

In his book *What is History?* Carr attacked the empiricist approach to history, but it was just this empiricism that dominated his work as it dominated Schapiro's. Of course they both had their different views which determined both the areas on which they concentrated, their sources and the 'facts' they discussed.

But this difference is obvious. The crucial point is that when it comes to analysis and explanation to the extent that it exists at all it is clearly tacked on as a separate element.

Neither Carr nor Schapiro were alone in this. They reflected and reinforced the whole academic tradition of the study of the Soviet Union. This starts from the unproven and unexamined assumption that the Soviet Union is a unique place of some kind.

To understand it therefore demands a sensuous grasp of sources — you must not only know Russian — you must know 'Russia'. The result is that the study of the Soviet Union is a ghetto into which the outside world rarely enters.

The impact of this can be seen in this book. Several of the contributors clearly do not share Schapiro's politics or his view of Russia but they all share his and Carr's method. The result is interesting, empirical studies of the rise of Stalin but no analysis.

When some attempt is made to understand how things happened it comes in two contributions one of which spends most of its time seeing how Russia fits into Max Weber's analysis and the other more bizarrely still, resurrects a 'flow chart' from an outdated American work on politics to help us understand the dissident movement!

Of course the fact that academics want to talk to themselves in the little worlds that they carve out does not matter in itself. It is just the sort of thing that they normally do. The problem here is that socialists also want to discuss and understand Russia.

But when they try to do this they are confronted by a door over which is written 'Only those who truly know Russia may enter here' and this rule is protected as vigorously by the guardians of the left as those of the right.

There is no virtue in ignorance and we need to study more and learn more about the Soviet Union. But we are all capable of doing this and we should refuse to be intimidated. In this the works of both Carr and Schapiro will be of value as long as we are aware of their limitations.

They can give us the stuff out of which we can develop our analysis. We will not find it elsewhere for behind that door lies not the light but an intellectual bankruptcy hidden only by its own mystique.

Mike Haynes

## Students of Russia

**Authority, Power and Policy in the USSR**

Ed: T H Rigby, Archie Brown and Peter Reddaway  
MacMillan, 1983

No-one interested in recent Russian history can avoid having to read the books of E H Carr and Leonard Schapiro. For the last thirty years they have dominated the study of the Soviet Union in Britain.

Yet on the face of it no two historians could be further apart — Carr the ex-diplomat and wartime editor of *The Times*, an admirer of realpolitik in international relations and of the value of planning over anarchic market capitalism — Schapiro, the virulent anti-Communist and believer in the continuity between Lenin and Stalin and the inevitable totalitarian con-

sequences of Bolshevism.

Carr died in late 1982 and now a year later Schapiro has also died. He is unlikely however to suffer the same posthumous fate as Carr. In the year since his death a vicious personal and political campaign has been waged against him.

It was begun by an attack by Norman Stone in the *London Review of Books* (1982 vol 5 no 1) and continued by Leopold Labedz in the *Times Literary Supplement* (10 June 1983). This attack brought out the left establishment in Carr's defence from Alec Nove and Eric Hobsbawm to Robin Blackburn and Tamara Deutscher.

Unfortunately for them much of the attack (though not all) struck home because Carr was soft on Stalinism as his right wing critics claimed. Regrettably this same softness characterises so many of his defenders too with the result that they have been unable to come to terms with the very real ambiguities of Carr's achievement as a historian of the Soviet Union.

I mean no excessive praise of Duncan Hallas when I say that his obituary of Carr in the January 1983 issue of this journal was the best that has been written. Rather it reflects on the weaknesses of the academic study of the Soviet Union in this country that the specialists should be outdone by an admitted non-specialist.

The publication in paperback of this book of essays in honour of Schapiro which will now perhaps be his obituary volume, provides an obvious opportunity to do a similar hatchet job on him to that done by the right on Carr. It would not be difficult to do, for while he may not have had Carr's personal peccadillos his right wing version of history disfigured his writings just as much as did Carr's inadequate approach to Stalinism.

But what is really interesting is not this but what unites the

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# TEAMSTER REBEL

Farrel Dobbs died on 31 October in California. He will be best remembered as one of a group of Trotskyist militants who led the massive strike by Teamsters in 1934. **Chris Bambery** looks back at his life.

In the book *Teamster Rebellion* Dobbs wrote about that strike and explained how he came to join a Trotskyist organisation.

'One night after a meeting, I went into a beer joint across from the union hall and saw Miles Dunne standing at the bar. I took a place next to him, and after engaging in a little small talk I came right to the point. "Are you a communist?" I asked.

"What the hell's it to you?" he shot back. "I heard that your are," I told him. "If it's so, I guess that's what I want to be."

As Dobbs himself admitted he'd come a long way politically. In the 1932 presidential election he'd voted for the Republican candidate, Herbert Hoover. The great depression had forced him to become a coal driver but Dobbs up till then had still hoped to go to university and become a US judge!

It was as a coal driver—facing low wages and casual work—that Dobbs had first joined the Teamsters Union. He joined a branch where there was already a group of Trotskyists, including the three Dunne brothers and Carl Skoglund, who were attempting to build a fight back against the bosses. They were doing so in a situation where the Teamsters' officials refused to recruit most coal drivers and none of the labourers, preferring to maintain a small union for a few craft workers. The Great Depression had also sapped workers' confidence.

## Confidence

In 1934 two things changed the situation. First of all a drop in America's massive unemployment helped restore a degree of confidence among workers. In addition the new Democratic President, Franklin Roosevelt, in order to get working class votes, had been forced to make noises about the right of workers to organise in unions. Roosevelt was just indulging in rhetoric but workers began to take him at his word.

In February 1934 the Trotskyists in the Teamsters local judged the time right to strike for union organisation. Some 600 coal drivers came out—traditionally a weak group. But the Trotskyists introduced new tactics. 'Cruising pickets' toured the town enforcing the strike. Every one of the 600 strikers was involved. These flying pickets ensured victory.

The rest of the Minneapolis story will be

well known to readers. The Teamsters decided on an all-out strike to win a closed shop. A virtual general strike followed with 'cruising pickets' defeating the police in a pitched battle around the city market which lasted three days. The bosses then conceded only to withdraw the agreement having secured the backing of the state governor who controlled the paramilitary National Guard.

The second strike remains a model for revolutionaries. The cruising pickets went back on the streets. When they met with opposition from the police they brought out other groups of workers in solidarity. A 'women's auxiliary' of strikers' wives and girlfriends was formed to help with picketing and unemployed workers were organised as well. Decisions were taken by mass meetings and an elected strike committee.

## Mafia

When the National Guard moved in to arrest the strike committee a 'shadow' committee took over operations in a secret headquarters with its own printing machine!

But in *Teamsters Rebellion* Dobbs is also clear that the strike couldn't have been successful without the intervention of the Trotskyist grouping, the Communist League of America. Its Minneapolis branch had discussed its work among the coal drivers for two years through thick and thin. It had helped train a layer of militants who could look beyond the coal yards, who had a grasp of the tactics and strategy needed to win the strikes and could link up the disputes to the general struggle for socialism.

Naturally, this wasn't easy. Many of the Teamster comrades found themselves sucked into constantly dealing with the minutiae of the dispute. As Dobbs wrote:

'In the case of Local 574, for example, the union problems were so pressing and so complex that comrades could easily get so one-sidedly preoccupied with them that they slighted other political and organisational matters. Being part of a general membership branch helped them to offset this danger. They were drawn into broader patterns of political thinking and into the party's multifaceted educational processes.

The tragedy is that Dobbs and his comrades shifted their strategy in the years that followed. In 1939 Dobbs became a full time official of the union at the request of its president, Daniel Tobin. Just months earlier he'd tried to throw Dobbs and his comrades out of the union. Even Dobbs admitted it was a case of 'If we can't beat them we'll recruit them'.

The Trotskyists now believed that by taking positions they could build a 'class struggle' current in the union which would include officials opposed to Tobin. The emphasis became not on organising the rank and file around disputes but attempting to

gain 'a competent leadership'.

One of those Dobbs worked with was Jimmy Hoffa—who would later become Teamsters' president and introduce the Mafia into the union's affairs.

Dobbs himself described a section of the bureaucracy as 'progressives', claiming:

'So far as relations with progressive bureaucrats were concerned...nothing more was involved than a bloc over trade union policy; it was not a political bloc.'

The Trotskyists, now known as the Socialist Workers Party, concentrated their fire on the Communist Party rather than the 'progressive bureaucrats'.

Dobbs and other SWP leaders were involved in a sharp disagreement at a meeting with Trotsky in Mexico shortly before his assassination. Trotsky told Dobbs:

'There are small Tobins on whom you depend. They depend on the big Tobins. They on Roosevelt.'

He correctly predicted that with America's approaching entry to World War Two the Rooseveltians would turn on the Trotskyists.

Dobbs himself summarised Trotsky's arguments (which were later published) as follows:

'What we had outlined was a trade union policy, Trotsky responded, not a Bolshevik policy. While gains for the party had been accomplished through certain unavoidable degrees of adaptation to trade union realities, measures were needed to offset the dangers involved. Many comrades appeared to have become more interested in trade union work than in party activity; and to a certain extent we were adapting politically to the labor bureaucracy.

'Bolshevik policies, he stressed, begin outside the trade unions. Although a militant worker may be an honest unionist who can develop politically, that is not identical with being a Bolshevik... There was a need for more emphasis on the party, he advised us, more systematic theoretical training, sharper maneuvering. First and foremost the comrades had to be party members and only in a secondary sense trade unionists.'

## Battle

Dobbs had already resigned as a Teamsters' official (probably at Trotsky's urging). Along with many SWP leaders he was gaoled for his opposition to the war and his activity in Minneapolis. The gaoing was welcomed by both the Communist Party and the 'progressive' bureaucrats—including the leadership of the Teamsters who brought the case against Dobbs and Co. Tragically the Trotskyists found themselves more isolated because of their previous adaptation to these bureaucrats.

For the rest of his life Dobbs was a central leader of the American SWP. *Socialist Review* would have a number of sharp disagreements with that organisation as it drifted rightwards in the years that followed. But the best memorial for Farrel Dobbs remains *Teamster Rebellion*. That is still a manual for any revolutionary involved in industrial struggles.

Television has a handful of stock arguments to draw on. And one of its most familiar was dusted down last month for a *Horizon* programme, *China's Baby*. In its portrayal of how China copes with the danger of a population explosion by the enforcement of a one-baby-one-family rule, *Horizon* made two points.

The first was the grudging admission that China's revolution had brought about some material benefits. Standards of living had been raised and harmful traditions and superstitions were being broken down.

But, implied *Horizon*, what about the freedom of Chinese people to make decisions about their own lives? Communism, in one of its manifestations has not been able to guarantee this basic right. People may be better off but what about their spiritual well-being?

The argument is well-known and isn't confined to TV. We have all had to confront those who claim;

'You socialists only fight for economic demands, forgetting that it simply isn't enough. People need to be encouraged to develop their own spiritual and individual needs.'

Frequently the argument goes even further. Socialists are not merely accused of over-looking the individual, they are charged with working against it.

The examples of Russia and China are trotted out. In these countries communism is said to have reduced individuals to numbers. Men and women are subordinate to the common good and any attempt to cultivate their own ideas are stamped on.

Whenever the rules are bent—as in the recent return of hairdressers and Western fashions to Peking for the first time since the revolution—the media can barely refrain from smugly saying:

'We told you so—people have to be able to express their own personalities and be encouraged to develop their own ideas.'

And so they do. But while the chances don't exist in the Eastern bloc, they certainly don't in the West either. Capitalism reduces choices about all sorts of things, from how and when to have children to how to live out one's own

## Lost in the masses?

sexuality. The room to grow spiritually is a privilege denied to most of us.

'The distinction between the personal and the class individual, the accidental nature of conditions of life for the individual,' wrote Marx, 'appears only with the emergence of class, which itself is a product of the bourgeoisie. This accidental nature is only engendered and developed by competition and conflict between individuals themselves. In theory, therefore, individuals appear to have greater freedom under the rule of the bourgeoisie than before, in reality of course they are less free.'

So Thatcher would have us believe that she is the custodian of the individual. One of the foundations of Toryism is the claim that they allow people to develop according to their own talents and spiritual requirements. You can do it on your own, they say, and we'll make sure you don't get swamped by the crowd.

The same theme forms part of the right's ideological attacks on, for example, trade unions. The individual, or so the argument goes, is lost in the union and dominated by a propaganda machine. We have heard it more recently around the secret ballot. The idea that private and personal choices should be made individually and in secret is a peripheral but attractive argument.

The trouble is that those sorts of choices are not individual ones. A decision concerning working conditions and pay affects every person in a workplace. There should be greater freedom to openly and publicly dis-

cuss issues, not less.

It isn't too difficult to see that the Tories' cult of the individual is a sham. But we also have to deal with criticism from some feminists. Not all, but certainly many, influential writers in the Women's Movement have argued that liberation can be achieved within each individual. Or, at least, the individual is a good starting point.

The ideas of writers like Anais Nin, Marilyn French and Germaine Greer begin from the premise that change begins with Number One. Some feminists criticise revolutionary socialists for generalising oppression to the barest economic facts.

The notion is attractive because it puts the onus on ourselves rather than wider social and economic problems. It is always easier to work out a programme for individual changes than embark on a grandiose scheme that encompasses the whole social system.

Unfortunately it just isn't possible to guarantee the spiritual well-being of individuals within capitalism. Changing economic conditions will change some of the fetters that prevent us from developing into fulfilled human beings.

In *German Ideology* Marx wrote:

'The contradiction between the personality of the individual proletarian and the condition of life imposed on him, his labour, becomes evident to himself, for he is sacrificed from his youth onwards and has no opportunity of achieving within his own class the conditions which would place him in another class.'

'Thus while runaway serfs only desired the freedom to develop and gain recognition for their actual conditions of existence, and therefore, in the end only arrived at free labour, the proletarians, if they are to achieve recognition as persons, will be obliged to abolish their own former conditions of existence, which are the same as those of society as a whole. They are in direct opposition to the State as the form in which the members of society have so far found their collective expression. *In order to develop as persons they must overthrow the state.*'

Marta Wohrle

