

Workers' fight

5p

No.94 April 26 to May 3rd 1975

may
day

FREE THE

shrewsbury TWO!

BLMC RESIST SACKINGS AND SPEED-UP!

THE MEETING held in Birmingham last Wednesday (April 23rd), which brought together shop stewards in the motor industry on a nationwide scale, could be a turning point in the in the present struggles of the whole of the working class.

Called by the BLMC Shop Stewards Committee, the meeting was attended by shop stewards from the principal motor plants — Fords, Vauxhalls and Chrysler — as well as some from the car components sector, Lucas, Dunlop and Smiths. The major decision of the meeting was to set up a permanent national unofficial shop stewards organisation for the motor and car components industries.

STEWARDS

The inaugural meeting of this proposed body to be held on May 12th, and all the main plants in the industry will be asked to send delegates to it.

Already, the new body has declared its aims to be: to secure greater participation in the decision making in the industry, and to protect workers' jobs against short-time and redundancy. This is a far cry from what Lord Stokes was calling for when he proposed a BLMC combine stewards organisation to help him 'manage' the workforce!

The motor industry stewards could hardly have picked a more crucial time to leave behind the disjointed, un-coordinated struggles of the past and work for a national response to problems that are hitting car workers in every part of the country.

In SWANSEA, 2,000 men have just occupied the Ford plant in protest management threats and provocations and attempts to reduce them to "robots" in a new speed-up drive.

RUTHLESS

At DAGENHAM the ruthlessness of the car bosses can be seen in a whole sequence of events. Fords closed the body plant, sending 1,200 men home. They were told not to report back for work until May 6th! This action, and further lay-offs, Ford claim were made necessary by the strike of 18 door-hangers... And they had to strike because Fords had tried to sack eight of them and make the other ten do the same work.

Everywhere, the same two things are seen together: cut-backs and speed-up.

At the CHRYSLER COVENTRY works 600 men have been laid off following a strike by 180 men in the paint shop who were resisting a re-shuffling of their jobs aimed, according to the firm, to "increase output with the same number of men". With nearly a million on the dole, this would be bad enough; but the men see clearly that in the present state of the car industry that means main-

taining output with fewer men.

At the Fords plant at HALEWOOD the men have received warning letters from the management, saying there will be short time working and sackings unless more export cars are built.

In BIRMINGHAM at the Rover plant, 500 redundancies have been threatened. The alternative, say BLMC, is a 3-day week or more redundancies.

Everywhere, the condition of the market is king, and this king rules without mercy. The condition of the industry and the pressures of competition demand heavy investment, which in turn demands huge profits. Which is why as well as cut-backs, the bosses are also pushing for speed-up.

Thousands of car workers are still on short time, 3-day weeks in some cases; thousands are laid off and sacked because, they are told, there is no work for them. For the rest, there is speed-up because, it is claimed, not enough is being produced. One Fords convenor has said that his members' work-loads were up 50%, while another steward thought Fords were trying to get their old five day work-load out in the three days they are working now!

RYDER

Nowhere is this more clear than in the case of BLMC; nowhere will the new nationwide shop stewards committee be so tested as there.

The now published Ryder report could do no other than blame management for their ineptitude and the shareholders for their greed. The directors are rapped for distributing nearly all the profits in the form of dividends instead of using it for investment in the company. Bank borrowing at high interest rates filled the liquidity gap, but undermined the whole financial structure of the company. Outdated machinery meant low productivity. And the report believes, too, that company structure was inefficient, and that too many different lines were produced.

None of this is new. And none of this needed a long and detailed report either. Nor does any of it imply a solution that is in the interests of the workers at BLMC. Ryder and Benn, the NEB tandem, are as all the press agrees "mounting a rescue operation". Their first priority is to make BLMC efficient, and that means profitable.

Contd. back page

by PAUL
ADAMS



Vietnam: Which class will hold power now?

Every major revolutionary victory in modern history has had world wide effects. In the 25 years following the outbreak of the great French Revolution in 1789, there were radical changes right across Continental Europe, and the English working class raised its head as a factor in political life for the first time. The Russian Revolution of 1917 was followed by working class revolutionary struggles, right across Europe, with the rule of workers' councils briefly established in Bavaria and in Hungary, and by a whole series of colonial revolts. The Cuban revolution of 1959-61 changed the political face of Latin America.

The struggle in Indochina has already had such world-wide effects. For ten years now it has been a central issue in world politics. Through the movements that grew up in solidarity with it, it has greatly accelerated the growth of the revolutionary left, especially in western Europe, and it has dealt serious blows to the social stability of the capitalist order in the USA.



Ho Chi Minh.

The present defeats for the greatest imperialist war effort ever cannot fail to inspire fresh struggles throughout the capitalist world. But inspiration is not enough: theoretical clarity, an analysis which draws out lessons, a critical assessment, are

also necessary. The Cuban revolution encouraged thousands of people in Latin America to take up the revolutionary struggle; but a false and superficial set of conclusions drawn from the Cuban revolution (particularly by Regis Debray), glorifying isolated rural guerilla warfare, led many of them to defeat and death.

In last week's WORKERS FIGHT, we described how the military strategy of the US had grotesquely distorted the society of Vietnam. The Vietnamese bourgeoisie, never very solidly rooted in production, has become simply that class which received the lavish outflowings of the US treasury. Separated from its political power and its connection with the state machine, its social roots amount to very little.

The peasantry of Vietnam is far removed from being a conservative class of petty proprietors, each one earnestly attached to his little plot of land. His little plot of land has been scorched by bombs from American B-52s, and the peasant himself has been driven into a 'strategic hamlet', into a refugee camp, or into swelling the armies of unemployed in the cities.

The working class of Vietnam, beginning to develop in the 1920s, was neither very large nor very well defined before the start of the 30 years of war. In 1955, figures estimated the number of industrial workers in South Vietnam at 50,000. The number has grown slightly since, as a certain proportion of the US aid has percolated through to industrial development; and the number of people who, at one point or other during the course of a year, are industrial workers is probably considerably larger than the number in jobs at any particular time.

Nevertheless, the working class is not large, and it shades off into a vast army of non-productive state employees (about one and a half million

and an equally vast army of unemployed.

Whatever the complexities of the struggles to come, a few points are clear already.



US puppet Thieu

FIRSTLY, that the victory of the liberation forces will bring — and has brought in the areas where it has already triumphed — immense advances for the people of Indochina. The social priorities of the US-supported regimes, even before the degradation and corruption and savagery of the past ten years, were summed up in the sort of figures cited in Bernard Fall's book "The Two Vietnams": between 1957 and 1960, the South Vietnamese regime built 47,000 square metres of cinemas and dance halls, as against 6,500 metres of hospitals; 56,000 square metres of churches and pagodas, as against 3,500 square metres of rice mills; 425,000 metres of high-rent dwellings — and 86,000 square metres of schools. In Laos in 1971, in the areas under government control, there was a literacy rate of 20%, and just 17 doctors.

Since the escalation of the war, the influence of the most advanced capitalist civilisation in Vietnam has produced an uprooted population and a devastated countryside.

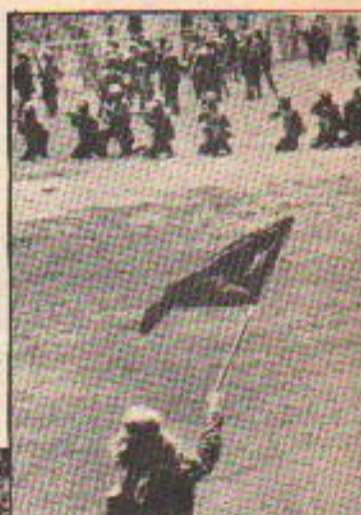
The USA has sent in millions upon millions of dollars to shore up its puppet regimes. But

rather than going to buy the "hearts and minds" of the population, an estimated 40% simply disappeared into the capacious bank accounts of those in power. Over the last two years, average real income per head has dropped by 45% in South Vietnam.

In the areas of south Vietnam under stable NLF control, however, every village has a primary school and a doctor. The peasants have been relieved of the most crippling burdens imposed on them by the landlords and by the state. North Vietnam has almost 100% literacy; every sizable provincial centre has a hospital; no-one starves.

The SECOND point is, however, that though the victories of the liberation forces do promise real improvements for the workers as well as the peasants of Indochina, those forces cannot be considered as working class political forces. There have been some reports — not filled in with circumstantial detail — of popular uprisings accompanying the recent victories of the NLF, but it is quite clear that the orientation

Top: Cambodians greet the victorious Khmer Rouge as they enter Phnom Penh; Middle: Student waves flag on the campus of Kent State University, Ohio, in a protest against the war in Indochina. Minutes later six students were shot dead by the National Guard. Bottom: 'Calley's Ditch' where scores of South Vietnamese were massacred by an American patrol in the village of My Lai; Inset: Khmer Rouge soldier.



of the NLF is not towards the self mobilisation of the working class as an independent class, leading the peasantry — but towards military-bureaucratic methods.

Some revolutionaries have suggested that the Vietnamese Communist Party — which leads the NLF — has made a decisive break from Stalinism, and must be considered as an effective revolutionary socialist party, even though confused and hindered by Stalinist hangovers.

There is nothing unthinkable in principle in the idea of a Communist Party making a decisive shift from Stalinism to the left. It is certainly a fact that the Vietnamese Communist Party has quite a different outlook from the British or the French Communist parties, for example. Instead of finding a cosy niche for itself in the established system, it has a record of continued heroic struggle.

But the simple fact of militant struggle, important though it is, does not outweigh the rest of the VCP's record. Before 1930 the group round Ho Chi Minh followed a policy of attempting to build up influence gradually in a nationalist movement — in line with Stalinist policy of the time. Adapting to the Stalinist 'third period' policy, they turned from that not only to forming an independent Communist Party, but to ultra-left adventures which were bloodily repressed, like the 'peasant soviets' of 1932.

From 1936 the Communist Party followed the Popular Front policy and dropped the demand even for national independence. During the war, while opposing Vichy French imperialism, it allied with the Americans and with the Gaullist French. From 1943 to 1947 it again dropped its demand for national independence; in 1945/46, the VCP welcomed British

troops in, tried to get an agreement with the French, and murdered Trotskyists and nationalists who fought against this policy. Only from 1952 did the VCP resume a policy of radical land reform.



Madame Binh —

In north Vietnam, capitalism and imperialism have been eliminated, and serious improvements secured for the people of the country. As a workers' state, it is bureaucratically deformed, with no workers' democracy, or, indeed, any sort of democracy except the most paternalistic. A brief 'hundred flowers' period in 1956 was met by swift repression.

When struggle began again in the south in 1958, the north was very slow to give aid. Their methods of negotiation have always been those of secret diplomacy. Even now, they support monarchist coalition regimes in Laos and Cambodia, and advocate coalition in South Vietnam. (The PRG is in fact itself a coalition government, though the bourgeois representatives in it are more a token of the VCP's willingness to make concessions to capitalist elements than a real social force.

None of this is cause for denying the importance of the victories of the Khmer Rouge and the NLF, or for failing to welcome those victories. It is, however, cause for a critical approach.

The programme of the active democracy of workers' councils still remains to be fought for in Indochina — and the Communist Parties will fight not for, but against, that programme. Workers' democracy is not just some ideal, inessential finishing touch — it is vital for any concept of socialism beyond a miserable bureaucratic-reformist level.

Those, like the International Marxist Group (*Red Weekly*) who present the NLF and the Khmer Rouge as revolutionary proletarian forces (with perhaps various political weaknesses and confusions) are gravely abusing the elementary programme of workers' power. To say that one should not disdain to recognise a revolution because it doesn't fit the 'norms' is one thing; to chop those 'norms' down to miserable proportions for the sake of fitting the accomplished fact, is another.

The effect is that concepts simply lose all precise meaning. The NLF or the Khmer Rouge can be characterised as proletarian, working class forces neither on the reality of their politics, nor on the reality of their social base, but only through the most metaphysical constructions.

Curiously, it is not only in the IMG's paper, but also in IS's *Socialist Worker* that we find a quite uncritical assessment of the revolutionary victories in Indochina. Given that IS has the theory that countries like North Vietnam, or the Soviet Union, are 'state capitalist', one would expect razor-sharp criticism of the aspirant 'state capitalist classes' of South Vietnam and Cambodia. Not a word of it!

The term 'state capitalism' does not even appear in IS's reportage on Indochina.

To spell out a 'state capitalist' analysis would present some thorny theoretical problems. Should they logically, for example, understand the fundamental nature of the struggle in Indochina to be a clash between Russian 'state capitalist' imperialism on one hand, and American imperialism on the other? That would mean socialists could not on principle support either side. (This was their position during the Korean war.)

But in fact the real reasons for IS's approach are probably not those theoretical problems, which they could with ingenuity evade.

In the first place, IS simply doesn't care very much. The week of the victory in Cambodia, they gave it just eight obscure column inches on page 2. In fact they have a mechanistic fatalism about the struggle in the 'third world', which flows logically from IS's 'state capitalist' theory — "well, it's as good as you can expect for Vietnam". Nor do they appreciate the impact of the

revolutionary struggles in Indochina in the advanced capitalist countries.

But there is a second, cruder reason for IS to keep its theory to itself: a blunt description of North Vietnam as state capitalist would probably shock many of IS's newer members who, uneducated in IS's theory, hold to the dominant left wing view that it is some sort of socialist state. Rather than come out sharply and honestly with its arguments, IS prefers to drift with the tide — especially when there's a chance of doing a slick 'public relations' job for 'revolution'.

But the task of Marxists is not to do a public relations job for revolutions elsewhere, but to think critically and to fight for solidarity. We do not give the PRG or the GRUNK our political confidence in any sense. Nevertheless we support them unconditionally in their fight to free their countries from American imperialism and its client regimes. We should demand that the Labour Government recognises the PRG and the GRUNK and provides immediate aid without strings to assist in the reconstruction of their war-devastated countries.

END OF THE 5 YEAR WAR

THE struggle to overthrow the Lon Nol regime in Cambodia began with the coup of March 1970. For over five years previously there had been increasing tension between Sihanouk and the pro-US forces such as Lon Nol.

At the time of the Japanese withdrawal in 1945, independence was declared in Cambodia as in Laos and Vietnam. But British troops swiftly invaded, and from 1946 to 1954 Cambodia was involved in the Indochina war. An alliance was established between the nationalist movements — the Vietminh, the Lao Issara in Laos, and the Khmer Issarak in Cambodia. The Khmer Rouge was founded in this period, originally as part of the Vietminh.

Sihanouk, who had been monarch since 1941, used the Khmer Rouge 'threat' to persuade France to grant independence at Geneva in 1954.

Admitted

Sihanouk steered a careful 'neutralist' line for 16 years, and earned himself Hanoi's approval and the suspension of the Communist Party's independent activity. This neutralist policy was possible because of the lack of explosive social antagonisms in the country. Most peasants own their own land, there is little shortage of land and there are few large landowners. There is very little industry beyond the rubber plantations, French-owned before their nationalisation by the GRUNK last July.

In 1964, however, by nationalising all foreign trade, Sihanouk created a grouping of rich opponents who had lost their source of income. The United States also became increasingly concerned about the possible use of Cambodia as a supply route from north to south Vietnam and as a safe retreat for the National Liberation Front.

From early 1967, armed

struggle began in Battambang province, and two years later Sihanouk admitted that some areas were controlled by the Khmer Rouge. The right wing was getting stronger in Phnom Penh, and Khieu Samphan, Hou Youn and Hu Nim, the present leaders of the Khmer Rouge, fled the city — where they had previously been deputies in the National Assembly — and joined the maquis. Sihanouk's reaction to the increasing conflicts was to denounce the guerrillas as "foreign provocation".

Protests

Caldwell & Lok Tan's book "Cambodia in the South East Asian War", mainly devoted to the most ridiculous apologetics for Sihanouk, remarks with a puzzled air about this period: "It is extraordinary and inexplicable that Sihanouk permitted himself gradually to become isolated from every force in Cambodia except the extreme right." Sihanouk even condoned US bombing over Cambodia in 1969 and 1970.

But, for the sake of having a reliably and explicitly pro-US regime, a coup — evidently backed by the CIA — overthrew Sihanouk

while he was on a visit to Peking, in March 1970. Sihanouk and the Khmer Rouge immediately joined together to form the FUNK (National Unity Front of Cambodia) and, six weeks later, the GRUNK (Royal Government of National Unity of Cambodia).

For his part, Lon Nol had Saigon troops in Cambodia within two days of the coup. Massive US bombings also followed, arousing world-wide protests. But already by June the GRUNK claimed to control half the country.

The Lon Nol regime never managed to conquer any popular base, even of the feeble sort the Thieu regime had in south Vietnam. An indication of the corruption and chaos was Lon Nol's announcement in December 1972 that 100,000 of his supposedly 250,000 strong army existed only on paper, so that their 'commanders' could pocket the extra wages. It was estimated that 30,000 of the remaining 150,000 might be non-existence too. And, besides, not all the soldiers that did exist received their pay.

Already in May 1972, Khmer Rouge forces were entering Phnom Penh. Demonstrations, mainly of students, repeatedly demanded the resignation of Lon Nol. But after the signing of the

LAOS — PHONY UNITY IS BREAKING DOWN

The strangest possible political situation has existed in LAOS since the 1973 ceasefire agreement, with the contending forces — the Royal Lao Government and the Pathet Lao — sitting together in a formal coalition, while their respective armed organisations in fact retain control of different zones of the country.

Prince Souvanna Phouma continues as Prime Minister, while Prince Souphanouvong, a leader of the Pathet Lao, sits as his deputy. Equal armed forces from both sides are stationed in

the major city of Vientiane, but in the political sphere the old Royal Lao right wingers dominate — as the National Assembly, elected while the Royal Lao Government still had sole power, has stayed in existence, and there haven't been new elections since the ceasefire.

Now this weird and tenuous set-up is beginning to crack. There have been struggles over the control of particular areas, with the Pathet Lao liberation forces gaining. In the last two weeks, the King — yes, there's



Paris Accords in January 1973, the US set itself to the biggest ever bombing assault on Cambodia, continuing until domestic pressure forced a halt in August.

Lon Nol's area of control had by 1973 been virtually reduced to Phnom Penh. In the dry season (roughly January to September) of 1974, the Khmer Rouge tightened their grip. On April 17th this year, the Lon Nol regime finally collapsed and the Khmer Rouge took over Phnom Penh.

Since then reports have been scanty, indicating only that the Khmer Rouge is attempting to evacuate some of the population of the city. While this is no doubt connected with the wish of the Khmer Rouge to maintain bureaucratic control, it also makes



Sihanouk

sense simply in terms of feeding the population. At two million, the population of Phnom Penh was massively swollen beyond what the city could hold (in 1962 its population was 400,000). 90% of those crowded into Phnom Penh had no employment. Not the least benefit of the Khmer Rouge victory will be the restoration of some sort of normal economic life.

The future relations between the Khmer Rouge and Sihanouk are unclear. Sihanouk himself has said repeatedly that the Khmer Rouge are the masters and he is merely a figurehead, but "Sihanoukists" are in important positions in the GRUNK. The fate and direction of the new regime will depend heavily on events in Vietnam.

John Sterling

Martin Thomas

PORTUGAL: ONE YEAR AFTER THE FALL OF CAETANO

Workers create their own democracy

THE Armed Forces Movement have regarded it as their "badge of honour" that elections would be held in Portugal "within the year". Indeed, this was one of the few clearly defined elements in the much-vaunted "Programme of the AFM".

Accordingly, some 6 million people will be going to the polls on Friday April 25th, the first anniversary of the coup that ended 48 years of fascism in Portugal. But there are two important reasons why these elections, for a Constituent Assembly, are not as significant as they might, in other circumstances, be.

The first is that, though the Constituent Assembly is being elected for the purpose of drafting a new constitution, the main lines of such a Constitution have already been agreed between the largest parties and the AFM.

According to this, the AFM will retain its 'watchdog' role in Portuguese politics for a period of 3 to 5 years after the elections, with the power of veto over 'lower bodies' in a pyramid system.

At the top of this will be the Presidency. Then the Revolutionary Council of the AFM, then the assembly of delegates of the AFM; and, right at the bottom, an elected Legislative Assembly.

Bourgeois commentators have dwelt on the fact that this set-up, dominated by Army men, isn't what one expects of bourgeois democracy; and on the fact that it in any case was sewn up before the elections took place.

ASSERT

But while lamenting the poor condition of Portugal's parliamentary democracy, these writers have had few words to say about the rapid and widespread growth of working class democracy in Portugal — which, far more than the AFM's manoeuvres, has gone to reduce the significance of these elections.

By taking more and more spheres of social and industrial life into their own hands, workers are gradually beginning to erode the power of the Portuguese capitalist state. Its writ stops at the gate of many factories; its control over parts of the army is tenuous; it makes little or no attempt to assert the property it formally upholds, when workers are taking over land or empty houses.

Workers' Committees in the factories directly represent every worker from canteen, office and shop floor. Neighbourhood assemblies are now being set up as well, with working people getting together to organise their own welfare (see below). In some army regiments, notably the First Artillery (RAL 1), decisions are taken and resolutions passed by mass meetings of all ranks. Ships in the Navy have set up democratic councils to run them. Village people decide together what to do with unused land.

TENSIONS

This may not be "democracy" as British MPs conceive of it, or as Guardian journalists recognise it. But in one short year, the Portuguese working class has created more real democracy than British workers have seen in a lifetime of voting in local, General and union elections.

Nevertheless, of course, the emasculation by the AFM of the bourgeois electoral process, and the collaboration of the powerful Communist Party in this, doesn't bode well for the Portuguese working class. It certainly hasn't been done in the

by
MAXINE LANDIS

name of working class democracy, but rather because, given the combativity of the working class in the face of economic conditions which the government is little able to alleviate, the AFM fears that a free-flowing parliamentary democracy could increase the tensions and confrontations, rather than help to create stability.

In general, they probably still fear the right wing most; it has tried already to mount two counter-coups, it has gone in for a wide variety of economic sabotage and it has powerful allies in international capitalism's 'warrior' bodies like NATO and the CIA. The old fascist organisations are of course banned, as are many right wing parties. But many of their members have flocked into the CDS, the right wing party which is still legal and which is expected to do well in the elections.

However, the AFM has not confined its attacks to the right.



12 parties contested the elections

Two left wing organisations were banned at the start of the elections — the AOC and MRPP; 100 MRPP members were arrested at the time.

More threatening has been government intervention in trade union affairs. The Trade Union Law of February was passed with the intention of strengthening the official Intersindical Trade Union structure as against the Workers' Committees. According to this law, only trade union delegates are recognised as representing



Photo Michael Tomlinson (FP)

WHAT YOU SHOULD DO

Banner of the Solidarity Campaign with the Portuguese working class on last Sunday's march to celebrate the first year since the end of fascism in Portugal. The Solidarity Campaign aims to spread knowledge of the actions of the Portuguese workers among British workers, and get pledges of solidarity

action. There is a very real danger of NATO intervention against the working class of Portugal, and the Campaign is urging trade unionists and socialists to commit their organisations to opposing such action. Send copies of such resolutions to the Campaign at 18 Fleet Road, London NW3, invite a speaker down to your branch, suggest to your Executive that a Campaign speaker address your Annual Conference, and affiliate to the Campaign.

workers, whereas on the Workers' Committees, all workers in the workplace whatever their union (and the non-members too) are represented, thus bridging all the usual divisions of grade and trade. Moreover, the trade union delegates as recognised by the law are seen as representatives not of the shop floor members, but of the Union Executive's policy, which could mean that delegates would be bound to oppose the wishes of the workers who had elected them. In such a case (unlike on the workers' committees) there would be no chance for the workers to recall their delegates.

SURGE

In the case of the Chemical Workers Union, the military and the Ministry of Labour actually intervened to depose the Executive which was sympathetic to the AOC (one of the parties later banned), arrested several of its members, and instigated new elections in the union with the aim of installing a rival grouping which supports the dominance of the Intersindical.

There has been as yet no overall, heavy-handed attempt to head off the great surge forward of the Portuguese working class. If such an attempt was made, how would the workers and their newly formed organisations face up to it?

There is no doubting the vigour, the creativity and the class consciousness of the workers' movement. And every

day brings new sections into action, impelled by a tightening economic screw and eager to join the struggle. But as yet this spontaneous, questing upsurge is fragmented and unco-ordinated. There is no authoritative leadership that is honestly committed to the self-activity of the working class. There is, on the hand, a leadership with a large measure of authority, the Communist Party, which is committed to harnessing and limiting the workers' revolutionary energy. It is two-faced, treacherous and powerful. And it is ruthless: already the CP Minister of Labour last summer sent in troops against strikers who, the Party claimed, were playing into the hands of the Right. If workers' militias were formed, the CP is not above sending troops to disarm them by force, as its sister-party did in Spain in May 1937.

The Portuguese working class has dangerous enemies, not least those who claim to be leading it to socialism. But there are opportunities, too, for consolidating the advances the workers have made.

Workers are abandoning the Communist Party, with its constant strictures on grass roots working class organisation and struggle, and its limited perspective of a mangled bourgeois democracy presided over by a vague and unpredictable collection of officers and by its own bureaucratic apparatus.

They are turning increasingly to the revolutionary groups whose central platform is the strengthening, arming and

knitting together of the working class democratic organs in preparation for a workers' takeover of Portuguese society.

The contrast in outlook can be seen most clearly if we compare the 'successes' of the Communist Party and of the Left. The CP's successes are such things as its control of the apparatus of the Intersindical, its ministerial posts in a non-elected government, and its takeover of areas of local government by behind the scenes manoeuvres.

ABOLISH

The successes of the Left, on the other hand, are such achievements as the formation of the Inter-empresas, a body which brings together the Workers' Committees of 40 Lisbon factories. Another recent success for the Left was a conference last weekend attended by representatives of 150 Workers' Committees and other organisations, which declared its aim as the establishment of permanent soviet-type Councils bringing together factory committees, neighbourhood assemblies and soldiers' delegates; the arming of the workers; and the restructuring of the army to abolish ranks and establish democratic majority control in the army.

The conference was called by one of the groups the CP would like to decide as 'marginal'. But if ideas like these get established in the working class and acted upon, it could be the CP, and Portuguese capitalism with it, that is pushed into the margin.

PORTUGUESE WORKERS TAKE MATTERS INTO THEIR OWN HANDS

AS ONE factory after another is occupied by its workforce, and workers' committees are elected to run them, there is a growing number of examples of workers mobilising on a neighbourhood basis in order to take control of other areas which affect their lives such as health, transport, education and housing.

In a country where over 2 million people live in slums and shantytowns, houses are no longer being allowed to stand empty. They are being occupied. Left wing parties, trade unions and broad-based neighbourhood assemblies are all behind a movement through which hundreds of houses and buildings either unused or mis-used have been occupied and transformed into nurseries, social centres, clinics, old people's centres and a multitude of other purposes tailored to the needs of the community.

On the 9th March a general assembly of local residents in Porto decided to occupy a 4-house complex of 24 flats owned by the Ministry of Justice, which had stood empty for 15 years.

In Cascais, a suburb of Lisbon, local workers have occupied an exclusive sports club and formed a local residents' committee to run it as a day nursery.

In Areiras de Cima, a mansion belonging to an absentee landowner was taken over on 27th March by local people. They have formed a committee to transform it into a clinic, nursery, cinema and cultural centre.

In Lisbon, workers in the Portuguese Institute of

Rheumatology converged on a building in the city centre, empty for 9 years, and in it are setting up a proper therapy centre for a disease which up until now was treated in Portugal merely by drugs.

Another empty building in Lisbon, the dilapidated Francfort Hotel, empty for two years, was the target of the Lisbon shop workers who occupied it on the 7th April. They organised groups of workers to clean it, repair it and to guard it by night. They issued a communique stating the aims of the occupation. They intend to create "...a nursery, library, canteen and common rooms where workers can discuss, read and in different ways create a better class consciousness, a better political

consciousness and a better spirit of co-operation."

In Corroios, another luxury hotel was occupied on 7th March by local people. A member of the occupation committee commented: "The working people will devote their time to transforming this luxurious hotel complex of the rich into a place for workers to enjoy themselves — into a peoples canteen, a child care centre, and an old peoples centre. The workers want to show their exploiters and prove to themselves that they are capable of solving their own problems."

Not only empty buildings, but local services, especially clinics and hospitals, have been requisitioned by neighbourhood committees, who through them are running a peoples health service suited to the needs of the local community.

from OUR COMMON STRUGGLE, newsletter of PWCC.

"Common Market Lefts" show their true colours

by Jack Price

IN tones of measured thunder, Michael Foot declaimed from the platform at a series of TRIBUNE rallies on the need to Get Britain Out. Within the week this same "left winger" was standing four-square behind Labour's draconian budget proposals and defending them right down the line before the assembled delegates of the Scottish TUC.

What a picture of the Labour left this represents! They demand a recognition of their "working class" credentials by shouting about the Common Market, but when an issue does arise which is truly a class issue — the Budget — there is virtually a complete silence from them. And Haffer, the martyr of the Market, who felt impelled to speak out last week, this week falls silent.

SUBSIDIES

Only two Labour MPs spoke in the Budget debate in the Commons, Stan Thorne (MP for Preston South) and Bob Cryer (MP for Keighley). Quite rightly Stan Thorne pointed out that "the only real contribution that the Government are anxious to make at this stage seems to be by slashing food subsidies, by putting up taxes, by lifting prices

and by forcing up unemployment ... We used some grandiose words in the election manifesto. We spoke about bringing about 'a fundamental and irreversible shift in the balance of wealth in favour of the working people and their families'. In what way is what is proposed now by the Chancellor of the Exchequer likely to achieve this aim? In my view, it will not achieve it."

IMPORTS

Bob Cryer had some fun recalling a report in the Daily Mail about the "tough life" faced by Marks and Spencer heir Joel Lerner. "He fled British shores because of) the tax situation... After renting villas around the continent he finally took up residence in Monte Carlo", leaving behind "a £250,000 estate in Berkshire... At the time the average full-time earnings for male manual workers were £48.63 per week and for full-time female workers £27 a week. ... The miner and the railwayman might well look askance at the Comptroller and Auditor General, for instance, who has had an increase from £16,500 to £18,500."

All good stuff, though not exactly fighting talk. For all



Cryer could suggest as an alternative to the Budget was a programme of import controls. But that was all the TRIBUNE group had as an alternative. And Cryer was one of the few Tribunes who spoke out at all. Almost every one of them remained silent and trooped into the lobbies dutifully to support the Budget.

Some of the left's responses remained more or less private. For instance Sydney Bidwell, Tribune group chairman,

attacked the Budget in the relative obscurity of a Labour MPs meeting. Most remained mute.

Worse still, when the Scottish TUC, meeting on Wednesday 16th, declared that the Budget was variously "the death knell", "the funeral oration" and the "death oration" of the Social Contract, it was the Left's elder statesman Foot who was there to defend it. On the day following the STUC's rejection of the Budget he addressed that

body denying "that the Social Contract is dead and destroyed" and defended the Government at all points.

Those sentimentalists who regret the passing of Foot's rhetoric in the Commons Budget debates (when he regularly rose to tear into the Chancellor of the Exchequer) need not mourn the loss altogether: he's still speaking on the Budget ... selling it as if his life depended on it.

AMRIT WILSON reviews Satyajit Ray's new film

DISTANT THUNDER

DISTANT THUNDER is said to be Satyajit Ray's "political film", made because he has been urged by admirers and challenged by critics to produce at last something politically relevant. And very few subjects could be as relevant to India today as that of the Bengal Famine of 1943.

I am an admirer of Ray's films. For me he can convey the intense beauty of moments, making them as personal as a dream — a girl in a swing in the moonlight in *Three Daughters*, scenes of childhood in *Pather Panchali*. Distant Thunder falls far below Ray's best films in this respect.

But as a political film it is not even an attempt.

It is the story (based like the *Apu* trilogy on a novel by Bhabhi Banerji) of a young brahmin, Soumitra Chatterji, and his wife Babita in a remote village during the approach and earliest days of the famine. The price of rice goes up, the local merchant hoards some of it, finally rice is no longer available and people begin to starve.

Famine — made in Britain

The village people don't know why it is all happening, and the fact that Ray himself knows is suggested only through a chance remark from a clownish old brahmin from another village, who says that the British have lost Burma to the Japanese so that Burmese rice is no longer available, and what rice there is in Bengal has been requisitioned to feed the troops. That one remark is all we are ever told or can see as to the causes of the Bengal famine — hardly adequate for an Indian audience, let alone British viewers to whom the causes and effects of other contemporary calamities, unrelated to Britain, are much better known than those of the Bengal famine for which British imperialism was directly responsible.

According to the (British) Famine Inquiry Commission,

natural causes such as floods and the failure of crops were responsible for the famine, and the number of deaths was between one and two million. Interestingly, this is the figure mentioned in the reviews of Distant Thunder in most of the national press, although the film itself mentions a figure of five million. Perhaps the Inquiry made under the supervision of Sir John Woodhead is still considered in Britain the only reliable document available...

Punishing Bengal

In fact, the long term causes of the famine were first, the diversion of land from rice to jute — an important cash crop of the British empire — and secondly that because of lack of agricultural development, Bengal had become dependent on rice from Burma.

The more immediate causes of the famine were the failure of the government to do anything about it in the early stages. The British took the opportunity to "punish" Bengal for its part in the "Quit India" movement which started in 1942. The colonial government implemented the Denial Policy, which by preventing the use of boats increased starvation in areas where the river was the only means of transport.

When starving villagers poured into Calcutta there were no relief measures at all until the number of refugees was more than a hundred thousand. Free kitchens were then opened, but the government insisted on the use of a very coarse grain not usually eaten by humans in Bengal. The use of this grain unhusked led to illness and death.

Fighting for food

What Ray's old brahmin said was true, rice was requisitioned for troops and for munition workers brought in from outside Bengal. In Calcutta starving



British "concern" — the Viceroy visits a food kitchen. Five million died as a result of British policies

families would wait all day outside military establishments for leftovers, which would then not be given directly to them, but would be thrown into rubbish bins where surgical dressings from near-by hospitals were also dumped.

That was the characteristic scene of the Bengal famine: human beings and dogs fighting for food in the rubbish dumps of white soldiers.

British pundits

These scenes Ray has avoided, giving us instead the story of an isolated village, where in an almost spuriously beautiful landscape sensitive characters suffer — discreetly. In doing so he has made only one point of political significance: that the lives that were lost were worth living.

In the story, caste provides an interesting secondary motif. To the reviewers in London that was the film's political theme. In fact caste had no role to play in the Bengal famine, and not everything in India emanates from the caste system as the British pundits tend to believe. (of course if you can't tell Indians apart, you can have a tough time reviewing an Indian film. Derek Malcolm in *The Guardian* reported that the brahmin's wife "sells herself for food to the deformed stranger whose advances she had

previously repulsed; all this, Malcolm tells us, is "beautifully observed". Perhaps so by Malcolm; unfortunately for him, not by Ray — the brahmin's wife does not do this, it is done in fact by a different, and different looking, woman.)

In Britain, the Bengal famine is never mentioned as an imperialist atrocity. Even those anti-imperialists who are interested in India would choose the Amritsar massacre of 1919 as the high-point of imperialist brutality. But

the Bengal famine is perhaps more relevant because it characterises the way imperialism kills all the time, by expropriation and starvation rather than with guns. And in India these methods did not end with the Empire; they are being used today by neo-imperialists backed up by the Indian bourgeoisie.

The Bengal famine needs a different film, one that relates to our lives now. In Distant Thunder, Ray has given us only an elegy for the life that was destroyed.



ONE MILLION ON THE DOLE

THERE ARE now nearly ONE MILLION unemployed workers in Britain, according to the Department of Employment. That means in fact that there are well over a million out of work, because there are also many thousands of unemployed workers — mainly women — who are not counted because they do not sign on at the Labour Exchange. Also, 75,722 people are out of work and classed as "temporarily stopped".

By the end of the year, warned Denis Healey, there might be a million on the dole unless we toe the line. Well, it's only April now and the threatened level has already been over-reached.

Meanwhile the trade union leaders sit reacting to the new figures like a rabbit transfixed by a bright light. The more unemployment is threatened the more they acquiesce to all sorts of cuts into our living standards under the guise of "maintaining the Social Contract".

Within two days of the Budget, Foot was telling the Scottish TUC "we deny that the Social Contract is dead and destroyed". He didn't get a good reception there, because the Scottish TUC is pretty good at sounding v-v-very f-f-ferocious. (Remember? The whole of western Scotland was going to be on strike is troops were sent in to break the Glasgow dustcart drivers' strike... In the event, the men didn't even get support from their own union, the T&GWU!)

The full TUC is only good at sounding spineless and indifferent. Five days after the worker-battering Budget, Len Murray pronounced, at the end of a TUC-Labour Party Liaison Committee meeting: "The meeting as a whole re-affirmed the continuing importance of the Social Contract. It was totally accepted that this was still at the centre of economic and social policy, and still the best means of solving the problems that Britain is facing."

Well, it's certainly helping to solve the problems that British bosses would be facing if the workers' leaders led a fight back against all the attacks and abuses that the working class has had thrown at it.

If the Social Contract was ever written on a piece of paper, it is high time that it was torn to pieces now, just as the Labour Government has torn to pieces the promises of its lame Manifesto — most notably, at present, the promise that was also the key to the Contract: all-out war against unemployment.

LONDON RUBBER Fighting against the sweatshop

MORE THAN 200 workers are now on official (T&GWU) strike for trade union rights at London Rubber Industries, manufacturers of Durex contraceptives and rubber gloves.

The strike is a focal point for local militants, since the management is so obviously trying to break the union, as it has tried to years.

The strike was sparked off by the refusal of the management to operate a check-off system for union dues or to allow time and facilities for stewards to collect them. The management also refused to honour a previous agreement to re-negotiate a new pay rise (the present basic is just £29.40 a week).

LRI — who were pulled up a few months ago by the Monopolies Commission for making excess profits and responded by spending more on advertising — are not just anti-union, they are viciously racist. Well over 80% of the workers are black, and the vendetta of the management, supervisors and foremen against them as trade unionists (such things as stopping sick pay) has been compounded with racist practices: promotion is restricted to whites, and deliberate attempts are made to confuse the black workers over their rights and benefits.

The men work a 12-hour shift, four days on, four days off, four nights on, four nights off, making a 48 hour week, with meal breaks stopped. The meal breaks themselves are only half an hour, and there are two tea breaks of ten minutes each in the hot, dirty and dusty conditions of continuous production.

The strike has had a lot of support locally from factories and trade union branches; there's been blacking, and help with round-the-clock picketing. And the local LPYS have also lent their support.

But, though a couple of the stewards on strike are

women, the management has so far successfully played divide and rule, with the women, who work in the same sweatshop conditions for even more appalling wages, still working.

These women are mostly part time workers and are being intimidated by the management as they are mostly middle aged and afraid to lose their jobs and pension rights. Now they are being asked to do the men's jobs. The management is most anxious to keep the women working, and has even been able to find hitherto unknown 'generosity'. As one of the pickets told WF, on the first day of the strike the management went out and bought thirty pairs of protective boots for the women in the Automatic Gloves sections to work in.

Infamous

However, with the electronic testers and the quality control staff out, with official backing and strong local solidarity, the strikers are in a very determined mood indeed. The pickets were unanimous in saying that there was no chance of them going back until they got what they wanted — full union recognition, and new pay negotiations.

Their will to change the conditions of this infamous sweatshop was expressed by one of the pickets who told me: "My old man's worked here for 18 years. I started two months ago — and he's still only getting the same as me. What makes me mad is that the government say the national average wage is £50. I don't even see £50, let alone earn it."

Donations and messages of support to: M.Khan, 'Broad House', 205 Fore Street, Edmonton London N.18.

A.H.

IT WAS anticipated that the big fight at the AUEW Engineering Section's National Committee meeting at Blackpool would be over the question of "fixing a figure" for the coming wage claim.

For some time now the division between the way the Right and the Left in the trade union movement have been posing the question of wage demands has been that the Left want to fix a definite figure for the increase while the Right want the phrase "a substantial increase". Naturally this phrase is twice as slippery as the employers.

The fact that this time the Left gave way very early on to the Right wing on this

WARWICK STUDENTS' RENT STRIKE ESCALATES

Students at Warwick University (Coventry) have been on rent strike since the cost of college accommodation went up by 33%. After threats from the college that rent strikers would not be allowed to take their degrees, the Students Union met last week to demand the withdrawal of these victimisation threats and the freezing of the new Spring Term rents. Several hundred students also started a sit-in at the administration block and the university's telephone exchange.

The Trades Council straight away pledged its support, and invited the students to attend the TC's new open sub-committee against cuts in social expenditure. The students also have the declared support of NALGO and T&G members working on the campus.

It's going to be a tough fight. Colonel Robert Hornby, 'University Development Officer' is leading the enemy forces, and his view is that rents should go up even further. He has said that in the present economic climate the rise from £4.80 to £6.50 was not enough, and hinted that before long the administration will be trying to exact rents of £7.50.

TEACHERS AND THE TROOPS OUT MOVEMENT

There will be a teachers' workshop at the TOM conference on May 26th. For those interested in going to this workshop, there will be a pre-conference meeting on May 14th at 8pm at 103, Helix Road, London SW2.

TEACHERS' RANK AND FILE ANNUAL CONFERENCE

The conference is now scheduled for June 28th. The deadline for motions is May 2nd. Nominations for the EC and amendments to motions have to be sent in by June 7th, and names of delegates by June 21st.

NATIONAL ABORTION CAMPAIGN

There will be NAC contingents on the May Day march (1.30 May 1st, from Arundel Street, Thames Embankment to Hyde Park) and on the TUC International Women's Year demonstration on 25th May. On May 9th, there will be a meeting at Essex Road Women's Centre (London N.1) to co-ordinate action between Hackney, Hornsey and Islington abortion campaign groups. And, of course, preparation for NAC's own June 21st demonstration. For more information, contact NAC at 80 Raiton Road, London SE24. 01-274-8496.

A U E W WAGE CLAIM

Left without a strategy

question reflects their paralysis in the face of the present economic situation and their demoralisation — even before the official declaration of all the results in the recent elections — at the clear sign of the ebb of their influence among the rank and file.

Speaker after speaker from both Left and Right stressed what seemed to them to be the impossibility of fixing a figure for the coming claim because of the present rate of inflation. If the Left but thought about it, however, no such problem really exists. There is no earthly reason why a definite figure cannot be fixed right now which would rise with increases in the cost of living.

Track

In fact the moment the question of rapid inflation is posed, this kind of "escalator clause" ought to be built into the agreement itself. The union is perfectly well equipped to track the rise in the cost of living and

to demand that their members are fully compensated for it.

The figure that the Left has wanted to fix is £60 as the minimum rate for craftsmen, for a 35 hour week. The high figure was not in itself opposed by the right wing — they just wanted any definite figures eliminated.

The reason why the Left is focussing on this figure can be found in the recurrent problem within the engineering industry. That is, the enormous disparity in wage rates and earnings from plant to plant, district to district and industrial sector to industrial sector means that hardly anybody works at the basic rates anyway. The result is that those who are well enough organised to fight for a higher basic have little to benefit from that fight, while those who have much to gain are extremely weak and underorganised.

The arbitrary fixing of a high figure, however, will not solve the problem. It can only be solved by a

more solid development of the union at the base coupled with a wage policy which argues for increases on existing basic rates (not only the minimum rates). This needs to be combined with a sliding scale — that is, an automatic cost of living increase to fully compensate the fall in members' real earnings after tax.

Chord

The Left's present weakness seems to have induced it to line up with the Right in the name of unity. Thus despite Scanlon's statement earlier in the week that the Budget was "diametrically opposed to the TUC recommendations of infusing £1,000 into the economy" and suggesting that this bodes ill for the Social Contract, the issue was skirted round by the delegates, few of whom had a good word to say for the Budget, but none of whom wanted to cut the chord of the Social Contract.

WIMPEY BAR WORKERS SET A MAY DAY EXAMPLE

All London's Wimpey bars will be closed on May Day this year, when over 800 (mostly Turkish) workers in the London Eating House chain will be striking to demand the immediate release of the Shrewsbury Two and the repeal of the conspiracy laws. Their Shop Stewards Committee decision was readily endorsed by the International Branch of the T&GWU.

This magnificent solidarity action comes from a section of immigrant workers who were unorganised until about 18 months ago. They used to be paid probably the lowest wages in the entire catering industry (itself notoriously low paid), waiters getting 25p an hour and working anything up to 100 hours a week (9 of 12 for 7 days) to scratch together £25.

Since they have been organised, non-one earns less than £33 for a 40 hour week.

It took three strikes to get to that stage. The first was for recognition and lasted 3 days, with just 13 places in South London involved. By the time of the second strike, in December 1973, all London's 60 Wimpey establishments had been brought in on the struggle and they won a wage increase and procedural agreements. This year they came out again and won another wage claim.

They've now got a level of organisation that many traditionally well unionised workers might envy. The management now aren't take any steps without consulting the 11-strong shop stewards committee. In the last dispute, when management refused to

budge at all, a mass meeting in working hours threatened to strike the next day and the bosses backed down. And the workers have defeated all attempts at sackings, and attempts to divide them — such as, during the second strike, the setting up of two of the leading militants in business in their own cafes.

Experience with the police on picket lines has bred their active solidarity for the two jailed pickets, 5 Wimpey workers were arrested in one of the struggles. It is this fellow feeling with the Shrewsbury Two which is responsible for the May Day posters you will see in London's Wimpey bars at the moment, and for the 500 or so strong contingent they expect to have on next week's demonstration.

WH

From page one

MOTOR INDUSTRY

And the only way of doing that is by raising the workers' productivity without paying for the increased output.

Logically that means SACKINGS and SPEED-UP.

It is estimated unofficially that 15,000 to 20,000 will be cut from the workforce over the next 3-4 years. This is on top of the current demand for 5,000 redundancies, and on top of the 10,000 jobs wiped out in the last 18 months.

According to Ryder, this will ensure that there are jobs in the 1980s! What an offer! Lose your job now to get one in 10 years' time. Plus ten years' speed-up...

How will the new National Shop Stewards organisation face this challenge? Eddie McGarry, chairman of the BLMC shop stewards committee, said that the

new committee would press for Government action to help 'the motor industry'. There is a danger here. Any identification of the needs of "the industry" and the interests of the workers could lead straight into the trap of workers taking responsibility for the state of the industry and getting conned into making "sacrifices" for it: Already the new boss Alex Park has said explicitly that "participation" implies responsibility, and Harold Wilson spelt out that any more money after the first instalment would be conditional on "good labour relations and high productivity".

The power to operate this blackmail is of course increased by the fact that the Government has side-stepped the question of nationalisation. Instead, it has opted for buying up shares (at nearly twice the going rate) and underwriting a new shares issue so as to hold a clear majority. This means both that private industry can feed directly off the fruits of the Government investment and that the whole

operation can be put into reverse — that is, returned to private industry — all the more easily.

And there can be no doubt what Wilson has in mind. It was he who attacked BLMC workers just after the New Year as being "workshy". (At least this report knocks that load of nonsense into a cocked hat when it says "We do not subscribe to the view that all the ills of BL can be laid at the door of a strike-prone and workshy labour force.")

STUBBORN

If the new National Stewards organisation can resist becoming enmeshed in these deals and schemes which leave the workers to carry the can and the bad news; if it can put up a stubborn fight — in the teeth of all the kidology — to keep jobs and defend working conditions; if so, it could be able to give leadership to the whole of our class in the struggle against the employers and the Labour Government's anti working class measures in boosting unemployment.