

Workers Power

INSIDE: COLD WAR
IRELAND S.D.P.
ITALY 1920
BRADFORD 12

AFTER THE LEYLAND SELL-OUT ORGANISE THE MILITANT MINORITY!

TWO WEEKS AFTER their overwhelming vote to reject Edwardes' 3.8%, Leyland mass meetings voted to reject their stewards' call to throw out the company's derisory "final offer"

It is no service to Leyland workers to conceal the harsh truth. This is an enormous victory for Edwardes and the Tories. They picked a fight with the Leyland workers because they thought they could beat them and, by doing so, force through their 4% pay limit. They can now prepare to do battle with Fords and public sector workers, knowing they have won the first round in the pay battle.

The sight of the little dictator Edwardes riding out a tide of workers' militancy that threatened to engulf him will give new resolve to an employing class set on trampling on shop floor trade union power, and brutally asserting management's right to manage.

The result is a bitter and humiliating defeat for the Leyland workers themselves. Every Leyland worker, whichever way they voted, knows that it will mean further hardship as wages fall even further behind the rising cost of living. Three years of wage rises of under 5% already mean that Leyland workers have fallen from above average levels in the early 1970s to well below average today. Thirteen plants have been closed and 65,000 jobs lost in three years.

Edwardes' "Slaves Charter" has increased the pace of work, and increased the power of managers and foremen over the remaining

workforce. No wonder then that the dispute was not simply about pay. What was at stake was whether the Leyland workforce would assert itself, and break the draconian regime that Edwardes has imposed in the plants. After the overwhelming strike votes and one day of mass picketing, thousands of Leyland workers will be feeling let down and demoralised.

It is an important defeat for the whole working class. An all-out Leyland strike could have been the signal for a general working class offensive against the Tories. The trade union leaders, of course, set out to avoid this at all costs. Joe Gormley put off the crucial miners' pay talks so that there would be no danger of the NUM leaders being forced into action beside the BL workers.

But a victory at Leyland would have put new heart and spirit into the ranks of workers—most notably the miners—who are lining up to do battle with Thatcher's pay limits.

It is right to point the finger of blame at the Judas trade union leaders. They sold the strike out. The AUEW leaders brazenly set out to derail the strike and never hid the fact. The cringing Duffy always stands for the England of Thatcher and Edwardes whenever the workers threaten to disrupt it and push him into the firing line.

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Pickets stop the wheels of Leyland turning

Picture: Morning Star

Vote Scargill But no blind trust in King Arthur

THE NCB'S OFFER of 7% in response to the miners pay claim of 25% and a four day week, has once again set the scene for a possible confrontation between the miners and the Tory government. A struggle would inspire other workers, especially those in the public sector, to smash the 4% limit on pay.

The climbdown by Thatcher in February over the threatened closure of 50 pits, despite being a tactical retreat by the Tories, demonstrated the enormous power the miners wield and the fear that the Cabinet has of confronting them head on. This fear is moderated by the knowledge that in Joe Gormley they have an old hand at delaying and dislocating miners struggles from those of other sections of the working class—a service he has performed in every miners strike—1972, 1974 and early 1981. True to form Gormley has delayed the NUM's answer to the Coal Board for two weeks thus deliberately taking the miners out of the line of fire during the start of the BL strike.

Few miners will expect much from Gormley, except an attempt to sell out the claim with a productivity deal, his final good deed for the Tories that he hopes may earn him a ticket to the House of Lords next March. But what of Arthur Scargill, champion of the left, who will almost certainly succeed Gormley as President after the elections this

December? Many rank and file miners will remember as though yesterday his deeds as a rank and filer, in the successful pay strike of 1972. They will watch his conduct in this latest round of negotiations to see how he measures up to his own words, in the *Yorkshire Miner* (June '81) "If the price of winning the Presidency is to compromise my views or prostitute my basic principles, I don't want the job."

But the early signs are ominous for miners. As we have shown in previous issues of *Workers Power* (see Nos 3, 20 and 21) Scargill's deeds often fall short of his words. Yet even the fighting talk we come to expect from him has been considerably muted during this years pay negotiations. He has not openly condemned the playing-for-time antics of the NUM EC revealed in their decision to postpone negotiations; he has not made plain that only strike action will win the full claim; he has not made any attempt to forge a united front with the BL workers in order to inspire a class-wide offensive against the Tory onslaught.

On numerous occasions, in interviews, in speeches, we have heard him talk about bringing the reign of Thatcher to a premature end, and of the miners being in the forefront of the movement that does that. For example in *The Collier* No 38 Scargill proclaims: "I think we should fight as hard as possible to create the conditions to force an

early General Election. How that will be done can take a number of forms. Trade unionists could refuse to accept an incomes policy, they could refuse to accept any more unemployment and any more cuts. They could come together in a massive campaign of opposition to the Employment Act."

Yet when the opportunities of building such a movement present themselves—during the steel strike, in February around the threatened pit closures, again during this years pay claim—Scargill flinches from calling for strike action and openly acknowledging and supporting its political objectives.

A comparison of Scargill's 'election platform' *'Miners in the 80's'* and his considered views given to publications such as the CP's *Marxism Today* or the SWP's *The Collier*, show Scargill operating with a dishonest 'double standard'. What he says to the periphery of militants around the CP and the SWP and what he says to the majority of NUM members are two different things. In his speeches to left audiences and in his interviews Scargill is forthright and honest about what is at stake in the fight against Thatcher and about the limitations of some of the reformist answers. Thus he can say:

"The Alternative Economic Strategy is a policy within the existing system. It does not take the necessary step where we have to take the state machinery

less we recognise the power of the armed forces and the police then we have not quite frankly, understood the class nature of our society." (*The Collier* 38).

Or again in *Marxism Today* (April 1981) he scorns the idea of simply waiting for a Labour Government to enact socialism and argues the need for an 'immediate alternative economic strategy' which says: "We need the restoring of all cuts that have been made in public expenditure. . . We need a huge cut, 50% at least, in our arms bill" and much more.

And yet despite his recognition of the armed power of the bosses to defend their property, despite his advocacy of the need for industrial action for immediate demands, in which miners and other workers can bring down Thatcher—Arthur Scargill has nothing to say to the NUM member on this and how they should organise for it! Arthur reserves his semi-revolutionary perspectives to left-wing audiences. Despite the rosy prospects unfolded for the *Miners in the 80's* he says nothing about how this relates to smashing the Tories. Not even the Triple Alliance (Steel, Rail, Mines) comes in for a mention, let alone the building

of solidarity strike action on a class-wide basis.

Scargill here betrays the weakness of all left reformist trade unionists. He relegates to the background the miners

workers against the government and every aspect of the class war. He pushes to the fore the miners limited sectional interests. The former remain a distant prospect for speeches at protest rallies. He therefore guarantees that the miners will be kept within the narrow limits of trade union struggle. Despite his bluster about 'political' strike action he ensures (eg the steel strike; February pit strike; BL7) that potential focuses for such action remain unexploited. This is because in the end Scargill really does believe that Parliament is the tool by which socialism will be fashioned, with a strictly subordinate role for demonstrations and strikes. As he remarked to *Marxism Today*: "I believe that we can bring about a political change through Parliament but only if its backed up by mass mobilisations of ordinary working people desirous of change."

If there is a difference between Scargill the trade unionist and Tony Benn the parliamentarian, it is that the latter sees extra-Parliamentary actions used to defend the actions of Parliament from the right, while Scargill believes such mobilisations are necessary to force Parliament to act.

Scargill's reputation and standing amongst militant miners are second to none. His 'left' talking must be put to the test of action. That is why we call

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What options for the ruling class?

Some Tories lose their nerve

When the "wet" opposition to Thatcher first raised its head, her supporters were dismissive. But by Christmas 1980, opposition had become significant enough to sack St. John-Stewas. The July 1981 Cabinet prevented Thatcher and Howe from achieving their £5 billion cuts target for 1982-83. The resulting purge, however, has merely seen the erstwhile conciliatory faction of the Tory "old guard" (Whitelaw, Heseltine and Carrington) take more of a leading role in the opposition to Thatcher, denying her as much as half of her sought-after £7 billion worth of cuts in public spending.

In the 1920s, Trotsky remarked: "Our class enemies are empiricists, that is, they operate from one occasion to the next, guided not by the analysis of historical development, but by practical experience, routinism, rule of thumb, and instinct".

Trotsky's observation helps us to comprehend the lack of permanence in the various factions of the bourgeoisie and the fluidity with which individual members can embrace and discard various ideologies and strategies, each designed to preserve and bolster the rule of their class.

Thatcher, Howe and even more so, Joseph, always knew that their policies would cause social upheaval. Thatcher's obsession about "U-turns" is born of her determination not to be deflected from her "tasks" by working class pressure, as was Heath in 1970-74. Her "tight money" strategy was designed to prevent employers "buying time" with their workforce by financing "inflationary" wage-deals under pressure, and Thatcher provided her class with the necessary state backing (SPG, Employment Act etc) to stiffen their resolve.

Thatcher knew the going would be rough even for sections of her own class. In the 1979/80 period she attempted to sweeten the pill by lowering taxes for the rich, giving big pay rises to the police, army and senior civil servants; bolstering farmers' profits within the EEC and using rate redistribution to increase funds to the Tory shire counties. Of late the government has even sold off parts, or all of, profitable public concerns (Cable and Wireless, British Aerospace, and now the British National Oil Corporation, to name but a few), both to raise short-term cash and to appease big business with tasty tit-bits.

In the honeymoon period of 1979, the CBI applauded Thatcher's vigorous stance and argued that "the new government's views are much closer to those of the CBI than its predecessors". But 1980 was to prove a year of high interest rates, and a strong pound. November 1979 saw record interest rates of 17%, making borrowing for investment punitive, and the 12% rise in sterling simultaneously crippled export outlets. By the November 1980 CBI conference, the rumbles were clear.

Prominent industrialist Stanley Husband argued: "If the price (of reducing inflation - WP) is to lay waste great tracts of British industry, it is unacceptable"; and Director-General of the CBI Terence Beckett echoed: "if we are not careful, a lot of industry will not be around when the revival comes".

1980 proved a record year for bankruptcies. The first nine months of 1981 has seen a slowing down, but even so there have been 6,232 closures. Manufacturing output has fallen 17½% in two years. Large sections of the bourgeoisie look upon the results of Thatcher's strategy so far with dismay, but different factions draw different conclusions.

The Thatcherite right believe that the strategy is sound but that it has been effectively sabotaged from the start by indecisiveness. They point to Thatcher's defeat as early as the Winter of 1979/80 when she lost the battle to cut a further £4 billion off the 1980-81 spending targets, and the summer 1980 reverses over the 1981-82 cuts. The *bete noire* of this faction (Parkinson, Lawson, Biffen, Howe, Bruce-Gardyne) is the nationalised industries. The nationalised industries again and again have acted as the battering ram which has burst large holes in the public spending limits.

Ironically, the Secretary of State for Industry who presided over much of this budget-busting was none other than Keith Joseph, an apostle of monetarism &

the "new laissez-faire" since 1973. When put to the cruel test of the huge state corporations' imminent bankruptcy, Joseph was forced to repeatedly sin against his own doctrine, to the malicious glee of the "wets" and the rage of his own disciples, allowing the public sector to go over-budget.

The 1980/81 limits will be overspent by at least £900 million. British Rail is likely to double its loss over last year, and despite all the attacks on labour and productivity gains B.L. is likely to lose £500 m this year. As a further sign of weakness, Energy minister and "wet" Howell was forced to find extra money for the NCB when he backed down in the face of the miners in February.

Those who will continue to back the Thatcherite course have few illusions in the Tories' electoral chances. They recognise that the cost of Thatcher will be high. But, they argue, for that very reason, further and more fundamental benefits must be won. For example, under Prior's leadership the measures against the trade unions have been carefully designed to whittle away at legal "immunities and privileges". Even now most Tory opinion is against outlawing the closed shop completely. But if Thatcherism is to be a spent force in 1984, if it cannot secure a new mandate, her supporters may well urge draconian measures against the unions to really break their ability to fight back. No doubt these options are already being mooted should the BL workers' strike be defeated.

Thatcher has at least one card in her favour on the economic front. Although output has plummeted over two years, for most of 1981 is has levelled out at about 85% of its May 1979 figure. More crucially, unit wage costs are much lower now. Whilst production has slumped, productivity is rising fast. In the first half of 1981, productivity in manufacturing has risen an enormous 11½p.a. & B.L. productivity has risen 40% in four years. *The Economist* (10th October 1981) reports gross trading profits are slightly up for the third quarter in a row.

As a result of these trends, a "semi-wet" or "damp" faction within the Tories (*The Economist*, The 'Blue Chip' MPs) continue to back Thatcher, but believe that industry is unable to benefit from the productivity gains by expanding output, as long as investment is so difficult due to very high interest rates (at present 16%). An increasingly large section of the bourgeoisie (especially the CBI) is seeking a moderation in Tory policy to include a range of measures which could either lower interest rates directly or release funds for investment by a cut in the employers' National Insurance contribution. The desperate fear of this stratum is that unless they are released from the grip of high interest rates, the early signs of economic upturn will be strangled. Thatcher has always resisted making more money available if it was to be used to pay higher wages, since if productivity remained the same and output low, it would only lead to renewed inflation as the capitalists put their prices up to maintain their profits. The dispute is really over whether enough has already been done to allow a mild deflation without incurring this risk.

Not so wet behind the ears; Norman Tebbit, Thatcher's hatchet man



Photo: Mike Abrahams/Network

Enter the SDP

But if the British bourgeoisie are not yet ready to ditch Thatcher, their preparations for an alternative to both Thatcher and a Left-dominated Labour Party are well advanced, in the form of the Social Democratic Party (SDP).

The SDP owes its origins to a core of right-wing MPs for whom life became absolutely intolerable when their constituency activists started to call them to account for their actions, and the trade unions ceased to block-vote through Conference support for their thinly-disguised liberal politics. When the conference failed to place them on the NEC of the party, where they could police any over-eager leftists in the rank and file, and when it began to support modest, indeed elementary democratic reforms, the Gang of Three and their supporters were looking for a way out of this torture. The route they chose took them straight out of the Labour Party.

The Gang were of immediate value to the bosses both as a means of forcing Healey, Hattersley and Shore to fight inside the Party, and as a rampart for a new political party to baulk Labour at the polls.

The SDP's policies, hardly clear even to its own members, do not explain its popularity. The SDP favours an incomes policy, the EEC and a nuclear NATO - causes overwhelmingly opposed by the electorate of Warrington, for example, as opinion polls showed - yet Roy Jenkins still came close to overturning the massive Labour majority. Nor can the SDP's poll be attributed to the quality of its 21 MPs, who with one exception are Labour defectors. They represent a mixture of parliamentary dross who have either been so rightwing or so incompetent that they were unlikely to be reelected by their constituents, and are so discredited that even the local SDP/Liberal Alliance activists are refusing to allow some of them to be their candidate for the next election.

The SDP/Liberal Alliance election victory at Croydon cannot simply be dismissed either as a media-inspired creation, nor as just another example of an anti-Tory mid-term Liberal victory, such as has occurred several times since the war (Torrington 1958; Orpington 1962; Sutton and Cheam 1973), and which will disappear, as before, at General Election time. In the earlier cases, Liberal victories were secured through historically strong local party organisation based on an equally strong local government presence. In Croydon, the Liberals had six active members. At the May local elections, the less-than-charismatic William Pitt polled 12% of the votes.

Of course, the Fleet Street/TV pro-Alliance saturation did substitute for this organisation in a big way. More than one poll (see *Observer* 25th October 1981) revealed that media coverage influenced voters against Labour and Tory, and in favour of the Alliance. But in Britain after 2½ years of Tory rule, there is a fertile soil upon which the Alliance can grow. Media approval acts only as a political fertiliser.

The most obvious class defecting to the Alliance is the petit-bourgeoisie. Small businessmen and salaried employees, crushed by the Thatcherite purge of small inefficient capital; those home-buyers devastated by record interest rates. This is the usual reservoir of pro-Liberal support whilst the Tories are in office. It

THE TORY CABINET reshuffle of September 14th, in which Thatcher purged or demoted her opponents (Thornycroft, Gilmour, Prior, Howell) and replaced them with "yes-men" (Tebbit, Lawson, Biffen), has only served to further polarise opinion and deepen the factionalism within the ruling class.

The Tory "Wets" are haunted by an overwhelming fear that the Tory Party is courting electoral disaster. They realise the unpopularity of the Tories. Unemployment has doubled; inflation is 1½% higher than it was in May 1979; interest rates are 4% higher. They have lost all confidence that the mechanisms of the free market will in and of themselves, halt the galloping recession that has gripped British capitalism.

Thus St. John-Stewas, Rippon, Heath, Prior and Co. like to invoke the names of Disraeli, Churchill, Butler and Macmillan in order to hymn the virtues of "One Nation" conservatism. This policy had a real material base in the boom years of the 1950s and

is the revolt of the conservative voters against the effects of conservative measures.

However, it would be foolish to try and disguise the fact that the Alliance has managed to draw significant support from within the working class itself. This is not a sudden development. The Tories themselves achieved office in 1979 by a brand of populism that has some similarities with the Alliance, and which succeeded in drawing some one third of the TUC's membership to vote for Thatcher. The deep disillusionment of the working class with the Labour Party stems from its post-war experience of Labour-in office - a party that has proved incapable of resolving the contradictions of British capitalism.

All this means that it is not an absurd scenario for sections of the ruling class to push the SDP to the fore as an alternative party of the "left", to capitalise upon the Labour Party's decline. *The Economist* (September 19th) urged the Alliance:

"But if the party is to have real identity it must sooner or later declare firmly what it means to be. The only meaning that makes sense is as the new party of the left. The Alliance must go not for Mrs Thatcher's fair-weather friends, but for the votes of disillusioned socialists away from Mr Foot. They must wreck Labour at every turn and fast".

Whilst some of this bluster is Tory fear that the Alliance can also grow at the expense of the Tory party itself, it does reflect a shift in the consciousness of the working class.

The rise of the Alliance reveals a pull to the "centre", to the "old ways" against the "extremes" of Labour and Tory. Just how important this reaction is, is seen in the fact that the Alliance campaign in Croydon put out two separate leaflets, one to a known Labour electorate attacking Benn and Livingstone, the other to Tory voters attacking the other "extremist" - Thatcher.

Between 1945 and 1970, both Labour and Tory polled nationally over 40% of the votes at General Elections. But in the crisis-wracked 1970s, this fell dramatically. Neither party has gone its full term and been returned. Voting is more fluid: the rotation between Labour and Tory has continued, but the experience of governments handling a crumbling capitalism in the 1970s (i.e. attacking the working class) has spawned cynicism, distrust and increasing abstentionism at elections amongst the voters.

But an Alliance government would be incapable of solving any of the fundamental questions facing either the working class or the bosses. On the one hand, it would be less able to control the working class than the Labour Party because it lacks any organic ties with the trade union movement. *The Economist* (19th September 1981), in keeping with its vision of the Alliance as a replacement for Labour, recognises this when it urges

"the SDP to take over the commanding heights of the political left in Britain. It must capture the institutions and power centres at present occupying them"

by which they mean, crucially, the trades unions. On the other hand, its programme, whilst undoubtedly a bourgeois one, lacks the forthrightness of the Tories'. The bourgeoisie would fear its willingness to fudge and compromise where bold solutions are required. There is a further danger for the bourgeoisie in courting the Alliance as a potential ruling party. The stability of British parliamentary democracy throughout the 1970s has in no small way rested upon the present electoral system - "first past the post" - which promotes and guarantees the two party system. (Under it a third party needs at least 30% of the votes to get a significant number of seats). The Alliance (or at least its Liberal half) is committed to proportional representation. If this reform were carried through in a period of continuing acute social crisis, the danger exists that the current instability would be an inherent feature of government. If the Alliance were to come to power and introduce proportional representation, Pandora's Box would really be opened.

The SDP/Liberal Alliance is in itself an empty spectre compounded of memories of the past, of the "golden eras" of class collaboration and peaceful reform. Its apparent form, as far as those who vote for it are concerned, is made up of hatred of and disillusionment with, either the Labour Party or the Tories. This negative attraction is inseparable from a dream-wish that in the Alliance, apparently untarnished by a past or a record, the hopes they once placed in their former parties will be fulfilled.

Tories can look to the SDP's denunciations of the unions, and the promises to put legal shackles on them. Ex-Labour supporters look to the promise of a real fair-shares-for-all incomes policy. If the Alliance is

early 1960s. Without touching the welfare state provisions enacted by Labour (which they had not seriously opposed anyway), Churchill, Butler and Macmillan collaborated with a right-wing TUC, involving bureaucrats in state bodies and boards like the National Economic Development Corporation (NEDC). The era of the "concensus", of "Butskellism" (Butler the Tory and Gaitskell the Labourite), saw the differences between liberal Toryism and right-wing Labourism narrowed to vanishing point.

But in this easy-going period when trade union leaders roamed at will in the "corridors of power", the long term problems of British capitalism were mounting. Heath tried in the early 1970's (when the period of the long boom had definitively ended) to carry out an early version of "Thatcherism" - attacks on the unions, higher levels of unemployment, pruning out the weak industries. It ended in disaster in 1974. Labour saved the bosses' bacon in terms of defusing the political crisis, tying the unions to the "Social Contract" and eventually imposing the first

round of cuts, and the first million unemployed.

The Selsdon policy of 1970, revived by Keith Joseph and represented in the leadership campaign of Margaret Thatcher, conquered the Tory Party. Why? Because in a period of chronic crisis for British capitalism, dogged by low productivity, low profitability and consequently being hammered by its rivals on the world and on the home markets, "muddling by" would no longer do. A longer term offensive was needed. The slumps of the new period could not be answered by repeated Keynesian "anti-crisis" measures. In 1974/5 these had produced 26% inflation. The 1979/82 slump would have to be used to good effect in order to restore the bosses' profit levels.

Thus Thatcherism is slump politics, it is the deflationary stick, necessary to curb the unions, to raise productivity and notionally allow the market forces to restore British capitalism to a powerful position. But Thatcher's "successes" have at best been double-edged in economic terms - higher productivity matched with crippling interest rates. The effects with re-

gard to the working class, though severe, do not to date constitute a strategic advantage for the bosses. A serious offensive by the working class could leave the Tories with only ashes in their hands.

Electoral however, Thatcher is a complete disaster. Whilst the major sections of the ruling class are not yet ready to ditch her whilst she is in office (the famous "midnight visit" from the Tory Mandarins is yet to come), they are increasingly certain that the Tories cannot stop Labour in 1984. Thus they must look to a two-fold policy. First, use as much time as Thatcher has to inflict the maximum damage in the working class movement and at the same time prepare an alternative to a Labour government which might be pressured by the unions into undoing the "good work" of Thatcher and the slump.

It is in the context of this crisis facing the British bourgeoisie that we examine the current factionalism in the Tory Party, the rise of the SDP and the dramatic decline in Labour's electoral fortunes.

a blind alley there are, as a result of Labour's years in office and the trade union leaders' sabotage of any sustained fightback, a lot of sleep walkers willing to go up there. *Only the clarion call of class struggle, a real fight against the Tories will shorten or abruptly terminate this trance.*

Breaking up the Labour Party?

The enormous and almost unanimous support the press and the TV has given the SDP is proof positive that the decisive circles of the ruling class are seriously interested in an "alternative" to the Labour Party. *The Economist* in the issue appearing immediately before the Labour Party's Brighton Conference this year stridently proclaimed that "No government constitutionally or politically dependant on organised (let alone unorganised) labour must again be allowed to rule Britain. The anti-Benn forces in Parliament should immediately shift their allegiance to the SDP".

The Economist is clear: it does not want a centre party, it wants a replacement for the Labour Party "for (the SDP - WP) to succeed it must not just hurt Labour, it must assume the better part of its mantle and reduce the rest to a leftist shred" (26th September 1981). *The Economist* calls for 100 Labour MPs to desert the PLP, for half the Shadow Cabinet to go over to the SDP, for the right wing to "smash or demoralise as many constituency Labour Parties as possible; split one Labour group after another on local councils; create a political environment so fluid that every traditional Labour voter is forced to ask whether the official party is any longer the legitimate custodian of the interests of Britain's working class" (ibid).

There is therefore little doubt that our rulers, having governed happily through Attlee, Wilson and Callaghan for seventeen out of the last thirty-six years, are mobilising all their agents inside as well as outside the Labour movement to not only block a radical Labour government of a Bennite colouration, but also to reduce the "party of the trade unions" to an impotent sect.

Can they succeed? The scornful laughter in the ranks of the Labour left has been stilled by the Warrington and Croydon by-elections. As London's "left" Labour Council staggers under by-election defeats and Lambeth's Ted Knight covers not only from the swish of Heseltine's axe, but also at the prospect of a 1982 electoral debacle, a cold shudder runs through the erstwhile triumphant "lefts". Could fate be so cruel as to rob the Labour Party of its monopoly of the working class vote at precisely the point where they were on the verge of winning control of the party. It would be a bitter blow indeed to have struck down David Owen and Shirley Williams in the constituency parties, only to see them rise up again on the shoulders of millions of former Labour voters.

Of course only half, or perhaps less of the SDP's voters were Labour voters at the last election. But it would be unwise to over-estimate the solidity of the working class behind Labour. All evidence points to a desertion of Labour by large numbers of skilled workers and substantial numbers of the unskilled. Labour is becoming the party of the white-collar worker, the worker in the public sector and the nationalised industries.

Its activists have become less and less the blue collar trade union militants and more and more the radical white-collar salaried workers. This social transformation accounts for the very strength of the Left-unparalleled in the party's history. The rise of Benn and Livingstone is not the result of a flooding of the Labour Party by aroused worker militants.

What passes for "socialism" in the British Reformist tradition - state-capitalist nationalisation, welfare-statism, municipal services - arouse little enthusiasm outside the ranks of those workers who work in these "industries". Why? The nationalised industries were welcomed in the 1940s because workers thought it meant an end to unemployment, and chronic insecurity, an end to the despotism of the manager and the foreman. The welfare state was seen as banishing the



Photo: Chris Davies/Network

The unacceptable faces of Social Democracy? Or could they swamp Labour with a tide of ex-Labour votes?

fear of sickness, unemployment and old age. Municipal services were seen as ending the rack-renting landlord or the inability to find a house. Gradually the realities of public sector low wages, of managers no different to the old owners, of the closures of pits, steel mills and car plants, the decline of social services the thrusting of more and more of the burden of this onto the wage packets of ordinary workers, has cut away at the attractiveness of this "socialism" in its Westminster and townhall meaning.

The Labour right offer merely a piecemeal surrender of the elements of the "New Jerusalem". The Labour left offer more of the same but at the cost of higher taxes, higher rates and rents etc. Both varieties of Labourism are fatally vulnerable to the new tax and rate cutting populism, whether it be wielded by the Tories or by the SDP.

The New Statesman (30 October 1981) said that between 1964 and 1979, those who favoured higher spending on social services halved in number. It is no accident that the Alternative Economic Strategy is largely silent on the question of "nationalisation of the commanding heights of the economy", instead concentrating on piffling schemes to control pension funds and to affect "tripartite planning agreements between employers, government and unions".

The authors dare not pose massive nationalisations because unless these were expropriations the cost to the overburdened working class tax payer would elicit a brutal electoral rejection. If they were to be expropriations, then all the elections between now and doomsday would not persuade the bosses to play the game and hand over their banks, factories, shops and offices.

If the SDP succeed in reducing the Labour Party to a shadow of its former self; if consequent to electoral disaster the unions desert it or allow, as Owen has threatened, an SDP/Liberal government to legislate against the political levy going en bloc to only one party, then the reasons are not hard to find.

The seriousness of the crisis of British capitalism makes a reformist "welfare capitalism" with rising living standards an impossible and intolerable prospect for the bourgeoisie. A right-wing Labour Party of the Callaghan/Healey type would be no threat, but the failure of 1978/79 reminded the bosses that the organic link with the unions - organisations that the workers are forced to use for economic self defence whatever the desires of their officialdom for respectability - was not a stable instrument for ruling class policy in a period of chronic crisis and stagnation. *The Economist* pithily explains Labour's unsuitability for the tasks ahead as long as it is "the creature of the unions" and of the Labour Party members: "It is equally inconceivable that the forces now rampant within the Labour Party will allow it, before the next election, to put forward policies to reform industrial relations (ie Anti-Union laws - WP), support the NATO Alliance (ie step up the arms race - WP) or defend free trade (ie not impose import and exchange controls - WP) -

nor, more crucially, will they permit future members of parliament or ministers to exercise their own independent judgement on such issues".

The "Left" within the party and the unions is certainly strong enough to prevent a Healey or Hattersley take-over in the short-term, and therefore the SDP card is a must for the bosses to play. But the "Left" in the unions and the Labour Party will preside over a faction ridden and shrinking heritage. At a certain point another group of MPs is sure to desert. Union leaders like Chapple, Weighel, Sirs and Duffy will present ultimata for purges and constitutional counterrevolution in order to "save the party".

Already GMWU chief Basnett has warned "if the Labour Party converts itself into a socialist debating club then the unions will have to think where to put their political effort", insisting that the union leaders want "a broad based social democratic party" which could form a "sympathetic government" to the Trade Union leaders. He is serving notice of the real possibility that sections of the Trade Union leadership would consider deserting Labour should it lose credibility as a potential party of government.

If honest rank and file militants in the affiliated unions and the constituencies want to avoid this debacle they must break decisively with the passive parliamentarism and municipalism which sees the working class only as voters and which sees direct action, strikes, sit-ins etc as permissible only within the sphere of "trade union" or "economic" struggle.

They must also break forever with the view that "socialism" can be bought piecemeal by Attlee-type "nationalisations" or Benn-type "planning agreements". Lastly they must transcend the crippling illusion that a working class which passively accepts, or only fragmentarily resists, the crushing impact of the crisis and its Tory orchestrators, will vote for radical policies.

The only "defence of the Labour Party" against the onslaught of the bosses (in Tory or Alliance clothes) is to rally the working class to a militant defence of its gains, to pass over into an organised offensive within which the politics of the only genuine socialism - the expropriation of the expropriators - will take root. Such a turning of the tide is not only vitally necessary, it is possible now. The opportunities, the starting points stare us in the face - the Leyland strike, the miners' claim. If the working class as a whole rises in defiance, such vultures as Shirley Williams, David Owen and Bill Rodgers will be driven off as suddenly as they appeared.

To achieve this however means defeating, exposing and driving out the hundreds of ruling class agents in our ranks. Such cleansing will not be accomplished in one blow, nor will it leave intact the time-hallowed organs of the Labour movement. The winning of the militants of the working class to a consistent anti-capitalist (ie revolutionary) programme and the militant organisation necessary to lead such a struggle cannot be done except on the basis of building a new revolutionary party committed to the complete destruction of the capitalist system. ■

Free the Bradford 12!

IN THE WAKE of the summer riots, the state has organised a crack-down against black militants. The most publicised event was the police raid of Railton Road in Brixton, which left a trail of wanton damage that even upset the Tories' "Mr Fixit", Lord Scarman.

Perhaps most important, though, is the arrest of 12 Asian youths from Bradford on 30-31st July, some two weeks after their alleged offences are supposed to have occurred. Aged between 17 and 25, the youths have been charged with conspiracy to damage buildings and cause explosions. Significantly, eleven of the twelve are supporters of the Bradford-based United Black Youth League (UBYL), some of them well known in the area for fighting against racism.

The prosecution's case is that the twelve had made some petrol bombs because they knew of the threat of a right wing attack, and that when the attack failed to materialise, the bombs were dumped on a tip. For such an alleged "offence", the Bradford 12 face life imprisonment.

After three months of being remanded in custody, all twelve were eventually allowed out on bail. But this was with the crippling proviso that the eleven UBYL supporters are not allowed to attend meetings, demonstrations or pickets to get support for their case. This denial of political rights to the accused is unprecedented. It prevents them from doing anything to rally people to their cause, and leaves them open to the full might of the state's unfettered control over the judicial system.

"Conspiracy" is a notorious catch-all charge which allows the state to drag in all kinds of circumstantial evidence - right down to the kind of books the accused read, and the number of times they have met together. The law is easily aimed against the organised working class as workers prepare to defend themselves against attacks on a picket line, or organise an occupation. The Conspiracy law placed two Shrewsbury building workers in prison - their "crime" was to organise an effective flying picket in the building workers' strike on 1972.

A judicial victory is very important for the state. In the aftermath of the Bristol riot in 1980, the police got their fingers burned when they charged the "St Pauls 9" with various frame-up allegations. The juries weren't convinced and delivered "Not Guilty" verdicts. Severely embarrassed, the police were forced to drop the charges against the rest of the defendants.

With the Bradford 12, however, the police obviously consider that they stand a better chance of crushing the black militant youth in the town. This will give them a useful precedent to attack black militants in other towns with large black communities. At the same time the forces of justice turn a blind eye to the racist attacks that the black youth are organising to resist. In July in Bradford, two Asian homes were firebombed by racist thugs. In August, two community centres were gutted by fire - one of them the meeting place of the local committee set up to defend the 12. In such an atmosphere, the state is clearly siding with the racist attackers by their frame-up "conspiracy" charge against the youths.

If the state can whip up fears of insurrection, of further rioting in the street, it may prove easier for them to secure convictions than it was in the case of the St Paul's 9, no matter how blatant the frame-up.

Whatever the particular slant the state puts on their case, however, we can be sure that without a massive campaign inside the labour movement, the Bradford 12 stand in grave danger of losing their freedom for many, many years.

The Bradford 12 deserve and need the support of the whole labour movement in their fight against the state's attempt to put them away for life. We must ensure that resolutions are passed through trade unions, trades councils and Labour Parties, committing them to supporting the 12, making donations and offers of material assistance to the campaign, and giving their active support to any demonstrations, pickets etc that are called in support of the 12 youths. In the Bradford area, the Support Committee must campaign vigorously for support amongst the local labour movement, to ensure that a massive outcry comes from the whole community in protest against these racist frame-ups. ■

Send messages of support, donations etc to: July 11th Action Committee, c/o 2, Spring Bank Place, Bradford 8.

Left socialism aborts a revolution

AT A TIME when many avowed revolutionaries are entering the Labour Party with the declared intention "of securing left advance through a socialist government" (IMG) or building class struggle tendencies, not on "a scientific programme" but on one which "roughly answers the objective needs of the working class" (Socialist Organiser), the lessons of the Italian Red Years of 1919/20 are of the greatest importance. Here a party with a leadership and policy well to the left of Benn, led the Italian working class to a crushing defeat which paved the way for fascism.

In Italy, as elsewhere in Europe, the end of the war saw the eruption of workers' struggles that shook Italy to its foundations. The Russian Revolution went like an electric shock through a European working class which had suffered four years of slaughter in war and military discipline in the factories. By 1918 the real value of wages of Italian workers was only 75% of their pre-war level. In FIAT a 70 hour week was compulsory by 1916, with most workers forced to work for 75 hours. Between January and October 1918, over 19,000 workers were sentenced to hard labour for the "crimes" of insubordination or leaving their jobs.

The end of the war saw the beginnings of a fightback from the working class, which was to culminate in the events of 1919-20, known in Italy as Biennio Rosso - the Red Two Years.

In this period, the workers went on the offensive and tried to make up for the years of oppression they had felt during the war. Strikes and land occupations took place all over the country. In some areas, town councils declared themselves in favour of the dictatorship of the proletariat and flew the red flag. This massive upsurge of the class struggle led to a dramatic growth in both the Italian Socialist Party (PSI) and its affiliated trade union organisation the General Confederation of Labour (CGL); the PSI grew from 81,000 in 1919 to 216,000 in 1920 while the CGL grew from 320,000 in 1914 to 2.3 million in 1920. These struggles also shifted the policies of the PSI significantly to the left after the war.

DURING WORLD WAR 1

The PSI had been a major party of the Second (Socialist) International, which had effectively collapsed at the outbreak of World War I when most of the International's sections sided with their own ruling classes during the war. The PSI was the only Western European party not to follow this course. They had previously expelled the out-and-out chauvinists like Bissolati in 1911 when the latter supported the Italian government's invasion of Tripoli.

However, the party did not adopt a communist position on the war. Its slogans of "Neither aid nor sabotage" and "Peace without annexations" were far from Lenin's "Turn the imperialist war into a civil war" and Liebknecht's "The main enemy is at home". In the war, as after it, the leading elements of the PSI were centrists. Powerful upsurges of the workers could spur them to utter revolutionary phrases but when the hour for decisive action struck, they would always fall to the rear.

Under the impact of the Russian revolution, the centre faction of the party around Giacinto Serrati - the "Maximalist Electionists" took a leap to the left. At the Rome Congress in Sept. 1918 the worker rank and file gave the Maximalists an overwhelming majority for re-drafting the old party programme. Serrati was elected by acclamation to the editorship of "Avanti!", the PSI paper, effectively the leadership of the party.

In August 1919 the new "Maximalist" dominated directorate issued a manifesto declaring: "A socialist society cannot be achieved by decrees or by resolutions of Parliament or by a National Constituent Assembly.. The proletariat must be spurred on to seize political and economic power by force. Power must be handed over exclusively and indivisibly to the workers and peasants councils". (Quoted in Julius Braunthal, History of the International)

The October 1919 Bologna conference pledged support for the Russian revolution "the most magnificent event in the history of the proletariat", proclaimed the beginning of a revolutionary period which "must lead to the violent overthrow of bourgeois-capitalist rule and to the conquest of economic and political power by the proletariat" and set itself the task of creating workers and peasants councils as "instruments for armed struggle". The conference accepted the necessity of the Dictatorship of the Proletariat during the transition from capitalism to socialism and agreed to affiliate to the Communist International.

The strength of revolutionary feeling in the working class was demonstrated in the Nov. 1919 elections which were fought by the PSI on this new programme. This open call for revolution and proletarian dictatorship won 1.8 million votes (32% of the electorate) making the PSI the largest party in the Italian parliament with 156 deputies in the 508 seat house. A few months later the PSI won control of over half the municipal authorities in Italy including the Milan, Bologna and Turin town councils.

The elections and, more importantly, the militant struggles that burst forth again and again clearly showed that the workers were consciously seeking the path of revolution. Tossed to the left under pressure of the masses, maximalism was capable of the most fiery rhetoric in favour of "revolution" and "seizing power". However these leftist, and sometimes ultra-leftist, pronouncements

were not matched by the deeds of Serrati and Co. Faced by a social crisis with the question of organising the assault on bourgeois state power they recoiled from this task in dismay, falling back into the arms of the right, the conscious agents of sabotage and betrayal.

The maximalists and the new left-wing policies were opposed throughout by the rightwing of the party. Claudio Treves, Filippo Turati and Ludovico D'Aragona - the General Secretary of the CGL - led the reformist wing of the PSI. Its strength lay in the parliamentary faction, in the trade union bureaucracy and the full-time party apparatus. Turati declared in 1919 that the Communist International was a "dream" which, like the Bolshevik revolution, would not last long. The right attacked the new policy, arguing that the Italian working class was not revolutionary and that the peasant south was backward and would be a base for counter-revolution. Further, Italy was a weak country that could not withstand a blockade by Britain, France and other imperialist powers and therefore a revolution was doomed to failure, unless it came in a more industrialised country first.

In this way the reformists demonstrated their bitter hostility to a revolutionary strategy which threatened the destruction of the routine by which they lived, parliamentary and trade union negotiation with the industrialists and their political representatives. The Bologna Conference registered the relative weights of these factions when the new policy was adopted by 48,411 votes to 14,800 for the Right.

A third current was represented at the congress, by a grouping which considered itself communist, around Amadeo Bordiga from Naples. Bordiga's "Abstentionist faction" collected 3,500 votes and stood on a platform of opposing all parliamentary activity which it considered could only be opportunist - "To participate in such bodies and to expect to emerge unscathed by social democratic deviations is a vain hope in the current historical period" (Letter to Third International from Abstentionist Faction, quoted in Gramsci, Political Writings 1910-20). The Abstentionists also stood for the expulsion of the right wing, and the formation of a "real communist party". Thus they rightly declared: "The Italian Party is not a communist party it is not even a revolutionary party. The maximalist electionists are closer in spirit to the German Independents". (A centrist split from the German Social Democrats - WP) (Abstentionists' letter to the Third International).

A fourth current, which at this time supported the maximalists, was the grouping from the industrial centre of Turin, who published the paper L'Ordine Nuovo. The leading figure in this group was Antonio Gramsci, the future leader of the Italian Communist party.

This was the party, with Serrati at its head, which was in the position to lead the Italian proletariat in its momentous struggles of 1919-20. The revolutionary situation which developed in Italy was to put to the test the verbal radicalism of Serrati's centrism and find it disastrously wanting.

The centre of combativity of the workers through this post-war period was the heavily industrialised city of Turin, in the north-west of the country. As early as August 1917 Turin workers had taken up arms and risen against the government, using grenades, machine guns and rifles to fight troops and police. Despite the workers' electrified barbed wire fence defences, trenches and barricades, the state forces proved too powerful, and the rising was beaten, with 500 workers killed and 2,000 injured. The reasons for the defeat lay in the isolation of Turin from the other cities and from a general nationwide revolutionary crisis.

During 1919 and 1920, Turin was again in the vanguard. The metalworkers (engineers, steel and foundry workers) and their union FIOM had their base in the car plants and foundries of Turin. They had been traditionally at the head of the Italian working class. In 1906, FIOM secured the first agreement from the bosses - from the FIAT car firm - to recognise the "Internal Commission" in the factories. The Internal Commission consisted of three or four workers - usually elected by union members - who mediated between the workers and the management, represented the interests of the workers and dealt with their problems as they arose during worktime.

By the advent of Biennio Rosso, the Internal Commissions were well established in all the major factories in Italy, and were a vital weapon in the working class armoury. During these crucial years, they were to be regularly expanded into Factory Councils, as each workshop elected its own commissar, and the council acted as the leadership of all the workers in the plant, with the commissar system enabling disciplined, coordinated action to be organised.

1919 had been a year of massive riots, demonstrations, strikes over rising food prices and land occupations by the peasantry. In April 1920 a new wave of struggle developed centered on Turin. The bosses of the FIAT plant

in Turin took the opportunity of a dispute over hours to attempt the smashing of the Internal Commissions in the plant. The workers responded by calling a general assembly of all Turin commissars which called a general strike throughout Turin. The employers replied with a lockout, sending the hundreds of troops who had been mobilised in the city into the factories to prevent occupations.

The issue was clear, Gino Olivetti secretary general of the employers association, the Italian General Confederation of Industry (CGI) had called the month before for the suppression of the factory councils on the grounds that there could not be "two authorities in the factory". The employers were now pursuing that goal. The workers were led by a "Committee of Agitation" consisting of the Chamber of Labour (Trade Council) and the local and provincial PSI which appealed to the CGL and the PSI directorate to intervene in the struggle with national support. The PSI's response was revealing. The party directorate passed a motion on the 17th April which spoke of the Italian peoples sympathy "showing itself in energetic action if the government seeks to smash the unity of the Turin workers by force" (Avanti, 18.5.1920 quoted in Martin Clark, Antonio Gramsci and the Revolution that failed.)

What the craven Maximalist leaders were afraid to organise, the working class spontaneously undertook. By 19th April the Turin strike had spread throughout Piedmont involving half a million workers. Unabashed the PSI directorate's refusal of leadership was confirmed at the National Council of the PSI meeting in Milan. Originally planned for Turin, but moved because troops had blockaded the city, this meeting, composed of the directorate, provincial leaders and the parliamentary deputies of the PSI, spent most of its time discussing, in the abstract, the form soviets would take in Italy!

AN INEVITABLE SELL-OUT

Its only pronouncement on the massive struggle in Piedmont was a resolution calling on all party organisations to "maintain close links with the Directorate and to uphold discipline, avoiding at all costs in the interests of the Party and the Revolution, any localist initiatives or any manifestations of tendencies which are in opposition to the activity of the party" (Quoted in Clark page 107).

Having like Pontius Pilate washed their hands of the Turin strike, Serrati and Co handed the striking workers over to the right in the CGL. A sell-out was inevitable.

On 21st April, negotiations opened between D'Aragona of the CGL and Gino Olivetti. The Committee of Agitation was excluded from negotiations, and the resulting settlement severely restricted the rights of the Comissars and effectively reduced the powers of the factory councils. The bosses' triumph was expressed in the gloating notices they put up in some factories as the workers returned to work. "There is only one power in the factory!" read one, and "No discussion during working hours" read another.

In the first serious test of the class struggle, Italian centrism, despite its revolutionary verbiage, had ceded leadership to the right under the cover of not being pulled into "adventurism" through a local strike. As a result the reformists were considerably emboldened. The Turin workers on the other hand had become deeply suspicious of the PSI, a fact reflected in the complete break of the L'Ordine Nuovo group from the Maximalists, leading to an alliance between the former group and the "abstentionists".

The leadership of the Communist International, which the PSI had joined in 1919, was under few illusions that the latter was a communist party. The Bolshevik leaders, whose struggle had rid their ranks of reformists and centrists between 1903 and 1917 as a precondition of their party leading the workers to power, turned to the task of repeating this process in the short space of time allowed by the revolutionary crisis. The parties pushed towards the Comintern by the revolutionary enthusiasm of the masses - the French Socialist Party, the Independent Social Democratic Party of Germany as well as the PSI, contained reformists, centrists as well as those fighting their way towards real communism.

The Comintern summed up the essence of Bolshevism in the famous 21 points which demanded the expulsion of the reformists from the new sections. It was precisely on this point that the centrists balked. If they did this their days of irresponsible speechifying were numbered. Thus when the break with Turati, D'Aragona and Co. was posed to Serrati, he prevaricated. The 21 conditions were very good, he argued, but not immediately applicable to the PSI!

On returning to Italy in September 1920, Serrati summed up his attitude thus: "These politics, being helpful to the Republic of Soviets, must indubitably be of help to the world proletariat. All the same, they may not conform to the tactical necessities of another country which finds itself in a critical period of its own as yet unerupted revolution" ("Communismo" - quoted in "International Communism in the Era of Lenin - H. Gruber. p 247).

On the expulsion of the reformists, Serrati expressed his horror at the thought of losing "men of ability, of thrusting the municipality of Milan, for instance, into the hands of incompetents, new arrivals, people pretending at the last minute to be fervent communists...it is indispensable that the work of purging be accomplished with political discernment, without distasteful impositions.." (Gruber, p.249).

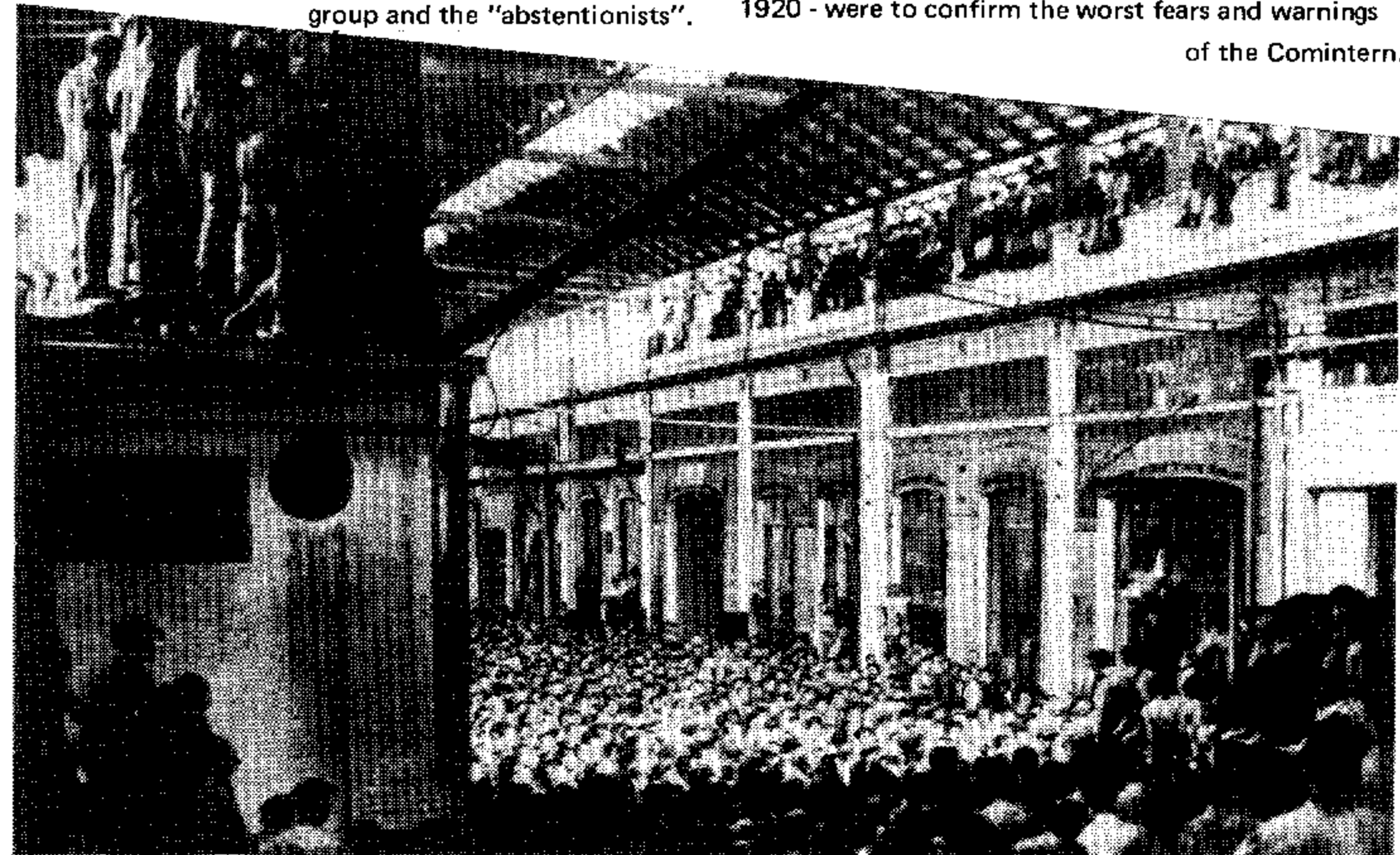
Later in the year, Lenin was to stigmatize Serrati's position thus:

"Anyone who would put the entire revolution at risk for fear of injuring the municipal affairs of Milan and so forth has completely lost his head, has no idea of the fundamental tasks of revolution, and is totally incapable of preparing its victory" (4th November 1920) (Collected Works Vol 31 p 384).

The Comintern as soon as it perceived the Jesuitry of the Maximalists and the bitter fruits of their "leadership" with relation to the Turin strike of April 1920, launched a warning to the Italian proletariat.

"It is clear to everybody that the Italian bourgeoisie are already not quite as helpless as they were a year ago...We suggest the Italian party has acted and is acting too irresolutely...All eye witnesses assert that the situation in Italy is profoundly revolutionary. Nevertheless in many cases the party stands aside, without attempting to generalise the movement, give it watchwords, give it a more systematised and organised character, turn it into a decisive offensive on the bourgeois state. The basic reason for this is the contamination of the party by reformist and liberal bourgeois elements who at the moment of civil war become outright agents of counter-revolution, class enemies of the proletariat." (CI letter to PSI and Italian Proletariat, Degras, vol.1, p.188, dated 27 August 1920)

The events of the next few months - the Autumn of 1920 - were to confirm the worst fears and warnings of the Comintern.



Mass meeting of occupiers



Picture: Collection Moro, Rome / Pluto Press

Occupiers, armed with rifles, revolvers and machine guns

In August/September 1920, the Italian working class found itself once more under severe attack from the bosses. The factory occupations which they undertook in defence of their living standards and organisations led to a critical confrontation with the bosses which the workers failed to resolve in their own favour. This crisis proved to be the turning point of the whole post-war revolutionary situation in Italy.

The occupations had their seed in a dispute begun by FIOM. In retaliation to the bosses' refusal to increase pay, the union called a national go-slow. Between January and September inflation drove up the average expenditure of a working class household by 35%. Wages had lagged far behind. Negotiations with the Engineering Employers Association, AMMA, collapsed in the middle of August. Their leader, Rotigliano, later to be a fascist, said: "given the state of the industry, no demand for economic betterment can be entertained at this time." In a more candid mood, he later added: "All discussion is useless. The industrialists will not grant any increase at all. Since the end of the war, they've done nothing but drop their pants. We've had enough. Now we're going to start on you."

The metalworkers' union FIOM immediately summoned an Extraordinary Congress in Milan on 16/17th August inviting the leaders of the CGL and PSI. In order to pursue the pay claim and face up to the implicit threat of the bosses to destroy the power of the union, the congress unanimously decided to call an immediate campaign of "obstruction" (work to rule) in all the metal working plants (foundries and engineering factories) and in the naval dockyards. It also decided that should the owners respond with a lock-out as they had done in April, the factories should be occupied.

The first lockout took place at the Milan Rome car plant where 2,000 workers arrived to find the gates locked and guarded by troops. As soon as it heard of this, the Milan section of FIOM ordered the immediate occupation of 300 metalworking factories in the area.

Faced with this the AMMA met and proceeded with a lockout throughout Turin, Genoa, La Spezia, Rome and elsewhere. As the lockout spread so did the occupations. The workers swarmed in, sometimes armed when faced with the threat of troops on the gates. By the end of the first week of September the whole of Italy was wracked by a wave of occupations. Over half a million workers occupied their plants. A French visitor to Milan wrote: "The spectacle could not fail to be impressive, above all towards evening, when the red guards straddling the walls weapons in hand, were silhouetted against the night sky."

Whilst the workers in many factories organised themselves for defence, (one workshop at the main FIAT works was devoted entirely to the production of arms and barbed wire) they were in no sense prepared politically or organisationally for the seizure of power. From the outset the occupations, led by the FIOM had as a major object the continuation of production by the workers themselves - a "work-in". This tactic was a disaster. It occupied the workers with the normal treadmill of production instead of freeing them for struggle. The syndicalist idea that it demonstrated their ability to run production without the capitalists was a hollow one. Industrial production needs raw materials, finance, communications. All these remained in the hands of the capitalists. As production hit bottle-necks, shortages, sabotage and slowed down it "taught" workers the exact opposite of what the syndicalists wished. This tactic turned its back on the State, on the need to fight for state power.

While the leadership of the PSI conspicuously failed to give any lead to the working class in this situation - the alternative leadership in Turin around Gramsci and L'Ordine Nuovo were themselves crippled by syndicalist prejudices. The Gramsci grouping could offer no counter-balance to the illusions of the workers:

"Under the capitalists, the factory was a miniature state, ruled over by a despotic board... Today, after the workers' occupation, this despotic power in the factories has been smashed; the right to choose passed into the hands of the working class. Every factory has industrial executives has become an illegal state, a proletarian republic living from day to day, awaiting the outcome of events". (Gramsci, Red Sunday, in Selections from Political Writings, 5 Sept. 1920, p.34)

But as to influencing the "outcome of events" the Gramsci grouping had little to say beyond the need to organise factory militias to defend the "illegal states". While the PSI was seen in some sense as the body which would have to overthrow the bourgeois state, the necessity of the party organising a militia, conducting revolutionary agitation amongst the troops, leading the insurrection was absent. Neither did the Bordigists, for all their correct criticisms of L'Ordine Nuovo, and recognition of the necessity for a revolutionary party, offer any real alternative leadership in struggle. In February 1920 after the April General Strike Bordiga had argued in a polemic with Turin "We would not like the working masses to get hold of the idea that all they need to do to take over the factories and get rid of the capitalists is set up councils. This would indeed be a dangerous illusion. The factory will be conquered by the working class... only after the working class as a whole has seized political power. Unless it has done so, the Royal Guards, Military Police etc - in other words the mechanisms of force and oppression that the bourgeoisie has at its disposal, its political power apparatus will see to it that all illusions are dispelled." (Il Soviet, Feb 1920, quoted in Gramsci, 1910-1920, p.326).

THE PARTY COUNTERPOSED TO SOVIETS

While being formally correct against Gramsci, in emphasising the importance of the revolutionary party Bordiga's sectarianism made him incapable of outlining any tactics for such a party. The abstentionists' fear of the united front led them to continually counterpose the Communist Party to the soviets and to the organs of struggle thrown up by the workers. "If the bourgeois class is still in power, even if it were possible to summon proletarian electors to nominate their delegates... one would simply be giving a formal imitation of a future activity, an imitation devoid of its fundamental revolutionary character. Those who can represent the proletariat today before it takes power tomorrow are... the workers who are members of the communist party. The soviets of tomorrow must arise from local branches of the CP. It is these which will be able to call on elements who, as soon as the revolution is victorious, will be proposed as candidates, to set up the councils of the local worker delegates." ("Is this the time to form 'soviets'", in Gramsci, 1910-1920, p.205, to Bordiga, Sept, 1919)

In this way Bordiga completely misunderstood that the Factory Councils, despite their work-place basis, were the embryos of soviets, that their organisation of the defence of the occupation would form the basis of a control over the whole area, as the workers' defence squads took control of the streets, as food and transport were organised around the occupation, and so on. In

this way, soviets will be the organs of working class power during the revolution, they will be the sources of working class strength and organisation as the insurrection led by the party proceeds, not imposed on the masses by the ruling party after the deed has been done.

If the left of the party had failed to develop the strategy and tactics of revolutionary struggle correctly, the centrists quickly abandoned any pretence of trying to develop them. This did not stop them however from issuing fiery calls to insurrection, without having made any political or organisational preparations for such a crucial task. Thus on Sept. 6th the PSI directorate published a manifesto to soldiers and peasants. It called on the soldiers to resist their officers and refuse to attack the factories. The message to the peasants read: "If tomorrow the hour of decisive struggle strikes, the battle against all the bosses, you, too rally! Take over the communes, the lands, disarm the carabinieri, form your battalions in unity with the workers, march on the great cities, take your stand with the people in arms against the hireling thugs of the bourgeoisie! For the day of justice and liberty is perhaps at hand!"

Note the characteristic centrist "if". When the hour struck these calls were completely absent.

The CGL leaders had no intention of carrying out actions like these at any time - they wished to keep the struggle as one over economic questions. The CGL's demand was for "Trade Union Control of industry" - a demand suitably vague, but with the requisite revolutionary ring about it. A joint conference of the CGL and PSI was to be held on the 20th Sept. On the day the conference opened a telegram arrived from the FIAT factory Council in Turin announcing that "The workers of FIAT-Centro Turin intend to open negotiations only if the dominant and exploiting class is abolished otherwise immediate war until a complete victory." (Quoted in Clark, p.166).

Under such pressure the PSI declared on the opening morning of the conference that it would "assume the responsibility and leadership of the movement extending it to the whole country and to all proletarian masses" and called for all factories and land to be occupied. The CGL leaders however had the measure of them. They decided to call the Maximalists' bluff. Speaking to delegates D'Aragona declared: "You believe that this is the moment for the revolution. Very well then. You assume the responsibility. We do not feel able to shoulder this responsibility - the responsibility for throwing the proletariat into suicide - we declare that we withdraw. We submit our resignation. We feel that, at this moment, the sacrifice of our persons is called for. You, you take the leadership of the whole movement."

Instead of calling the reformists' bluff by decisively taking control the Maximalists temporised calling for a further debate. The Maximalist resolution to the Congress the next day read: "The national council of the CGL requests the directorate of the party to take over the direction of the movement and to lead it towards the maximum solution of the socialist programme, that is the socialisation of the means of production and exchange." (The Occupations of the Factories, Paulo Spriano, p.91)

The CGL reformists counterposed to this their own resolution which sought to limit the implications of the occupations: "The objective of the struggle should be the recognition by employers of the principle of union control over industry. This will open the way to those major goals which will inevitably lead to collective management and socialisation, and thus organically solve the problem of production" (Spriano, p.92)

In the subsequent vote, the CGL resolution won by 591,245 votes to 409,569 with 93,623 in abstention. This provided the leaders - CGL and PSI, and the government, with an opening through which they could squeeze a satisfactory solution.

The triumph of the reformists led inevitably to a stitched-up settlement between Giolitti and the CGL leaders which "guaranteed" trade union control in the factories - or as the Executive Committee of the CI more accurately described it in a letter to the Italian workers: "A high class funeral arrangement by the reformists for your revolutionary movement!"

Serrati, showing his true colours in defending the miserable surrender of the maximalists, was to argue, a mere 3 months after these revolutionary events: "Thus we cannot regard the occupation of the factories as proof that a revolutionary movement was underway... it was really just a deep-rooted and broadly based trade union campaign which went off quite peacefully, apart from one or two sporadic incidents." (Avanti, 11.12.1920, from Braunthall, p.203).

The ultra-revolutionary of the Bologna Congress had moved a long way since 1919.

Lenin summed up the tragedy of the Italian proletariat in a speech at the IIIrd Congress, in his assessment of all strands of Italian socialism:

"Did a single communist show his mettle when the workers seized the factories in Italy? No. At that time there was as yet no communism in Italy. There was a certain amount of Anarchism, but no Marxian Communism". (Lenin, vol.32, Collected Works, p.465, June 28th 1921).

This the working class found out to its cost. A wave of victimisations and sackings followed the ending of the occupations. In March 1921 the bosses in Turin led the attack. Michelin dismissed all its commissars and most of what L'Ordine Nuovo called "the good communists" - an action which was imitated throughout Italy.

A demoralised working class now faced a growing fascist movement - 300,000 strong by the end of 1921 - funded and armed by the capitalists. They looted, they burned, they smashed up meetings, they killed scores of workers, seemingly without comeback. In the first six months of 1921, their orgy of destruction included: 17 socialist newspaper offices and printshops; 59 local labour movement meeting places; 119 chambers of Labour; 107 cooperatives; 83 peasant leagues offices and 141 socialist and communist clubs and offices. The PSI locked in its reformist perspective retreated from organising the workers, arms in hands, to defend their organisations. They preferred to appeal to Parliament and outside to sections of the bourgeoisie and its state to "control" the fascists.

Trotsky summed up the criminal role which the left centrism of Maximalism had played in a speech to the Third Congress of the CI: "The party carried on agitation in favour of the Soviet power, in favour of the hammer and sickle, in favour of Soviet Russia etc. The Italian working class en masse took this seriously and entered the road of open revolutionary struggle... But precisely at the moment when the party should have drawn all the practical and political conclusions from its own agitation it became scared of its responsibility and shied away, leaving the rear of the proletariat unprotected. The working masses were left exposed to the blows of the fascist gangs." (Trotsky, Speech at a General Party membership meeting of the Moscow Organisation, 1921).



Gramsci's paper L'Ordine Nuovo

The events of 1919/20 in Italy contain vital lessons for today's struggle. The Italian proletariat found out to its cost that its party, the PSI, despite its verbal radicalism, was a useless instrument not only for achieving socialism but even for defending its vital interests. The PSI leadership, despite its revolutionary phrasemongering, was proved to be unserious about leading the working class into struggle against the bourgeoisie. Any party which leaves the "economic struggles" of the working class to trade union leaders, while reserving to itself the "political arena" of parliament and the municipalities, as the PSI did, has no serious intention of leading the working class to seize power. In the end the PSI - both the right and the centrists - showed themselves to be out and out reformists convinced that the struggle for socialism was a parliamentary one, not a struggle to organise the working class in the factories, through the soviets, through the general strike and armed insurrection to break the power of the bourgeoisie and its state.

Bordiga's politics, like all sectarianism, embodied a fear of opportunism, not an alternative to it. The Abstentionist Faction's attitude was summed up in Bordiga's statement "To electoral activity we counterpose the violent conquest of political power on the part of the proletariat". Bordiga feared "contamination" from parliament - to discipline its MPs or to pose any political questions short of insurrection. Likewise in the struggles for workers' control it saw only a diversion, not a means for rallying the workers, for the assault on state power. Bordiga's hostility to united action for immediate or limited goals with workers still led by reformists, syndicalists and centrists, led to a chronic passivity. It led to seeing the party's role as essentially one of propaganda for the dictatorship of the proletariat. When the Executive Committee systematised the methods for united defensive action in the united front tactic in December 1921, Bordiga was vehemently opposed to it. Maximalism and Bordigism shared a common feature - passivity. Both Centrism and Sectarianism were and are useless to the working class in a revolutionary situation.

For those who believe that the path of the British revolution lies in developing "centrist" or "class struggle" currents in the Labour Party on "roughly" adequate programmes - the lessons of the Italian Red Year are salutary. Without a clear revolutionary programme and organisation, without a united front tactic which does not exclude relentless criticism of the more left-wing labour leaders, such a left-reformist or centrist-led current would only mislead the working class at decisive moments, potentially leading the working class to crushing defeat. ■

Picture: Collection Moro, Rome / Pluto Press

Ireland after the hunger strikes

GREEN TORIES SEIZE THE INITIATIVE

BY A MEMBER OF THE IRISH WORKERS GROUP

THE REPUBLICAN HUNGER strikes in Long Kesh internment camp collapsed on October 3rd. Politically this was inevitable because the entire weight of the struggle was born all along by the prisoners themselves alone despite the mass dimensions of the National H-Block/Armagh Campaign outside. That this should have been so was due to a disastrous failure of strategy by the campaign, a failure deeply rooted in the inherent outlook and perspective of Revolutionary Nationalism.

In themselves the terms of the settlement are on both sides a face saving agreement to shift the terrain of struggle out of the prisons. "Political Status" has not been won. On the other hand the Callaghan-Thatcher attempt to criminalise the Provisionals in the eyes of the great majority of the Nationalist population has been completely shipwrecked. Thatcher's murder of the ten hunger strikers has burned into the spirit of the population an undying loathing for her and for the whole gang of Westminster politicians, their army and uniformed Loyalist thugs.

But concretely, little has been gained. The infamous 'conveyor belt' which maintains the steady supply of new political detainees into the H-Blocks and Armagh still exists in all its rigour. The system of emergency laws, arbitrary arrests, beatings and torture to extract confessions, trial by no-jury courts and anonymous state 'witnesses' all remain in force. The Provisional dominated campaign consciously refused to direct itself against this apparatus. Why was this?

TERROR TACTICS

For the Provisionals—the latest representative of the pure 'physical force' tradition of Irish Republicanism, the answer lies in the application of guerrilla military action against the state forces allied to bombing of the enemies property and periodic assassination of vulnerable police and military figures. This strategy is shaped in a mould derived from the age-old rural guerrilla and anti-landlord terror tactics of the Irish peasantry but applied to the urban world of Northern Ireland. The perspective of mobilising the masses of urban and rural workers, organised into councils of action, of strike action is absolutely alien to the Provisionals petty-bourgeois outlook.

Hence their dominance of the H-Block Campaign had the ultimate single objective of renewing popular sympathy and recruiting new guerrilla fighters to guarantee the continuance of their method of struggle. However, the London bombings and the renewed bombing campaign in the 6 Counties have already begun the process of wearing down active popular support for the Provisionals. Such campaigns involving civilian deaths, and destruction offer the imperialist enemy, with all its allies in Ireland in the Church and media, endless fuel for their propaganda war. Such tactics expose the population as the main butt of army reprisals and at the same time exclude the masses from any active part in the struggle.

Thus the Campaign has left no lasting gain in terms of mass organisation. The Provisionals 'humanitarian' campaign, undemocratically controlled, turned its back on strike action by organised workers and held out its hand rightwards to the middle class North and South. The Centrists of the League for a Workers Republic, the Peoples Democracy and the Socialist Workers Movement aided and abetted this policy. They turned their back on the perspective of an Anti-Imperialist United Front of workers, republicans and socialists to win political status.

The Irish general election in June took place under the full pressure of the hunger strike. Significant numbers of working class voters effectively paralysed the bourgeois parties by voting H-Block prisoners or representatives; a vote of complete no confidence in the Fine Gael, Fianna Fail and Labour politicians. The result was a chronically hung parliament. The precarious Coalition (Fine Gael 56 seats and Labour 12) had good reason to heave a sigh of relief at the end of the hunger strike. Every new issue meant bargaining for the support of three independent deputies, so-called socialists, the ex-Labour anti-Republicans Kemmy and Browne and Sherlock of Sinn Fein the Workers Party (SFWP). All three have consistently saved Fitzgerald's Coalition in a series of disgusting betrayals of working class interests in Dail votes.

The H-Block prisoners seats, one of them vacated by Kieran Doherty's death, the other still

held on to, but of course not utilised by, Sinn Fein except as a threat to destabilise the government, would, if and when by elections occur, fall to Fianna Fail (the opposition). The complete failure of Sinn Fein to utilise the government crisis by mobilising the support that the election of these candidates demonstrated, but instead confining themselves to parliamentary threats, indicates that as 'abstentionists on principle' they come down on the side of electoral cretism every time against mass direct action.

While steadily sharpening the Coalition Austerity knife for the Irish working class Fitzgerald has also opened up a new front within the nation against all the forces of anti-Partition nationalism under the guise of a crusade for a 'new Ireland'. In this he is attempting yet another search for compromise with British imperialism which will, if not peacefully 'unite' Ireland, on a bourgeois basis, at least return the anti-imperialist tide to its normal minority channels.

This is the second attempt at such a front in ten years by a Fine Gael-Labour Coalition. In the 1973-77 inter-party Government the bilious Conor Cruise O'Brien (Labour) waged a propaganda war against the whole tradition of anti-Partitionism, whether militant (Provisional Republicans) or rhetorical (Fianna Fail). The constitution was subject to the cosmetic deletion of the 'special position of the Catholic Church' without thereby advancing the actual separation of Church and State one inch. At the same time savage repression of militant republicans in the South was stepped up. The international context was the tri-partite Sunningdale talks which attempted to introduce a 'Council of Ireland' and a 6-County power sharing assembly a project that crashed on the rock of a loyalist general strike in 1974.

In the new 'crusade' Fitzgerald aims at the reform of the 1937 De Valera Constitution via a popular majority in a referendum a year or more hence. Again the international context is renewed Anglo-Irish talks with the goal of an Anglo-Irish ministerial or parliamentary standing Council. This would supposedly concern itself with practical questions of economy, energy exchange and citizenship rights within the two islands. The newness of these talks lies in posing them as essentially between two sovereign governments (and thus supposedly beyond the right of anyone such as Paisley to attack them). The aim is to create a very general framework within which 'eventually' to 'solve' the problem of Irish unity.

COMMON FRONT AGAINST REPUBLICANISM

As always, the obduracy of the Paisleyite loyalist mass is the major obstacle to any formula involving Dublin. Fitzgerald's drive is to forge a political alliance of his pro-imperialist Southern bourgeoisie with the Northern Unionist bourgeoisie to erode the ground of extreme loyalism and to build a common front against Republicanism. Far from being a plan for Irish Unity, the present Anglo-Irish talks can have only one meaning—a new attempt to restore majority Unionist rule to the Six Counties as 'devolved government' but with sufficient verbal reference to 'all-Ireland co-operation' to allow Fianna Fail and the SDLP to proclaim it as a major advance.

Any Anglo-Irish deal if it is not to risk opening up a struggle from below—necessarily proletarian—to destroy the Northern state, and the Southern one in its train, must in essence preserve that state, even if under the appearances of 'federalism' or 'shared citizenship'.

For the Irish working class that means the perpetuation of its own division nationally into two prison houses of backward clericalist bourgeois rule.

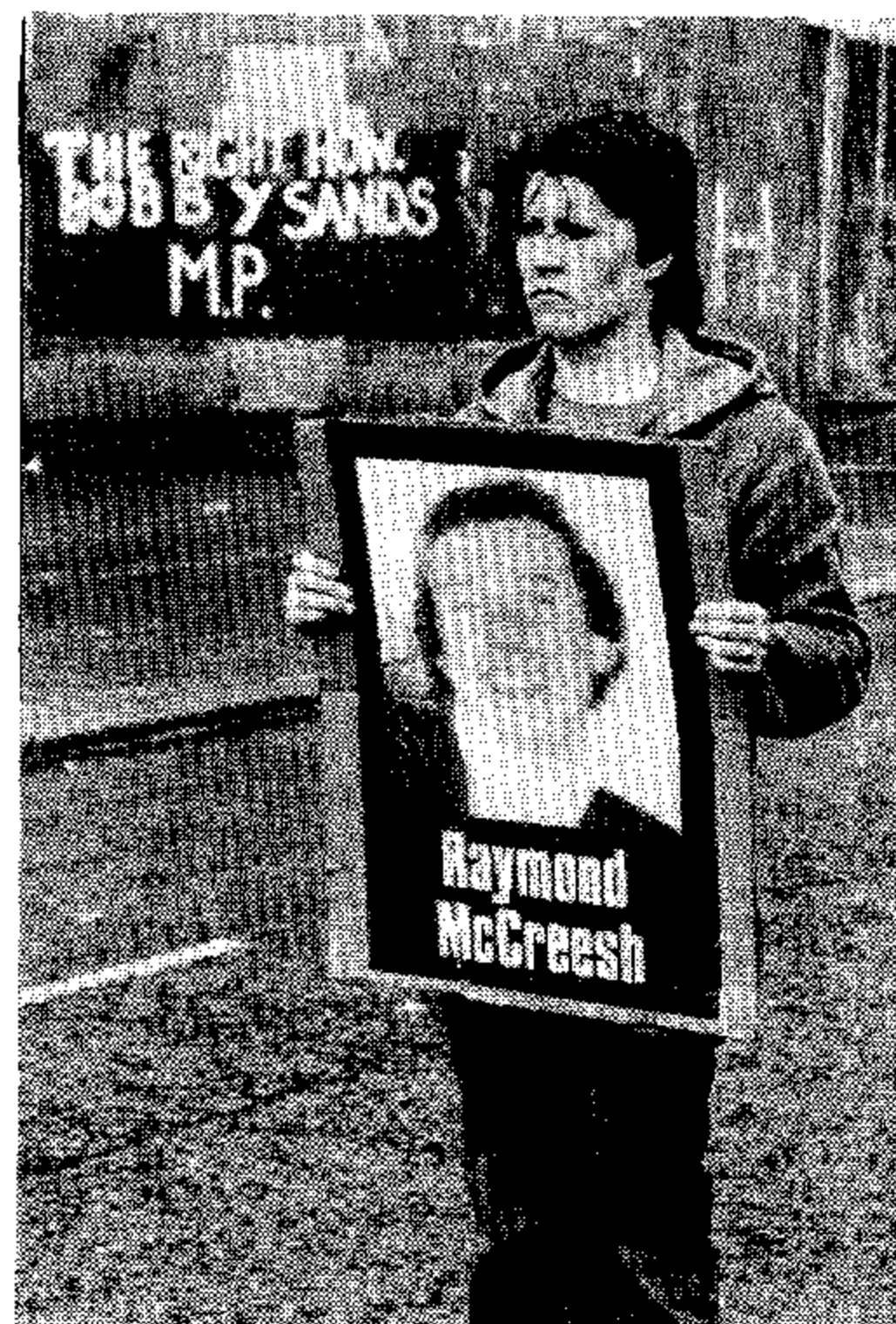
There are important features to Fitzgerald's crusade. On the Sunday that the verbal anti-Partitionists of Haughey's Fianna Fail were standing to attention at the graveside of Wolfe Tone (a bourgeois nationalist of the 18th century) Fitzgerald was on prime-time radio declaring his intention to lead the people into a referendum to re-write the 1937 Constitution to eliminate its 'sectarian' bias and its juridical and territorial claims (in Articles 2 and 3) over the 6 Counties. Cynically claiming to be the true inheritor of Wolfe Tone, Fitzgerald abrasively tarred Fianna Fail with the label of bogus republicanism and threw at them their record of Catholic sectarianism (which it should not be forgotten is rivalled in every detail by the disgusting record of Fitzgerald's own Party). In the ensuing week, bitter reaction from Fianna Fail and reverberations from ecclesiastical quarters persuaded Fitzgerald to mute his attack on the confessional nature of the South.

While the British and some sections of bourgeois Northern Unionism applauded Fitzgerald, Fianna Fail consolidated a majority in the opinion polls against tampering with Articles 2 and 3. They (i.e. Fianna Fail) would only agree to re-write the Constitution when the forces of 6-County Unionism would sit down at the conference table with the Southern government to discuss national unity. There would be no giving 'legal validity' to Partition and no co-operation with the 'colonial mentality' of the Coalition crusade.

Haughey's Fianna Fail feeds on the populist Catholic nationalism of the rural petty bourgeoisie and large sections of workers dominated (as so much of Irish social life is in an emigration bled country) by a rural outlook. Only a small 'national bourgeoisie' has ever developed on the basis of its own industry in the South and though powerful they are a diminishing base of support for anti-Partition nationalism.

Socialists, workers and genuine anti-imperialists, therefore, can have no common cause with Haughey in defending Articles 2 and 3. To make common cause with Haughey would be to play at being the left-wing of one section of the bourgeoisie which is every bit as reactionary as the other. It would be to poison workers with the "legitimacy" of a Constitution that is nothing more than the license of a semi-colonial bourgeoisie to exploit workers, oppress women and repress all radical political opposition in the interests of world imperialism.

Fitzgerald's bogus "anti-sectarianism" on the other hand, refuses to argue for the right to divorce or for secular control of schools or hospitals. And despite his questioning of the confessional nature of the state he has repeated his promise to introduce a Constitutional prohibition on any attempt in the future to introduce abortion legislation. Nevertheless, however lacking in content, the slogan of separating Church and State has enormous appeal for young people and sections of women. In so far as it opens a debate on secularisation, revolutionary Trotskyists alone can spell out the whole political and programmatic meaning of ending clerical reaction in Ireland, North and South. On this front the Provisional Republican movement is so compromised with Catholic nationalism and with the Southern State itself that it has not the programmatic armory with which to do battle with Fitzgerald for the minds of the rising generation.



Picture: Steve Benbow (NETWORK)

Demonstrator protesting against the death of a hunger striker. This sort of protest, virtually the only one sanctioned by the Provisionals, did little to organise a mass campaign for political status, or to put real pressure on Thatcher.

The semi-colonial status of the South takes on a new starkness in the latest Government economic report (Oct. 28th). It warns that three years more of foreign borrowing at the present level will mean that 99p in every £1 of direct taxes will go simply to pay the interest on loans.

The primary economic target, therefore, for the Coalition scalpel is the "unproductive" wage-bill of a quarter-million public-sector workers. A commission of economists (the "Three Wise Men") has played catpaw for Fitzgerald in proposing a norm of 6½% maximum wage adjustment for the coming year while inflation runs at 20%. A direct result of this norm-setting was the collapse of centralised union-employer wage talks covering industrial, public sector and service workers. For the first time in eleven years the unions are back to "free collective bargaining" - but in a leaderless, confused and sectional way. In essence the bureaucracy so far has simply abandoned to the forces of the market the vast but sectionalised trade union movement whose branches have considerably atrophied during ten years of bureaucratic centralised collaboration which banned official strikes for basic wage claims. The bureaucracy does this against a background of a furious propaganda war that the union bureaucrats have not fought back against because they fear to mobilise a class that has a consistent record of unofficial militancy and, more importantly, because the bureaucracy has no answer to the bosses' arguments.

A fighting programme for workers thus centrally focusses on the building of a rank and file movement armed with class-wide concrete demands and political answers to the bosses' offensive. These must flow from the need for, and lead to, open struggle against capitalism and imperialism themselves. A key immediate tactical focus must be to break up the Coalition and disrupt the ability of the bourgeoisie to introduce its austerity programme, by driving the Labour Party out of the Coalition.

The price of failure to fight back now is assured, for a government commission has recommended a series of measures which will begin to emasculate the workers' own organisations. These include making unofficial strikes illegal making secret ballots compulsory and expanding the whole apparatus of legal arbitration of disputes. The response of the rank and file alone can determine whether Fitzgerald will dare to put such measures into law, or whether this craven and fearful bourgeoisie can begin to be driven back in a struggle that can give birth to a new revolutionary socialist leadership that can finally settle scores with the imperialist and class enemy. ■

MINERS

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

for a critical vote for Scargill in the coming elections. But we do so from a position that seeks to outline policies and answers to those questions which Scargill will only at best talk about to leftist journalists. The SWP's *Collier* has no positions from which to do this.

Their occasional mild jibes at Scargill are no substitute for fundamental criticism. It is the incapacity of bureaucrats 'left' or 'right' to defend the interests of the working class that makes it necessary to build a rank and file movement in the mines. One that will teach miners not to put any trust in today's union leaders and to be prepared to act independently of them and to fight to replace

them when they sabotage their members' interests.

The aim of such a movement would be to democratically transform the entire structure of the union. To begin with it requires electing workplace representatives from every pit, shift and work-team which would act as the equivalents of shop stewards and would be instantly recallable. This would go far beyond the present system of the three or four 'lay' branch officials in each pit who usually act as no more than errand boys to the local fulltime officials.

It would mean regular pit head mass meetings where all the arguments can be put and which would take decisions on major issues such as pay. Pit representatives should be organised into area committees which could take the initiative from

and hold to account the area officials. All full time officials should be regularly re-elected, be subject to instant recall and be paid the average rate of the industry.

The programme the SWP's *Collier* espouses is inadequate in this regard leaving nothing to say about the transformation of pit level rank and file representation. Integral to such a structural transformation of the union must go a political transformation. Policies must be advanced—an action programme—which answer the miners needs as a section of the working class. Demands must be fought for which protect wages, jobs and conditions but go beyond that to offer solutions which unite all workers against the government which both expose the need for and prepare for its

overthrow. Whilst active support should be given to the left bureaucrats like Scargill whenever they take positive action, wherever their actions or policies are diversionary and reactionary, the rank and file must steadfastly oppose them. It is not enough to say as *The Collier* does that they are 'against racism' and yet have nothing to say on the question of import controls which is a central point of Scargill's platform. The present wage negotiations and the wider struggles in the working class this winter will give rank and file miners every opportunity to examine 'King Arthur's' credentials as a miners friend, and his likely performance as the new President of the NUM. VOTE SCARGILL AND PUT HIM TO THE TEST! ORGANISE A MILITANT RANK AND FILE ORGANISATION IN THE PITSI! ■

The heyday of US imperialism

A WEEK BARELY passes without new, ever more alarming evidence that the Reagan Administration is set on a course of potential military confrontation with the Soviet Union and any regime in the semi-colonial world that refuses to play the game dictated by US imperialism. Reagan is set on a desperate path to reassert US hegemony in world politics after 20 years of America's imperial decline. The carnage of two imperialist wars this century stands as a stark reminder of the barbarous potential of an ailing imperialism when it attempts to re-capture its past pre-eminence by resecuring its markets and increasing its unquenchable appetite for profits.

The sabre-rattling and the arms build-up which prefigure and threaten war, the Cold War rhetoric of the Pentagon are not new phenomena. But to understand them, to measure the tempo of events and weigh up their significance it is first necessary to place today's conflicts in their proper setting. Crucially, that entails an understanding of the conditions under which the 'modus vivendi' between the USA and the USSR was struck at the close of the Second World War, a collection of compromises which have provided the arena in which 35 years of international politics have been played out.

In the last years of the Second World War the principle politicians of the victorious imperialist powers—Roosevelt and Truman for the US, Churchill and Attlee for the UK—were forced to accept a compromise with the USSR that recognised a 'sphere of influence' for the Soviet bureaucracy on its Western border. By March 1945 the Red Army was facing 170 German divisions while the Western powers faced only 26. The victories of the Soviet Army over Germany presented the Western powers with no tactical alternative but to accept the terms of Yalta (February 1945) and Potsdam (July 1945) which laid down rough and ready agreements about which countries in Europe would be accepted as falling under the control of the USSR and USA respectively (with a minor allocation for Great Britain). Although the Soviet bureaucracy considered these agreements to have the status of a strategic understanding, the USA knew that they were purely tactical compromises born of temporary weakness.

The bourgeoisie would have dearly liked to have kept the USSR out of Eastern Europe. Truman had declared in June 1941:

"If we see that Germany is winning we ought to help Russia and if Russia is winning we ought to help Germany and that way let them kill as many as possible, although I don't want to see Hitler victorious under any circumstances" and Montgomery was to record that the Western powers had hoped to have pushed far further East so as to hold the Red Army back at the time of Germany's surrender:

"The important point was therefore to ensure that when that day arrived we would have a political balance in Europe which would help us, the Western Nations, to win the peace. That meant getting possession of certain political centres in Europe before the Russians—notably Vienna, Prague and Berlin." But each of these centres was liberated by the Soviet army not the armies of Western Imperialism.

Churchill and Roosevelt were perfectly aware that such an outcome to the war in Europe would be extremely disadvantageous to their respective ruling classes. Churchill wrote to Roosevelt in April of 1945: "There is moreover another aspect which it is proper for you and me to consider. The Russian armies will no doubt overrun all Austria and enter Vienna. If they take Berlin will not their impression that they have been the overwhelming contributor to our common victory be unduly imprinted in their minds, and may this lead them into a mood which will give grave and formidable difficulties in the future?" (Churchill—Triumph and Tragedy p.122).

But there was another pressing reason for the political leaders of Western Capitalism accepting Stalin's request for a sphere of influence in East Europe. The Soviet bureaucracy was prepared, in return, to actively collaborate in the disarming and destruction of leftist resistance movements in Greece, Italy and France and to back Imperialism as it drove back the tide of class struggle that had engulfed Western and Southern Europe at the end of the war. In the immediate post



Nixon pushes Krushchev, his luck and Cabot Lodge's words: "I say to you, representative of the Soviet Union, stay out of this hemisphere and don't try to start your plans and your conspiracies over here".

war period the Kremlin and the Communist Parties were indispensable instruments for the restabilisation of capitalism in Europe. That is why the seasoned anti-Communist Churchill—who had sent British troops into Athens to disarm the Greek resistance with instructions to treat Athens "as a captured city" and "shoot to kill"—could declare "The impression I brought back from Crimea, and from all my other contacts, is that Marshal Stalin and the Soviet leaders wish to live in honourable friendship and equality with the Western Democracies. I feel also that their word is their bond. I know of no government which stands to its obligations, even in its own despite, more solidly than the Russian Soviet Government." (ibid p.64).

Imperialism was forced to reluctantly recognise an Eastern European sphere of influence for the Soviet bureaucracy in order to protect its more vital interests hand in hand with the Stalinists. As the UK Foreign Office put it in the Spring of 1945 "If we tried to enforce our form of democracy upon them (i.e. Eastern Europe—WP) we should endanger our policy of cooperation with the USSR over an issue which was not vital to our interests in Europe, but which the Soviet Government regarded as essential to their security."

But if there was no real alternative for Imperialism in Europe but to accept the requests of the Soviet bureaucracy the two major Western powers were set on restricting the growth of Soviet influence elsewhere in the Globe. At the Yalta conference the USSR had agreed to enter the war against Japan in the aftermath of Germany's surrender. Such an entry would, of course, have paved the way for Soviet claims to influence in the vital areas of the Pacific historically coveted and tended by US imperialism. The decision of Truman to destroy Nagasaki and Hiroshima with the previously unheralded US atomic bomb was a brutal assertion that the US had the power and barbarous intent to dominate world politics and to brook no further expansion of the influence of the Soviet bureaucracy. "I'm tired of babying the Soviets" declared Truman soon after. "We possessed powers which were irresistible. Our outlook on the future was transformed." declared Churchill on hearing of the news that meant 78,000 immediate deaths in Hiroshima and 100,000 dead in Nagasaki three days later on the very day the Soviet Union declared war on Japan!

By the end of the war the US bourgeoisie had undisputed dominance within the shattered world economy. US capitalism possessed 3/4 of the world's invested capital and two thirds of the world's industrial capacity. Alone amongst the world's powers it possessed the atomic bomb. Its previous major capitalist rival—the British bourgeoisie—had suffered the final col-

lapse of their pretensions to being number one imperialist power. British exports declined from £471m to £258m between 1938 and 1945 while its imports increased from £858m to £1,299m. The British bourgeoisie's overseas debt increased five fold in this period. The principle obstacle to US dominance of world politics, world markets and raw materials was the expanded power of the Soviet bureaucracy to which the US bourgeoisie had acquiesced at the end of the Second World War.

Throughout the war the US imperialists acted to ensure that vital raw materials would be under the control of the US corporations and US backed regimes. Nowhere was this more striking than in the case of oil supplies from the Middle East. US relations with the oil producing states (Mid-East oil production in the mid-30s increased 12 times) have historically been dominated by the oil corporations. Before 1941 there was no US diplomatic representation in Saudi Arabia, for example, all diplomatic questions being handled by the Standard Oil Company. During the war however the US set out to intervene more directly in the Middle East—particularly in Iran and Saudi Arabia and attempted to squeeze out British Imperialism's influence in the area. The mounting recognition of the centrality of controlling Saudi oil was voiced, bluntly and crudely in a telephone call from Forrestal of the US Navy Department to Secretary of State Byrnes:

"But the main thing is that stack of oil is something that this country damn well ought to have and we've lost, in the last 90 days, a good deal of our position with this Sheikh—Even Suido, whatever his name is—and we are losing more every day."

and more formally in the *Petroleum Policy of the United States* of April 11th 1944 that declared: "Furthermore, and of greater importance, United States policy should, in general, aim to ensure to this country, in the interests of security, a substantial and geographically diversified holding of foreign petroleum resources in the hands of United States nationals. This should involve the preservation of the absolute position presently obtaining, and therefore vigilant protection of existing concessions in United States hands coupled with insistence upon the Open Door principle of equal opportunity for United States companies in new areas."

In this period too the stage was set for turning Iran into a semi-colony of the US. In 1941 the USSR and the UK invaded the pro-German Iran of Reza Shah establishing their own respective zones of influence in the North and South of the country. At the end of the war as Soviet troops withdrew from Iran so the US oil companies moved in and pressurised the Iranian government to tear up signed oil concessions to the USSR.

By 1946 the US had troops in 56 countries on every single continent. Only the planned economy of the USSR by its nature, and the capitalist economies of Eastern Europe because of the breakdown of world trade, put them outside the scope of the export of US capital and the US control of vital raw materials within the world economy. It is no surprise therefore that the US sought to break up the deal signed between Imperialism and Stalinism at the end of the war. On October 27th 1945—after the carnage of Hiroshima and Nagasaki—President Truman had declared: "We believe that all states which are accepted in the society of nations should have access on equal terms to the trade and the raw materials of the world." Accordingly the USSR—whose planned economy does not grant the US 'equal access' to its raw materials—was refused the \$6 billion credit it was seeking for reconstruction. But for the other economies—including the then capitalist economies of East Europe—came the offer of Marshall Aid from the US in exchange for 'Open Door' access for US investment and exploitation. The Marshall Aid offer of June 1947

was a clear attempt to use US economic might to prise the states of East Europe loose from the Soviet sphere of influence. It had been preceded by Churchill's call to arms against Communism in Fulton Missouri in March 1946 and the announcement of the 'Truman Doctrine' of March 1946.

"I believe that we must assist free peoples to work out their own destinies in their own way. I believe that our help should be primarily through economic and financial aid which is essential to economic stability and orderly political progress."

That the US ruling class was set on 'rolling back' the USSR is underlined by Truman's order to start production of the hydrogen bomb in January 1950—only 4 months after the Soviet Union exploded its first atomic bomb and 3 months after the Chinese Communist Party had seized power in China. It is evidenced by the drive of the US dominated UN troops in Korea in 1950 towards the Yalu river in order to deliberately engineer a military showdown with the armed forces of the new Chinese People's Republic. It was the purpose for the creation of NATO as an anti-Soviet Alliance in April 1949.

In the 1950s US imperialism experienced its period of expansion and relative stability without having succeeded in undoing the agreements of the Yalta and Potsdam conferences. The Stalinist bureaucracy responded to Truman's Cold War drive by cutting off its East European zone of influence from the world capitalist market as far as possible and remodelling the economy, society and political life of the buffer states along the lines of Stalin's Russia. But it made no effort to rebuff the US drive for world domination.

Central to American strategy was the arming of 5 key anti-Soviet garrison states—Turkey, Greece, South Korea, South Vietnam and Formosa. Between 1946 and 1961 1/2 of all US grants to foreign countries went to these five puppet states. Between 1946 and 1958 Greece received three times the amount of US 'aid' destined to India and Latin America together. With complete confidence the US could move into South Vietnam in 1954, following the defeat of the French at Dien Bien Phu, and send troops to Guatemala in 1954 to oust the Arbenz government which was initiating a mild land reform programme to the disadvantage of the US owned, United Fruit Company, and to engineer a similar 'stabilisation' in the Dominican Republic in 1956. Whilst all of this was carried through behind a barrage of anti-Soviet rhetoric—Eisenhower's UN delegate Cabot Lodge railed at the UN over Guatemala:

"I say to you, representative of the Soviet Union, stay out of this hemisphere and don't try to start your plans and your conspiracies over here"—the truth was that during the 1950s the US was at the pinnacle of its world influence. The Soviet bureaucracy—holding on to its gains from the war—was itself prepared to assist the USA in partitioning Vietnam at the 1954 Geneva congress and cling desperately to 'peaceful coexistence' with Imperialism, highlighting concretely that for the Stalinists the deals struck at Yalta and Potsdam were of strategic importance whilst for the imperialists they were a tactical compromise forced on them by the unfavourable balance of forces at the end of World War Two.

It is symbolic of US world hegemony in this period that between 1946 and 1953 the US was defeated in the toothless UN on only 3% of 800 resolutions. Barring Eastern Europe, the USSR and China—covering a not inconsiderable 800 million of the world's population—US imperialism could confidently claim the majority of the world as its 'sphere of influence'. It could confidently engineer the 1953 coup against the nationalist regime of Mossadegh in Iran to secure guaranteed access for the US corporations to Iranian oil, knowing that there was no force capable of baulking US global strategy.

The Soviet bureaucracy had no interest in anything other than preserving its sphere of influence as a bargaining counter with imperialism. This craven counter-revolutionary caste must, of necessity, attempt to preserve the planned property relations from which it draws its material privileges and political power. To that extent it stands in opposition to the drive of imperialism to kick down all doors and open all markets for itself. But its deep, and materially realistic, fear of the working masses which it has deprived of all political power and from whom it must daily disguise its parasitism behind the guarded gates of its dachas and the thick curtains of its limousines means that, of necessity, the Soviet bureaucracy strives for coexistence with imperialism against the interests of the oppressed and exploited. Despite the ritual demagoguery of the White House, the decline of US imperialism that was to take place in the 1960s and 1970s was not the work of the Kremlin bureaucracy.

On the contrary the anti-imperialist struggles that have characterised the last 20 years have often been directed against the wishes and aims of the Kremlin, even though they have sought to exploit the openings created by those struggles which have weakened the USA. It is the desire and determination of the White House to close these openings and re-establish its control (in Latin America, Middle East, Africa) that gives stridency to the 'new' Cold War of the 1980s. ■

In the next article in this two-part series, we will deal with the decline in the fortunes of the American imperialists, as the mounting tide of anti-imperialist struggles grew in the 1960s and 1970s. We will also deal with the attempts of Carter and Reagan, finding themselves presiding over an increasingly crisis-wracked nation, to take America back to the heyday of US imperialism.



Potsdam, 1945: Truman and Stalin split it two ways; Churchill and Attlee look on.

workers power

LEYLAND: WHY WE ARGUED

Occupation can beat the lock-out

THE LEYLAND SHOWDOWN with Edwardes faced workers not with an ordinary strike over a wage-claim but with the alternative of closure or the smashing of the whole Edwardes Plan and the Tory government's wage-cutting 4% limit.

Edwardes made clear from the outset that his answer to a strike was a lock-out. **WORKERS POWER** said that the key to victory lay in a mass occupation of the plants.

WORKERS POWER bulletins produced prior to the Leyland strike repeatedly stressed that the key to smashing Edwardes, and spearheading an offensive against the Tories, lay in occupying the plants from the very start of the dispute. "On Friday 30th, all workers must remain in their shops!" declared our bulletin for BL workers at the Castle Bromwich plant. "The answer is to strike and stay in the plants, holding them against Edwardes and defending them against the use of court injunctions etc" argued our Longbridge plant bulletin.

The factory occupation can secure the maximum sanction for the workers against the bosses. By holding the bosses' plant and machinery until the demands of the workforce are met, the workers have immeasurably more leverage and real bargaining strength, than when they find themselves outside the gates. All management plans to move plant, hive off equipment and maintain essential services for themselves can be definitively foiled in advance.

But more decisively, the occupation strike is the best means of involving the great mass of the workforce directly in struggle on an ongoing, day-to-day basis. A long strike, however effectively its picket rotas are organised, and however large the pickets may be, of necessity leaves a significant section of the workforce in the isolation of their homes. There they are far more vulnerable to the entreaties of the spineless trade union leaders, to the insidious propaganda of the press, and the blackmail of the employers. The truth of this has been bitterly testified to by the votes at the mass meetings at Longbridge.

Two days of union leaders, "impartial" TV commentators, economists and company spokesmen beamed into every Leyland workers' home obviously under-

mined the collective strength and solidarity of the workforce. The hundreds on the picket line could keep up their morale by joint action, and discussion which far outweighed the media barrage. Not so the dispersed thousands.

Even where anger at the company and hope for an effective fight enables the bulk of workers to vote for a fight as at Cowley, isolation and non-involvement in the strike would during the duration of the strike, have threatened to sap morale. These demoralised workers could then be used as a battering ram against the militant minority actively involved in the picketing.

The occupation makes possible regular involvement of a far broader layer of the workforce. Through regular mass meetings, through discussions and arguments with their workmates, these workers - learning from the real solidarity of the occupation itself - can be made far more impervious to the bosses and media than ever they could be if they are left isolated at home except when summoned to meetings by the trade union officials.

The immediate prelude to the Leyland strike underlined just how treacherous the union leaders are, particularly when they face a resolute employer. The out-of-the-gate strike leaves the initiative for organising the dispute in the hands of outright traitors like Duffy or of the deceitful "I leave it up to you, lads" brigade such as Kitson.

Once militants are outside the plant it becomes far more difficult for them to challenge these misleaders and take the running of the dispute out of the hands of the officials and their yes-men of the network convenors and senior stewards. The timing of mass meetings, the tactics of the dispute, the behind-the-scenes dealings all become the property of the union bureaucrats.

The occupation makes possible the holding of regular democratic mass meetings to maintain the mass involvement of the workforce. It can be the base for the election of a strike leadership accountable to, and automatically recallable by, the rank and file themselves.

Those new layers of previously inexperienced workers - particularly the younger ones - who always come to the fore in a fight as potential new leaders

ORGANISE THE MILITANT MINORITY

CONTINUED FROM FRONT PAGE

The disgraceful TGWU leaders refused to take responsibility for the deal they had made with Edwardes. Cowardly Kitson evaded hours of media questioning as to whether he was calling for rejection or not. Grenville Hawley, TGWU chief negotiator, showed his true colours when he hailed the vote for acceptance as a "responsible decision". Chapple's EETPU urged acceptance with their negotiator Sanderson making it abundantly clear that if the mass meetings voted for strike action, the union would give official backing, but "We should be supporting it without any enthusiasm".

No wonder that with such Generals, thousands of Leyland workers opted not to do battle with an employer who meant business and who had the full backing of the Tory government. But it would be too easy to leave the matter there.

The size and militancy of the pickets at Cowley and Longbridge and the size of the minority voting for action, indicates two things. A potential layer of militant shop floor leaders exists and they can connect with an angry rank and file ready to fight back against years of humiliation and betrayal. What the militants lacked was the right policies, the right tactics and the right demands. They also lacked the organisation capable of winning control of the dispute and seizing the

initiative from the bureaucrats.

This organisation must be built up in the coming months and years. It must be built to resist Edwardes' renewed dictatorship. It must be built to kick out Boyd, Duffy and Hawley and Kitson.

The "Broad Left" leadership of Robinson and Adams has proved its bankruptcy time and time again. BL militants need to organise not primarily in a vote-catching machine for born-to-losers like George Wright, nor in an uncritical supporters club for the convenors and senior shop stewards.

A rank and file movement must aim itself firstly at the men and women on the shopfloor. It must issue shop and plant bulletins. If the resources can be gathered, it must produce a factory news-sheet to hammer the propaganda of management and their agents in our unions - week in, week out.

Such a movement must set out to campaign to transform the undemocratic structures of the unions from bottom to top. The routinism, bureaucracy and antiquated structure of the unions work against them actively involving the vast majority of workers.

Shop meetings with real democratic debate need to be fought for. Militants cannot afford to be seen as a minority of manipulators, but must stand as honest fighters for workers democracy even when they don't win. They can win the trust of the rank and file only when they fight for the right tactics, the right demands, even when the majority is clearly against them. If, as the mass meetings showed,

with the wrong leadership huge majorities can turn into minorities overnight, then the reverse is also true.

But such a rank and file organisation must go beyond the struggle in the factories or in the union structures. Edwardes is not just a dictatorial manager. The cheers and applause at the CBI conference when the Leyland votes were announced and Thatcher's delight indicates that he was acting for his class. Leyland workers are the victims of the drive to break up and hive off those nationalised industries the bosses think are profitable.

They are the victims of these bosses' grim determination to shift the balance towards profit by increasing productivity and holding down wages. This is not, as Thatcher and the bosses claim, a matter of rejuvenating the industry in the future. Our bosses are capitalists first and foremost, not industrialists. There is no way within their system of directing their capital to provide jobs for the 3 million unemployed. On the contrary, their "investment" will go wherever it yields the most profit - into financial speculation, into automation or into low wage economies where the workers are super-exploited.

Thatcher and Co crusade openly under the banner of capitalism. The militant minority can only fight back under the banner of the complete overthrow of her system and its replacement by working class power, that alone can build a planned economy that would meet human need, not the greed of Edwardes and his ilk. ■



A year ago, Gardner's workers stopped the closure of their plant. Longbridge and Cowley workers could have stopped Edwardes' shut-down. Picture: John Sturrock (Report)

and organisers, can be drawn in alongside more experienced workers to strengthen the daring and resilience of the strike leadership. Such a renewed leadership, tied to the mass of workers in the occupation, can challenge the bureaucrats from a real base of support, and continue and extend the dispute when the officials, inevitably, try to sell it out.

In the face of the 4% limit and the Thatcher government's drive to break trade union strength, *solidarity action*, galvanising the entire workers movement behind those workers in the front line of battle, becomes ever more decisive. If Edwardes had been smashed, then millions of workers in the mines, the public sector and at Fords, would be immeasurably strengthened in their resolve to destroy the Tory government's plans.

The 1971 occupation of Upper Clyde Shipbuilders - despite its inadequacies - served as an enormous boost to the struggle to defeat Heath. Occupied plants, democratically run by the workers themselves, would be a visible focus for national and local solidarity to ensure victory.

But what was and is at stake in the struggles at Leyland, at Lawrence Scott in Manchester and Staffa in East London is more than simply protecting jobs and living standards. These disputes all pose sharply the question of challenging management's right to manage, to set the pace of work and decide on manning levels. At Lawrence Scott management wants to decide how many, and which, workers it will employ. At Leyland the management want to buttress their draconian police regime in the plants. The occupation directly challenges management's self-given right to manage. The seizure of their offices makes it possible

for workers to inspect the accounts, minutes and internal memoranda that the employers have not been able to smuggle out of the plants. It makes it possible for workers to scrutinise, and challenge, the cooked books and secret accounts of the employing class. It is no accident that Edwardes hired convoys of security vans to get his secret documents out of the plants. An occupation, a sit-down strike on 30th October, could have stopped him.

The last years have seen a serious erosion of shop floor bargaining power. The occupation strike, welding the workforce behind a tried, tested and accountable leadership, opens the road not only to defend wages and jobs, but also to challenge management *after the dispute*, to fight for work speeds, for hiring and firing, to be taken directly under the control of workers representatives.

But in the weeks of preparation for the decisive showdown at Leyland, the rest of the British left failed, without exception, to raise the call for the immediate occupation of the plants. Fresh from discovering that perhaps Edwardes wasn't bluffing after all, the Socialist Workers Party (SWP) produced a leaflet for Longbridge saying: "If Adolf Edwardes tries to sack us or close BL, we should occupy the plants and call on the rest of the Labour Movement to stop work in support of us".

Socialist Organiser explained on the 22nd of October that "BL militants must immediately fight for a policy of occupying the plants as soon as the first plant closure is announced"...a call that is notably absent from their 29th of October paper.

The November 1981 bulletin of the Leyland Action Committee - which is backed by Socialist Organiser supporters -

contained no call for occupation whatsoever.

If the workforce were already outside the gates, the successful launching of an occupation would have presented massive problems in the face of an organised lockout. But more seriously, these militants still have a crippling belief that the old methods of trade union struggle are adequate to win the battles of the day, and that revolutionaries dare not raise demands that don't strike an immediate chord with militant workers prepared to do battle.

We are not surprised if the majority of Leyland workers were not ready or prepared for the call for an occupation. No one prepared them. They know that the police have perfected their armed squads to break up pickets and that, as at Staffa, they have sufficient force to break up occupations of small groups of workers. They fear that court injunctions can be used against them to order them out of occupations. But the size of the plants and workforce in Leyland means that there are more than enough workers to hold the plants in the face of police attack and call for mass support should attempts be made to dislodge them.

The task of revolutionaries is to attempt to lead the working class, not tail it. Boyd and the Right will stand up and fight to break strikes. We must stand and be counted with a programme that guarantees victory whether it is immediately acceptable to the workforce or not. The art of winning leadership is to prove, in practice, that the revolutionaries are the ones who have consistently argued the correct path for the dispute and have successfully warned of the pitfalls and blind allies that confront workers. ■

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