

Workers power

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The Mines



Ireland

& "STATE CAPITALISM"

TORIES GO ALL OUT FOR DE-UNIONISATION

THATCHER'S ATTEMPT TO ban trade unions at Cheltenham GCHQ should come as no surprise. The Tories are taking advantage of Shah's victory over the NGA and the spineless behaviour of the TUC to step up their attack on trade union rights.

The Tories intend to remove the rights of GCHQ workers under the Employment Protection Act. If they get their way, the Cheltenham workers will lose their right to appeal to Industrial Tribunals and to belong to a trade union. Thatcher and Howe want to force GCHQ workers to join an "approved" staff association - i.e. a yellow house union that works hand in hand with management.

This is a foretaste of the government's plans for other groups of public sector workers. Thatcher has never hidden his admiration for "Japanese-style" company unions. Tebbit and King have both made it clear that the next round of planned anti-union legislation will be aimed at curbing trade union rights in "essential services". By "essential services" they mean industries or trades within which organised workers can pose a real challenge to the government.

The health workers, NUPE and COHSE, electricity workers, EETPU, the water-workers in GMBTU, and the Fire Brigades Union, are all prime targets for the Tories if they get away with their trial run at Cheltenham. Those groups who have shown themselves willing to use industrial action to defend their living standards and services, despite the ferocious media campaigns against them, must stand four-square behind the workers at Cheltenham.

There are special reasons why the government moved quickly to isolate Cheltenham. The banning of unions could be linked to "national security" in the aftermath of the Prime affair.

The Tories were quite happy to unscrupulously imply that spying and security risks were somehow connected with trade unionism. It was quickly leaked to the press that MI5 had "uncovered a small Militant tendency cell" at Cheltenham. A further reason for their action was the fact that the trade unions had supported their members in opposing the introduction of polygraphs (lie detectors) as a condition of work. This was obviously too much for American Intelligence and, hoping to kill two birds with one stone, Thatcher was quick to oblige.

There can be no doubt that Cheltenham will be the thin end of the wedge. The Tories are out to significantly reduce the ability of the trade unions to defend their members. The NGA dispute demonstrated how much they have already achieved. Virtually any effective trade union action, picketing, blacking, sympathetic strike action, etc is now already illegal, and opens the unions to massive fines. The legislation presently going through parliament aims at undermining the strength of the closed

shop and the trade unions' links with the Labour Party.

Add to this the present attempt to dramatically extend the number of workers either forbidden to join a union or to take industrial action, and it can be seen that the Tories do not intend to let up in this aim. The government intends to give the lead to a whole number of new "high technology" industries, particularly in the South, which will be "no go" areas for trade unions. If the Cheltenham decision is not fought and the rights of ordinary trade unionists defended, then workers will see the reintroduction on a wide scale of the notorious "document" so beloved by the bosses in the last century.

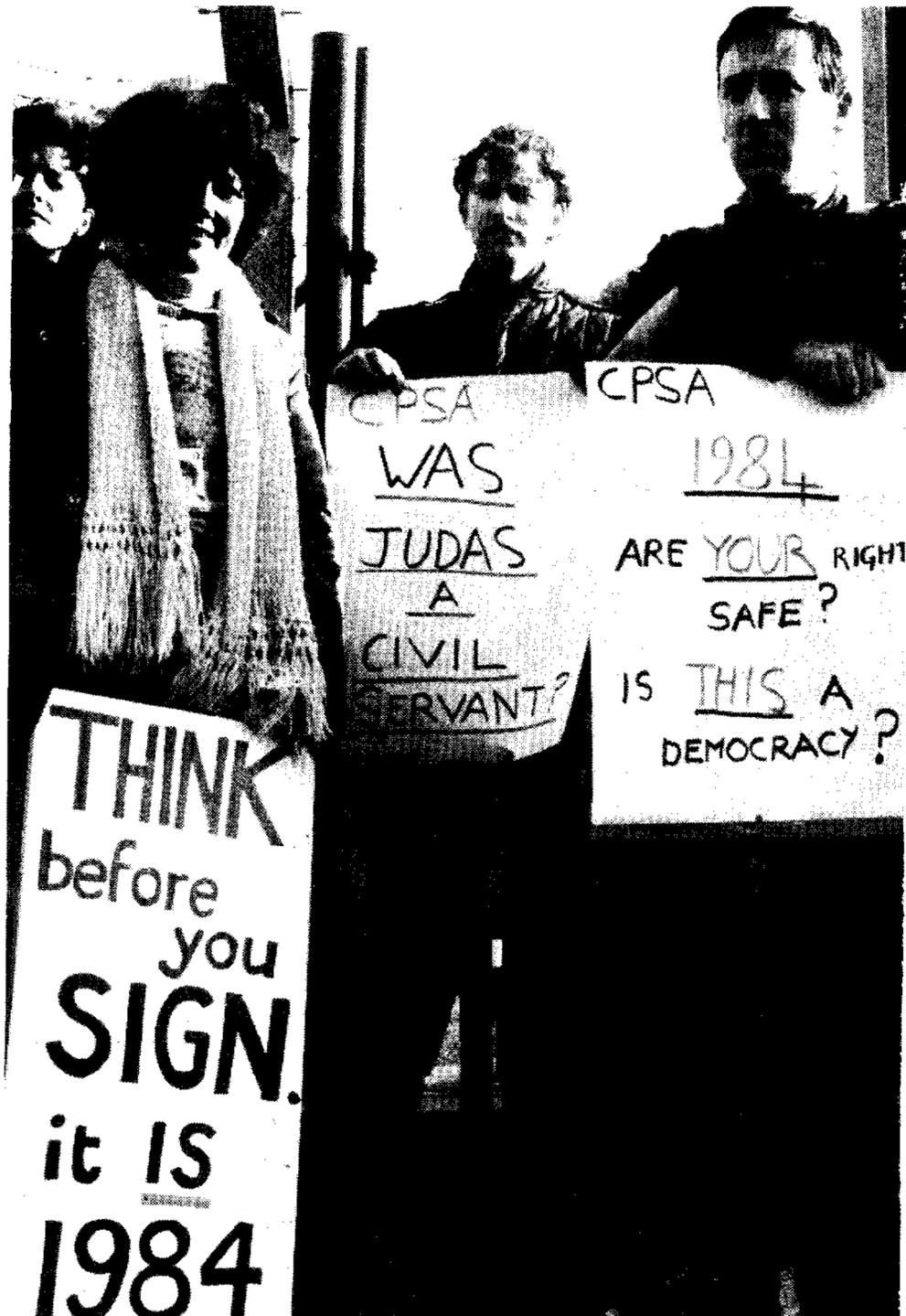
The Tories are out to recreate the conditions under which workers will have to sign away their trade union membership in order to get a job.

How have the TUC and the Civil Service Unions Committee responded to this further threat to trade union rights? Predictably, they have responded in the same way they did to the NGA struggle. Having sabotaged that fight and re-opened "reasonable dialogue" with the Tories, Murray and Co were rewarded with a straight kick in the teeth from Thatcher.

This has not prevented Murray from scrambling to get inside No. 10 for more negotiations. Unfortunately for the Cheltenham workers, this has meant negotiating away their right to take industrial action. Whilst the 4500 trade unionists at Cheltenham appear to have remained solid in rejecting the government's £1000 bribe to leave the unions, their leaders have been desperate to stop their protests disrupting the Centre. Instead, they have offered a "no disruption agreement" which will cover unions at Cheltenham. By this they will accept Thatcher's "minimum terms". They have been completely supported by Kinnock and the PLP leadership.

Thatcher has insisted on prevention of access to industrial tribunals, prevention of industrial disruption at GCHQ, a ban on union officials "interfering" at Cheltenham, and for negotiations to be restricted to GCHQ. In offering to agree to these points, through the "no disruption" agreement, Murray and the Civil Service union leaders are trying to save the nominal right to join a trade union by sacrificing its very essence - they are offering Thatcher "trade unions without trade unionism".

The workers at Cheltenham must reject these attempts to tie their hands completely. They must absolutely defend their right to strike and take any other industrial action they see fit. **If the government wants to prevent disruption to its so-called "security services", let it pay the workers a living wage and provide decent conditions".** If Cheltenham is not to be established as the model of Tory "industrial relations" then the entire labour movement must rally to the side of the GCHQ workers.



JOHN HARRIS (IFL)

- The workers at Cheltenham must:
- reject any negotiations centred on a "no disruption" agreement.
 - demand their leaders call an immediate strike at GCHQ in defence of trade union rights, supported by strike action throughout the civil service.
 - develop links with the other public sector

- unions under threat, to call solidarity strike action with the Cheltenham workers. Develop the Public Sector Alliance as a fighting rank and file organisation.
- call on the TUC leaders to break off all negotiations with the government and to organise immediate and effective action from affiliated trade unions. ■

MITTERRAND'S AUSTERITY DRIVE

Migrant workers start the fightback

THE DRAMATIC SCENES around and inside the Talbot car plant at Poissy indicated in the sharpest fashion possible that all is not well with Francois Mitterrand's 'Socialist' government. Its hypocritically phrased policy of 'rigour' or stringency - the word 'austerity' would give the game away - has run into serious opposition - despite the best efforts of the Socialist and Communist Parties and the leaders of the major union Federations. The fightback of the mainly immigrant workers of Poissy against redundancies holds important lessons for the French working class itself. The involvement of racists from the far right in violent attacks on the strikers, the government's role in originally sending in the CRS (not the police) to clear the plant, the treacherous role of the CGT and CFDT union leaders and the confusion of the rank and file leaders, all indicate the problems French workers must solve in their resistance to attempts to unload the full costs of the crisis onto their backs.

However the militant resistance of the Poissy workers and the effects this had on relations between Socialist and Communist Parties in Mitterrand's coalition, calls into question the ability of these reformists to force the austerity measures through. It also poses the very stability and future of the government in the medium term.

The Poissy events were sparked off by the Talbot management's plans to slash the workforce. In the Spring of last year, Talbot announced they wanted to reduce the 17,000 workforce by around 40%. This led to a one-day protest strike in July and the groundswell of shopfloor opposition that erupted five months later. Talbot is part of the Citroen-Peugeot-Talbot combine, PSA, France's largest private company, with plants in Britain and Spain. PSA has been in deep trouble in recent years, losing a total of F.Fr 6 billion since 1980. Talbot has been a major drain in PSA's finances: between 1978 and 1982, Talbot's output nosedived by 43.6%, taking only 4.5% of the French domestic market, as compared to 8.7% in 1978. To combat this decline, PSA is proposing a 10% cut in its total workforce. The Poissy sackings, linked with a F.Fr 1.2 billion investment plan to install robot production techniques by 1985, formed part of the Talbot end of this scheme.

Over half the workers at Poissy are North Africans encouraged to come to France throughout the 1950's and 1960's by successive Gaullist governments in search of plentiful, cheap labour and a manipulable workforce. As unemployment has increased in recent years, so too has racism and the popularity of repatriation 'solutions' to the so called problem of the immigrant workers. The government, and therefore the Socialist and Communist Parties, have been actively touting for immigrants to go 'home' in return for a few thousand pounds.

Until last year the predominant organisation amongst the Poissy workers was the yellow union the CSL, a 'union' set up by the previous owners of the plant, Citroen. This outfit which organises foremen and scabs against the other unions and is heavily influenced by the fascist far right and the racist right-wing of the Gaullists, maintained its hold due to intimidation and to the isolation and language problems of the immigrant workforce. Here it must be said that the self-satisfied indifference and French chauvinism of the CGT and CFDT union leaders contributed enormously to the failure of the unions to organise the plant.

Yet the attacks of management and the CSL thugs produced a radicalising effect on the immigrant workers. In the factory-wide elections for workplace delegates which took place last summer, the CGT headed the poll for the first time, taking 42% of the vote, the CSL received 35%. The Socialist-led CFDT 9% and the more right wing FO received 4%. The CGT gained ground rapidly because of the support it had won during the previous year's battles over pay. It had gathered some 4,000 militant workers around it in the plant. The CFDT only had a handful of members - less than 20 - in the plant, and were in no position to challenge the overwhelming influence of the CGT at Poissy.

Following the original announcement of a 40% reduction in the workforce, PSA got government agreement for 4,500 job losses in the shape of 'early retirement', in the autumn. However, PSA would not budge on the need to sack 2905 workers outright. With this threat hanging over them, several thousand workers on the morning shift went on strike and occupied the plant on the 7th December. This was against the advice of the CGT who argued that negotiations with management should continue. Hurried negotiations between the government and the PSA resulted in management dropping their figure by 1000 on the 17th December. However they remained adamant that if they didn't get the 1905 sackings they would close the plant. PSA even took steps towards this by transferring ownership of Poissy to a phantom company, SORA, which could be put into liquidation without jeopardising the rest of their French holdings.

Cowed by this threat the CGT caved in and joined the CSL and FO in agreeing to the job losses. They argued that the key question was to negotiate over the redundancy terms and preserve the rest of the jobs. Indeed, the PCF daily, *L'Humanite*, hailed the agreement as 'a victory!' This 'victory' proved a pyrrhic one. For the CGT itself, many of their members had been increasingly looking to the CFDT during the occupation. Two days after the 'victory'



Poissy workers.

of 1905 job losses, the CFDT called for a joint strike committee composed of CFDT members and CGT dissidents. By the time this committee was formed, on the 4th January, around 1000 workers had pledged their allegiance to it and to the fight for 'no redundancies.'

The local CFDT were nominally supported in their action by the national federation, and its ironically violently pro-austerity leader, Edmond Maire. The CFDT has been declining in size and influence since the election of Mitterrand in 1981. Part of the reason for this has been the leadership's enthusiastic support for the government's savage attacks on the French working class. Maire therefore cynically seized this opportunity to restore his federation's fortunes and his own soiled reputation at the expense of the CGT. The local CFDT militants largely accepted Maire's pronouncements at face value. Rather than warning of his hypocrisy and likely betrayal, rather than organising independently of his 'leadership', they put their faith in his support and in exchange offered no criticism of him. These concessions eventually produced disastrous consequences. They were to finally accept the logic of redundancies and repatriation, calling for 'no redundancies', but for lay-offs on full pay for 3 months in order to allow negotiations to find jobs for those who were to be sacked, and to provide more generous terms for repatriation payments.

Such mistakes would be perfectly understandable if all that was involved was a spontaneous struggle by very recently organised workers or if the rank and file leadership had been in the hands of social democrats and Stalinists. But the CFDT local leadership was heavily influenced by the 'Trotskyists' of the LCR (French section of the USFI). The LCR's policy throughout was woefully inadequate - lacking in elementary militant trade union tactics as well as marked by a passivity towards the trade union bureaucrats. They raised no call for solidarity action throughout the PSA combine, or in the neighbouring Renault plant at Flins, where a prominent 'left' CFDT leader Daniel Richter works. Instead the struggle for solidarity was limited by the LCR to workplace collections.

The strike committee, only proposed after the occupation was nearly two weeks old - was not based on the whole workforce through election at a mass meeting, but was simply composed of those workers who wished to join it. No attempt was made to create an authoritative plant-wide leadership with recallable and accountable members. Worse, the occupation was not properly defended. Given the presence of so many militant immigrant workers, and the known fascist links of many of the foremen in the CSL, defence squads were an elementary necessity to protect the workers from attacks. These failings on the part of the local CFDT and the LCR members cost the Poissy workers dear and contributed to the eventual defeat of the fight against redundancies.

As the occupation remained on the defensive over Christmas, the PSA and the government returned to the attack. Following a court order on December 27th, a 1500 CRS riot police were mobilised outside the plant on New Year's Eve, threatening to smash up the occupation. Faced with this assault, the 200 workers in occupation decided to leave peacefully. The plant was due to reopen on the 3rd January. The CGT called on everyone to return to work, promising to hold a referendum over the redundancy terms some time in the future. The CFDT militants could not go along with this, and through the growing strike committee, organised pickets. Management locked all the workers out, and there were repeated clashes between the pickets, mainly North Africans, and the white members of the CSL. These clashes flared up on the 5th January when hundreds of CSL thugs, armed with staves and guns, and backed up by fascists and foremen brought in from other Talbot plants, attacked about 100 CFDT pickets. The pickets were forced to retreat into the B+ building, where a pitched battle ensued. Catapults were used to fire heavy bolts the length of the track, and the plant was ransacked for potential weapons.

Fifty-five people were injured, nineteen were hospitalised.

Fearing a massacre of their members, and in the absence of any effective mobilisation in defence of the pickets, the local CFDT leaders mistakenly called in the cops to quell the fighting. The police set about their task with relish, expelling both groups of workers from the plant. Shaken by the violence, and under heavy pressure both from the CFDT leadership and the CGT, the local section of the CFDT called off the strike on the 9th January. Tripartite negotiations between the unions, PSA management and the government took place, and now the CFDT went along with the CGT's line of accepting the 1905 sackings and arguing over the terms of the redundancies - repatriation payments, retraining allowances etc.

The events at Poissy, and the inability of the CGT and PCF to control the dispute, have sent a shock-wave through the French working class and the PS/PCF administration. Taunted by the claim of Maire, the CFDT leader, that "the (Communist) Party and the union it controls have become a transmission line between authority and the workers", the PCF have tried to present a left face towards the growing austerity programme. Following a long PCF Central Committee meeting on the 18th January, PCF leader George Marchais stated, "Not one more redundancy from now on. Technical progress does not necessarily mean fewer jobs... Nothing can justify the present plans for sweeping redundancies". And the leader of the CGT, Henri Krasucki, said, "On redundancies as well as purchasing power, these are things which cannot be tolerated by French workers."

The PCF hope to be able to head off a storm of unrest which they fear will be gathering in 1984. Mitterrand's austerity programme is beginning to bite. The government wants to hold wage rises below 5% in the coming year. Inflation at the end of 1983 stood at 9.3%. Elected on a pledge to keep unemployment below 2 million, Mitterrand is now faced with the jobless total over 2.2 million, and rising at the rate of 30,000 a month. The 200,000 job losses being looked for by the bosses have the support of the government because they feel they will enable French capital to become more productive and competitive.

It does not look likely to be plain sailing, however. Most of the job losses are threatened in some of the best organised sections of the French working class, with a strong CGT influence. Thirty five thousand steelworkers are to be sacked as \$1 billion is cut from the nationalised industry; 8,000 miners are to lose their jobs, with a further 12,000 over the next four years. Two thousand textile workers, 6,000 engineers, 10,000 shipbuilding workers and 100,000 in construction all face the dole queue. With that scale of attacks, coupled with wage restraint, increased taxation, and a decline in popularity in local and workplace elections, the PS/PCF has its work cut out to maintain the allegiance of the working class and to prevent any major outbreak of industrial action.

While the PCF have been uttering left phrases, the PS have been sugaring the pill. The Prime Minister Pierre Mauroy, has launched a scheme whereby redundant workers will be able to attend 'retraining holidays' on full pay, grants will be made to sacked workers who want to set up their own business, and firms will be paid by the government if they take on sacked workers. The conciliatory mood of the government was made clear by Mauroy when he said, "In coal, steel and shipbuilding my aim is to ensure modernisation without redundancies... What we want is no loss of jobs at all. Wherever possible, workers being retrained will keep links with the business or industry where they worked, to avoid any feeling of rejection."

This is the latest in a long list of government attempts to hoodwink the workers and avoid a major confrontation over unemployment. Previous plays have involved the familiar litany of early retirement, youth training, "renaissance zones" for industry, and part-time work.

At the moment, the PS and the PCF can agree on this interpretation of "fighting unemployment". 'No

redundancies' becomes 'no worker on the dole' and allows for a whole variety of fake retraining schemes, pressure on immigrants to be repatriated, and so on. However it is possible that the relationship between the two parties of government will not continue to be so stable. Indeed, at another factory occupation in Lille, CGT leaders in the Massey tractor plant have refused to follow the CGT line of accepting 500 planned redundancies, pointing to the lessons of the Talbot dispute.

The relationship between the PCF and the PS is governed by the ability of the PCF to control the most militant sections of the working class. If the PCF were faced with a strike wave of such proportions that they felt forced to pull their Ministers out of the government in order to enable the CGT to stand at the head of it, Marchais would be prepared to part company with Mitterrand, Mauroy and the PS. It is likely that only a serious threat of losing its mass union base or an unlikely change in the 'advice' of the Kremlin bureaucracy could lead to the PCF taking such a move itself. However, this does not rule out the PS launching a pre-emptive strike by booting out of the office a party which was no longer able to control its rank and file.

At the moment, the key task for French workers is to organise against the government austerity plan, and against their bureaucratic leaders in the CGT and CFDT. The CGT and the PCF must be forced to support workers in struggle or be exposed and replaced if they will not. Militants must demand that all the union federations launch massive campaigns against any of the proposed 200,000 job losses. As Poissy shows however it will be fatal not to organise the rank and file to conduct their own struggle - fatal to mute ones warnings and criticisms of the union leaders. All-out strike action, led by representative, democratically elected strike committees must be organised where any plant is faced with sackings. Factories threatened with closure must be occupied, with organised defence squads to protect the workers against fascist provocations and CRS attack. All attempts at wage restraint must be resisted.

The PS and PCF arguments that concessions must be made by the workers to pressure Mitterrand's government must be combatted. If Mitterrand's government falls in defence of the bosses so much the worse for it. The experience of the last British government under Labour shows the fatal effects of attacks on the workers movement in preparing the ground for an even more right wing government. Mitterrand is merely preparing the way for Chirac. 'Sacrifices' to the bosses will not placate but encourage their demands for more blood. The reply militants should give to the pleas of the PS and PCF Ministers and the CGT and CFDT bureaucrats when they talk about the danger from the right is - go ahead and really attack the bosses, make them pay for the crisis of their system, not us. If you do this we will stand shoulder to shoulder against any play for power by the right. But now it is Mitterrand and his CP Ministers as well who are doing the bosses' dirty work and they must be fought.

In addition Poissy shows that the poison of racism and chauvinism in the French working class must be fought. Those immigrant workers who accept higher government grants to return home are - however understandably - seeking the wrong solution. Of course the French bosses should be made to pay adequately all those who after years of super-exploitation genuinely wish to return to their country of origin. But the French workers movement must argue to their 'immigrant' fellow workers - your 'home' is here in our ranks. They must combat all talk of an 'immigrant problem'. The only problem is capitalism's bankruptcy as a system and the poisonous fumes of racism and chauvinism it gives rise to. The leaders of the labour movement - not least the PCF heroes of Vitry - have a lot to answer for here. Class militants should fight for full civil rights, including citizenship rights for all workers resident in France including the right to vote. They should fight for the abolition of all immigration controls and work permits. They should support measures necessary to defend the immigrants against fascists or police harassment, including self-defence.

Only on this basis can the militant fightback that will erupt over the coming year be united and generalised into a united front of resistance against the government's attacks. Despite the fact that it is an oft whispered wish of many militants, getting the PCF out of the government would be a false goal. Demand that they cease their treacherous class collaborationist role, yes; but to direct the struggle into easing them out of the government so that they can renew their damaged credibility in opposition would be foolish. Certainly the PCF (and the PS for that matter) should make their deputies and Ministers vote against each and every anti-working class measure Mitterrand takes. But militants should relentlessly point out that the government parties do have a choice - to act for the workers or act against them. The fact that they repeatedly chose to do the latter demonstrates their anti-working class policies and intentions. They should not be let off this hook. By combining these demands with independent organisation, by offering the rank and file a real alternative leadership in the class struggle a genuine revolutionary party can be built that could make a reality of working class power in France. ■

From *Pouvoir Ouvrier* (Paris)

SINN FEIN: BEHIND THE 'LEFT TURN'

KEVIN BURKE, A chief publicist for Sinn Fein, was in no doubt about the significance of last November's Ard Fheis when he declared: "it can justly be described as a milestone in the party's long and dramatic political history." (Republican News, 17.11.83). The centrists of the Socialist League in Britain, always quick off the mark in spotting "leftward moving currents" were even bolder in their interpretation of socialist developments in Sinn Fein. They argued in Socialist Action that: "It's policies and leaders continued to move left." (18.11.83) that the consolidated Adams leadership was apparently "under the influence of Marxist politics", while the Ard Fheis had "deepened its commitment to a democratic socialist Republic" (25.11.83). Indeed so impressed were Peoples Democracy (PD), SL's fraternal group in Ireland within the United Secretariat of the Fourth International, that at its own conference a month later a minority of delegates pressed hard for closing down PD and joining Sinn Fein!

What happened in Dublin to warrant such testimonies? Amongst other things Sinn Fein chose to call itself a "socialist republican" party and downplay its Gaelic/Catholic roots and ideology. It agreed to campaign in the unions for "socialist policies" and to encourage the organisation of women in the party. Finally, the delegates agreed to take their seats in Strasbourg if elected in June in the Euro-elections, thus denting the hallowed principle of abstentionism.

Does this all add up to a step towards the kind of revolutionary socialist party the workers of Ireland (North and South) need? Has a watershed been reached, a decisive break with Sinn Fein's petit-bourgeois nationalist origins been affected? The answer is no. Stripped of rhetoric, the commitment to "socialist policies" remains as vacuous as ever. The pressures behind the declaration of a "socialist republican" party are easy enough to explain. On the one hand, the mass base of Sinn Fein has shifted drastically in the last 15 years towards the northern anti-unionist working class and away from the southern urban and rural petit-bourgeoisie. On the other, the commitment to a working alliance with the 26 county trade union bureaucracy makes it a required amendment.

Yet this alone is an insufficient explanation. We do not wish to deny that changes have taken place within Sinn Fein in the last few years. The point is that the shift in policies has a quite different cause, and the developments in the 1983 Ard Fheis a quite different significance, than the one suggested by Sinn Fein's centrist servants here and in Ireland.

To understand the nature and extent of these developments and the accuracy or otherwise of the claims made for them, it is necessary to analyse them in terms of the political and military impasse reached in the North by the strategy of the pure physical force tradition and Irish nationalism. This tradition had its historical roots in the emerging roots of Irish capitalism for a separate and independent bourgeois republic in the early 18th and 19th century. Sinn Fein was born as a conspiratorial military organisation with an ideology reflecting the isolation and weakness of an urban and rural petit-bourgeoisie. Its programme was, and re-

mains, the creation of a self-sufficient 32 county Ireland uniting Irish businessmen, workers, small farmers and shop keepers in largely co-operative enterprises. It was precisely the pro-capitalist basis of the republican movement in the war of independence (1918-21) that led to the eventual split in its ranks. The most powerful sections, the commercial and farming interests and the Catholic Church, opted for a compromise with British imperialism, not only for much less than a fully independent bourgeois republic but also accepting the secession of loyalist dominated Ulster where the most powerful concentrations of capitalist industry were located.

The Civil War that followed the split, with Britain supporting and arming the Free State forces (the newly created 26 county state with 6 gerrymandered Ulster counties remaining part of the UK) only served to expose the political limitations of the petit-bourgeois "die-hard" republicans. Despite the fact that they initially had the support of a majority of the working class in town and country, they could offer no radical social programme around which to build a serious political and military alternative to the British, Free State and Orange interests. Relying instead on a strategy of pure physical force, the die-hards were mercilessly crushed after a grim attritional guerrilla war fought mostly in the South and West of the country.

As a rescuer of the defeat of the anti-treaty forces one of its more astute petit-bourgeois leaders, Eamon De Valera, took the logical decision to abandon physical force and political abstentionism in order to return to the path of constitutional and parliamentary methods by entering the new Irish parliament (the Dail).

This period of Irish history contains all that is of the essence in republicanism. Republicanism fears to make enemies of the "nationally minded" bourgeois forces - whether on the right-wing of Fianna Fail, in the Church hierarchy, or in the American-Irish community from which it draws its important financial support for its struggle. Despite its occasional attacks on the "treachery" to Ireland of the bourgeois forces and the Church, republicanism does not strategically break with them by adopting thoroughgoing working class positions (expropriation of the expropriators regardless of nationality or religion; separation of Church and state; defence of the right of women to control their own fertility-contraception and abortion etc.) Here its formal political intransigence and refusal to take seats in the Dail, in the House of Commons, or in Stormont in fact leaves the field conveniently open to bourgeois forces. Republicanism, despite its heroism, its military daring, its progressive character vis-a-vis imperialism, shows that it stands on bourgeois class terrain - albeit on an idealised bourgeois politics which tries to meet each and every need of the worker, the small farmer, the small business man, the Church, the patriotic capitalist, etc. The political and economic schemes to produce this harmonisation of the Irish Nation are beautiful pipe dreams which ignore the reality of a class structure in Ireland - a large and organised proletariat, a rapidly declining number of small farmers and a ruling class of big businessmen, bankers and landowners absolutely tied up with the British, American and



John Sturrock (Network)

German monopolies that hold Ireland's economy in their iron (or golden) grip.

Republicanism dare not place itself unequivocally on the side of the Irish workers against their exploiters. It dare not espouse as its immediate aim a Workers Republic. Their message remains that of the post-World War 1 Republicans "Labour must Wait". Consequently, whilst it cannot for long ignore the reformist class, it appears before it as an alternative reformist leadership, joining the queue behind the Workers Party and the Irish Labour Party.

This is in essence what "community politics" means in the North. Perhaps the extension of this method to the South, the utilisation there of the prestige of a movement in armed combat with the imperialist exploiters of the whole Irish people may give them an edge over their wretched rivals. But for all the SF's revolutionary nationalism, they offer only reformist class collaboration to the working class and offer them an entirely auxiliary role in the struggle against imperialism.

For revolutionary communists the Irish working class is not an auxiliary but the essential central agent of the struggle to uproot imperialist exploitation which can only be done by uprooting capitalist exploitation. For us, therefore, class struggle cannot play second fiddle to "the armed struggle". Indeed for us the latter is a tactic, or rather a series of tactics, subordinate to the overall political class struggle. It is a means to an end at certain points in the struggle. In which the Republics' hands it becomes a fetish. One which at certain moments disorganises and disrupts the development of a mass struggle North and South. Whenever this disruption threatens to cut off the Republicans from their mass base in the northern Nationalist population, then a violent lurch to reformist "socialism" (do-it-yourself social welfare struggles) combined with electoralism, such as the one we are now witnessing, takes place.

Sinn Fein has therefore always oscillated between bourgeois politics (even if "communitarian-style") and guerrillaism. When the military campaign is isolated (1950s), crushed (1923) or at an impasse (1977) sections of SF open the door to full bourgeois politics by abandoning the armed struggle and abstentionism. This was the case with the Pro-Treaty forces, then De Valera, more recently the Officials and who knows who could be next. Each time the arguments and debates are repeated. The failure of the Border Campaign (1956-62), for example, led to a direct attack on abstentionism and the value of the military struggle in the North, and eventually a split within Sinn Fein in 1970. The outcome of last year's Ard Fheis is but another episode in the most recent "military slump/political boom" cycle of republican politics.

The recent shift in Sinn Fein's politics do not date from the 1983 Ard Fheis but from the political and military events in the North in 1976/77. By 1977 the British Government had regained the initiative they had lost as a result of the fall of Stormont in 1972. Under Labour's Roy Mason and Merlin Rees the Provos operational capacity had been severely weakened. The intense cross-border security arrangements that the Labour government enjoyed with the Southern government, the use of no jury Diplock courts, the ending of special category status etc all put the military struggle on the defensive. The Provos "One more Heave" strategy of military confrontation to kick out the British troops was looking increasingly threadbare.

The debate within the Provos and Sinn Fein 1977 over direction led to the victory of the ideas of the new generation of leaders, based in the North and educated in Long Kesh. As in 1962 after the failure of the Border Campaign the republicans pragmatically groped their way towards a more "political" strategy in response to the faltering armed struggle. What did this new orientation entail? Firstly it recognised that the fight to get the troops out would be a long haul given the British commitment to stay. Secondly it emphasised the

dangers of the military struggle being isolated in the North and pointed to the need to extend mobilisation to a 32 county basis - nominally at least recognising the importance of gaining workers' support. This led for instance to a cautious welcome being given to the formation of the Trade Union Campaign Against Repression (TUCAR) in the South and to the support given to a conference in January 1978, launched by PD and Bernadette McAliskey to launch the Relatives Action Committees.

The challenge by the Adams' faction succeeded, at the 1978 Ard Fheis, in getting Adams elected Vice-President and giving this group secure control of propaganda by merging the Dublin-based *An Phoblacht* with the Belfast *Republican News*, to be produced in the North. From a position of leadership Adams emphasised the new turn in June 1979: "We are not, and never have been, merely a 'Brits' force... We move... We stand opposed to all forms and all manifestations of imperialism and capitalism. We stand for an Ireland free, united, socialist, and Gaelic... We also require links with those oppressed by economic and social pressures. Today's circumstances and our objectives dictate the need for building an agitational struggle in the 26 counties, an economic resistance movement, linking up republicans with other sections of the working class." (AP, 23.6.79)

It is on the basis of declarations such as these that Irish and British centrists of the PD and SL stripe have detected, and set out to accommodate to, a supposed "socialist" or "marxist" evolution of Sinn Fein.

However, despite the rhetoric neither the "new" social and economic policies nor the proposed strategy for achieving them and for solving the national question - broad non-sectarian fronts - had anything to do with forging a revolutionary working class alternative to imperialism and Irish capitalism. To begin with the policy changes that characterised the 1979-83 Ard Fheis were not fundamental. In 1979 Eire Nua's economic policy was revised to incorporate a section on "economic resistance" which calls for the creation of co-operatives within a capitalist 32 county Ireland. The same Ard Fheis slightly reversed its position on women's oppression, concretely only giving support to contraception on demand. Even now SF remains opposed to abortion on demand. The 1981 Conference revised Eire Nua to remove the commitment to a 4 province federal Ireland and replaced it with the call for a strong central government with some regional autonomy. Motivated as ending a "sop to loyalism" it singularly failed to address the key question of how to split the Unionist monolith and raise the social/economic class demands that are needed to drive a wedge within loyalism and win over decisive sections of the Protestant workers. It must be recognised that no amount of "democratic concessions" to the Protestant working class will appease or tempt them, and this is all that Sinn Fein can offer. "Democracy" can only mean an end to their privileges and in return? A degree of "local autonomy" within which they can supervise their impoverishment? No, only a revolutionary communist programme which rallies sections of Protestant workers to an anti-imperialist and anti-capitalist (Orange and Green) perspective can prise away Protestant workers from defending their sectarian statelet.

Neither did the "turn to the working class" fundamentally change Sinn Fein's strategic intention of welding together a popular front between nationalist bosses and workers throughout Ireland. Their failure to place the working class at the centre of the struggle and to pursue it on a revolutionary socialist basis was no more clearly demonstrated than in the Hunger Strike campaigns. At the founding conference of the National H Block/Arming Committee, October 1979, Sinn Fein actively obstructed discussion and resolutions seeking to base the campaign on mobilising workers' direct action. In contrast Sinn Fein's own perspective was to mobilise Irish and International opinion around the moral and humanitarian aspects of the dirty protest in the H Blocks: "What is needed now on the H Block issue is a mass single-issue campaign aimed at drawing in whatever support possible... (RN, 25.9.79)

We have discussed the results of this strategy in detail elsewhere (WP 27). The result was that the one working class oriented anti-partition movement was quietly sacrificed. The one social class which had the power and interest to end partition was deliberately left on the side-lines as a consequence of Sinn Fein's political programme. The result was a defeat for the prisoners, after 10 valiant deaths, in October 1981 with virtually no concessions granted.

Nor has Sinn Fein drawn "left" conclusions from this bitter experience. Adams in his Presidential address last November confirmed their commitment to a strategic popular front and a "stagist" notion of the struggle ahead: "We must be mindful of the dangers of ultra-leftism and remember at all times that while our struggle has a major social and economic content the securing of Irish independence is a pre-requisite for the advance to a socialist republican society." (RN, 17.11.83)

Labour, it seems still "must wait."

Thus the 1983 Ard Fheis did not represent a break with any of the fundamental political tenets of petit-bourgeois nationalism. On the contrary, the experience of the H Block and Hunger Strike campaigns was summed up in the positions adopted there. At the centre of it all remains the utopian and reactionary programme of a democratic stage of the revolution which requires that workers' interests be subordinated in order to secure an alliance with the 26 County "national" bourgeoisie. This has always been present in

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FOR AN ALL OUT STRIKE IN THE MINES

DESPITE PETER HEATHFIELD'S bravado his narrow victory in the election for NUM General Secretary was an ill omen for the union's Broad left. The right wing candidate, John Walsh, came from well behind to within 2.4% of beating Heathfield. Significantly he had made the issue of the overtime ban the key plank in his campaign. The vote indicates two things. First, that despite their loyalty to the union in implementing the overtime ban, many NUM members are increasingly uncertain about its value as a tactic. Secondly, and in the long term more significantly, it shows that the right in the union have begun to recuperate since their trouncing at the hands of Scargill.

The responsibility for both of these developments can be laid at the door of Scargill and the other Broad left leaders of the NUM. For Scargill, the overtime ban, now in its fourth month, served a double purpose. It was at least a form of action. It could be pointed to as a means of unifying the pits around the pay claim and wearing down the NCB's enormous coal stocks. In short Scargill could turn round to the militants and say - look we are at last doing something after three failures to get a national strike. The overtime ban is, therefore, a means of avoiding a strike, not preparing for one.

The other function of the ban was that it enabled Scargill to maintain unity with the right. Vincent, Bell and Co. were against another attempt to get a strike. The members would refuse and besides, from their point of view, 5.2% was not that bad an offer from the NCB and could probably be nudged up by minimal pressure and maximum negotiation. Thus they were prepared to tolerate an overtime ban in the belief that it would lead to a re-opening of negotiations, avoid a strike and do very little damage, in the short term, to the members. For Scargill and the Broad left unity with the right was crucial, following their ballot debacles. So a unanimous Executive using suitably worded tones of rhetoric from left to right, got the delegate conference in October to go for the ban. What Scargill and the right failed to understand was that the new MacGregor regime had set its mind to destroying the union's strength. An overtime ban on its own could only play into management's hands.

Since the miners' strike of 1972 and 1974, the British ruling class aided by both the Labour and Tory governments have been after two things. To avoid the threat of damaging strikes they wanted to fragment and weaken the union. To avoid having to pay massive subsidies to a loss maker they wanted a scaled down, but more efficient and profitable coal industry. The productivity deal of 1978, engineered by Tony Benn, has done much to destroy the national cohesiveness and solidarity that the union developed in the early 1970s. National pay deals are now relatively unimportant in comparison with locally established productivity deals. This means vast discrepancies in earnings. In unprofitable pits in South Wales the worst paid miners are taking home as little as £76 a week. The earnings in super pits, like Selby, are, on the other hand, much higher. So high were some earnings that the Monopolies and Mergers Commission censored the discrepancies from their report for fear of provoking strikes by the lower



John Sturrock (Network)

paid miners. Now, on average, 18% of the wage is made up from bonus deals.

This set up has weakened the union. The ballot defeats for Scargill were testimony to that. However, it has not eradicated militancy in the pits. It has fragmented it. In the whole of 1983 30% of all recorded strikes took place in the pits. All of them were local. Most of them were unofficial. The Broad left leadership left the strikes isolated and did not act to spread them as part of a campaign for scrapping the productivity deals. They are beginning to pay the price for that.

MacGregor has been charged with finishing a job off in Britain's coalfields. The NCB has long been a loss maker. The bosses believe it does not need to be, provided the productivity of the pits is increased. MacGregor is doing this with a vengeance, just as he did in British Steel. The result is a programme of job cuts and closures and the installation of new technology in the super pits. The MMC report last year argued that 141 of the then existing 198 pits were unprofitable. The NCB plan is to close the great majority of these unprofitable pits and MacGregor is speeding the process up. Since last March 12 pits have been closed with the loss of 16,000 jobs. This compares with seven closures and the loss of 10,200 throughout the whole of 1982-3. This takes the total of jobs lost since 1980 up to 41,000. At the same time production is being stepped up at a cheaper cost through introducing new technology systems like MINOS in selected pits like Selby. When fully operational, Selby will produce 70% of the entire coal output of South Wales and Scotland with only 10% of the workforce of these two fields! The increased coal production over the last few years has also provided the management with a handy weapon against the miners - enormous coal stocks. Prior to 1980, stocks never stood above 30 million tonnes (apart from one year). Since 1980 they have risen each year to 38 million, 43 million, and last year, 53.3 million. On the other hand demand has fallen by 18 million tonnes a year.

There can be no doubting now that MacGregor wants to clear the way to the fulfillment of his plans, and taking on the NUM is a crucial way of doing that. The *Economist* magazine declared recently, "For three years the government has been afraid of tackling its biggest industrial headache - the coal mines. Now is the time."

Despite these high stakes and despite the fact that MacGregor is not bluffing, the NUM and its leaders have responded with feet of clay. The NCB rode out the first period of the overtime ban with ease. Scargill's claim that, "the overtime ban is working even more effectively than anyone could have anticipated", is simply not true. The 3.4 million tonnes lost have not affected coal supplies at all and, in a matter of two months, the arrival of Spring will lead to a further drop in demand.

Scargill and co can only counter this by talking of an indefinite ban. He is now talking about a twelve month ban and claims that this is possible because the members felt it is "the right tactic, the right policy, and the right discipline". This is dangerous nonsense.

Every militant should favour a total overtime ban in the pits. Overtime in and of itself is scandalous. Workers should receive a living wage for a shorter working week. They should not have to work for whole extra days in order to make up their wages. The existence of overtime working in a period of massive unemployment only heightens the obvious injustice of the whole system. However, to raise the call for a ban on overtime in isolation from a campaign for better wages, a shorter working week, the scrapping of productivity deals and the halting of sackings is pie-in-the-sky. Worse, it undermines the possibility of developing a fight on these questions the longer it is maintained as an exclusive tactic. It reduces wage packets, without offering the perspective of waging a serious struggle to improve them permanently.

So far loyalty to the union has staved off the danger of a large scale revolt by miners. Militants

must hold the line against any such revolts. But, as the situation progresses, they must do more. The winders' revolt was to be expected. The winders have long been an elite, existing outside and indeed against the NUM throughout the 1950s and 1960s. However, their feelings are a sign of potential dangers. Already in Scotland craftsmen and maintenance men have threatened to defy the ban at Solsgrith colliery. The management are playing on this. They are constantly laying off more and more miners without pay for one day a week - 10,000, 12,000 and 19,000 over three weeks in January. As older pits fail to receive maintenance work, usually done at weekends - the NCB will undoubtedly try to close them. Also their decision to cease development at Polmaise shows that they are prepared to hit the miners harder, through sackings, than the miners are hitting them.

This danger can be averted. Scargill, however, seems set on allowing it to happen. When 100 miners at Siverdale, a moderate pit once called "Judas Pit" by other miners in the area, struck against the scab winders Scargill thanked them and sent them back to work. When miners at High Moor, Chesterfield struck against a MacGregor visit, their protest was acknowledged but not built upon. It remains to be seen what will happen at Polmaise but the precedent of Kinneil gives a good indication that MacGregor will sell them down the river given the opportunity.

It is certainly true that many of the possibilities for achieving a successful strike in the pits for an increased pay offer have been squandered. But there is still some time left and militants must be rallied to using it if the union is to avoid a very serious setback. The mass of miners must be won to a strike by democratic organisation, and policies that make sense. Scargill and McGeahy offer neither, but they must be forced to act by the rank and file or removed and replaced with leaders that do.

We advocate a massive NUM financed campaign at pit level to put the case for a strike - special regional local and national issues of the union journal to be distributed, lodges to put out local bulletins and information sheets and a series of pit head meetings to discuss and, finally, decide on strike action. But such a campaign will not win if it is aimed simply at getting the NCB to resume negotiations on the 5.2% offer. It must unite all miners by fighting for lump sum increases to take miners back to their 1974 real earnings level. It must explain why the productivity deal is divisive and a means of making fewer miners do more work. It must commit miners to a fight to scrap the productivity deals altogether and replace them with an equitable wages system based on the highest earning pits at the moment and taking all miners up to that level. No reduction of pay can be tolerated by any miner. The closures, job cuts and new technology all make life more difficult for the miner. This can be resisted by campaigning for a shorter working week - 35 hours work for 40 hours pay. All closures must be resisted. In cases of closure for geological reasons the bosses cannot be trusted. At Polmaise they claim geological difficulties exist, yet the union's own experts say this is not the case. There is only one way of settling such questions in a way that benefits the miner. Workers' control over closures in cases of geological difficulties means that experts appointed, and controlled by the workers in the pit should alone decide on closures. In the event of closures no jobs should be lost. Redeployment with appropriate compensation - at a level decided by the workers - must be guaranteed. Likewise workers' control must be exercised over the introduction of new technology to prevent it being used to destroy jobs.

Around these policies, fought for at a rank and file level - and therefore requiring pit level rank and file organisation - miners can still be won to a strike. If they are not, between now and April, the bosses will be well pleased. They will not have smashed the NUM but they will have taken an important step towards decisively weakening a crucial section of workers. They must not be allowed to take this step. ■

SINN FEIN: BEHIND THE 'LEFT TURN' CONTINUED FROM PAGE 3

Sinn Fein's politics. It was theorised under the influence of Stalinism in the mid 1960s by Johnston and Goulding - later of the official Sinn Fein. It still is at the heart of Adams' project.

Last November's conference was significant in one major respect, however. Given the confirmation of its utopian programme, the decision to take their seats if elected in next years Euro-Elections was a further step along the road of bourgeois politics. It is laughable to hear SL and PD applaud this move because it coincides with a marxist tactic. Certainly, revolutionary communists are prepared to take their seats in bourgeois parliaments if elected; there the similarity ends. A powerful current in Sinn Fein wants to move further towards parliamentarism. They have not embraced a marxist tactic towards Parliament.

Certainly it is part of the communist tactic to take one's seats to use them as a tribune, to expose the injustices and corruption of bourgeois rule to the masses outside parliament - a path SF has traditionally rejected. But this use of Parliament is not the property of communists alone. Bernadette Devlin's election to Westminster as MP for Mid-Ulster and the use she made of it proves this. The real content of communist intervention into "their" parliaments is to rally the working class to independent, mass class action aimed at their bourgeoisie's economic interests and directed at the overthrow of this very parliament by workers' councils.

Marxists have a programme which links the defence of immediate needs of the workers, small farmers, women and all oppressed and exploited sections of society to the total overthrow of capitalism. Because of this they have no fear of entering these thieves kitchens to publicise this programme in order to expose and disrupt the plots of the bourgeois politicians against the masses.

Yet for the petit-bourgeois nationalists Parliament is a spider's web. The nationalist wants a parliament

but an ideal one - one that represents the whole Irish people. The "reality" and "legitimacy" of this parliament is located in history - the First and Second Dails, and in the future. In the name of this "once and future" parliament, existing Dails and parliaments are viewed as ploys to corrupt and entrap the "legitimate" armed forces of the ideal Irish Dail.

On the other hand, Sinn Fein has always been prepared to take their seats in local councils. Common to both positions is the belief that they need to be "near to the people" to avoid the corrupting and corroding influence of bourgeois politics. This primitive sociological reasoning misses the whole point. What is decisive is programme and political method. Communists are firmly moored to a coherent revolutionary strategy which is fully independent of the ruling class. Sinn Fein's programme, however, is but a pale, backward-looking echo of the bourgeoisie's programme. Up to now Sinn Fein have used elections only to make propaganda for the military campaign or advertise their current popular front. Election campaigns have always been the time for special resistance to mass working class action, as the Hunger Strike elections showed.

Should communists oppose republicans' entry into parliament? Not at all - it will put their "socialist" and revolutionary credentials to the test. It will expose them to the demands and pressure of the working class. It will deprive them of an historic alibi. It does not, as the pathetic opportunists of the PD and the SL assert, mark SF's adoption of "Marxist tactics". Indeed to claim this is to sully Marxists with reformist parliamentarism. This may win "Marxism" or "Trotskyism" the complacent smiles of the SF leaders today. It will win it the scorn and contempt of the republican rank and file tomorrow when reformist parliamentary practice bears its inevitable bitter fruit.

The conflicting positions within Sinn Fein have yet to be resolved. The constitution forbids taking seats only in the Dail, Westminster and Stormont. The 1983 Ard Fheis decision to stand for Strasbourg therefore only judges the issue. Indeed Adams went out of his way last November to reassure his Sinn Fein opponents that this "was not the thin end of the wedge." For the moment, O'Bradaigh is placated, but the next period is likely to see a greater commitment to electoralism. Sinn Fein's defensive reaction to the Harrods bombing shows how acute is the pressure on Sinn Fein to proclaim "ballot or the bomb." An open and forthright break with abstentionism in general may well lead to a split with the old O'Bradaigh and O'Connell Dublin leadership. This would leave Sinn Fein based largely in the Northern anti-unionist population rather than predominantly in the rural and urban petit-bourgeoisie of the 26 Counties.

The current turn in Sinn Fein will, given the republicans' inability to utilize elections, or to struggle for reforms in a revolutionary manner, develop opportunist results. It will produce a clash between the needs of electoralism and communist politics and the needs of the armed struggle. As so often before this will inevitably produce a reaction - a swing back to the methods of guerrilla struggle.

The present oscillation - involving direct involvement of republicans with working class struggles North and South can however be a basis for revolutionary communists posing the alternative to petit-bourgeois nationalism. However this will only be the case if they do not dissolve themselves into it. There is no automatic process which will convert revolutionary nationalists into revolutionary communists. This is a task that communists must perform by an open, honest criticism of the republican movement and fearless advocacy of the communist programme and tactics. ■

by a member of the Irish Workers Group

AN APOLOGY

This issue of *Workers Power* is four pages short of its planned size. As a result of a major typesetting breakdown, some articles and letters have had to be held over until the next issue.

The result is a somewhat "imbalanced" paper for which we apologise.

To ensure that there is no repetition of this in the future, we are launching a fund-drive to purchase new typesetting equipment. We aim to raise £10,000 over the next year. We would ask all our readers and supporters to help us in this effort. Send donations to: *Workers Power*, BCM 7750, London WC1N 3XX.

From the next issue, *Workers Power* will return to 12 pages - and will be regularly priced at 30p.