

Communist Party of Britain (Marxist-Leninist)

Forty years on: a May Day celebration of the founding of the Party.

First Published: WORKERS, JUNE 2008 ISSUE

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On 1 May [2008], the CPBM-L held its traditional May Day rally and celebration at Conway Hall, London. This edited extract from a speech at the event illustrates the spirit of the evening...and of the preceding four decades.

In celebrating the bold move to found a new party of our working class 40 years ago, we're not having a reminiscence session or wallowing in nostalgia. A vital stream has flowed, influencing our class ever since, breaking away from moribund, social democratic thinking.

There's a rich pre-history, too: born out of previous decades of struggles of ideas that include the dark days of the Second World War where the bright light of class resistance was kept burning and (as I have heard from our veterans) soldiers and airmen vibrantly discussed possibilities of creating a new world, a new Britain. Our biography of our founding chairman, Reg Birch, eloquently sums up those decades.

No benefit or achievement for the people of Britain has been won without hard, long demands and struggle. Capitalism has never been benevolent. The anniversary we celebrate today has resonances in such struggles – such as the six decades since our National Health Service was achieved (I remember it well – I was born in 1948!).

I would not be here today but for those who, over centuries, fought for that, and free education for all, too. Which brings us right up to date, with teachers still vigorously defending their dignity and standards. I would not be presenting you with music tonight had it not been for the winning of free instrumental teaching and the foundation of nationwide funding for arts and music, freeing culture (somewhat) from the direct patronage of capitalism and its rich, controlling benefactors.

Perhaps my own route to joining this Party has parallels with our class and its journey – needing to "get organised"? 1968 was one of those years when disparate militants and aimless activists were shouting loudest. But there were also strong inspirations to resist and to change the world.

The Vietnamese people – led by communists – were pushing back US invasion under relentless bombardment. "Che" Guevara's murder by US agents had aroused support for socialist Cuba (I composed a musical epitaph which was performed by five students on this very stage in October 1968!).

Martin Luther King's murder that year showed the anger that could erupt on the streets of such a capitalist power. He had started to condemn the Vietnam War and had given a memorial oration in praise of W. E. du Bois, a prominent communist.

Later this evening we'll perform The Ballad of Joe Hill, made famous by Paul Robeson back then, which links to the struggle of our own working class. Robeson brought the struggle of his own people and its lessons close to our hearts, especially when he sang such songs with the Welsh male voice choirs (mainly drawn from the ranks of coal miners), performing from London to Clydebank.

Inspiration is not enough

However, such disparate activities and diverse inspirations are not enough in themselves – and when I heard of the formation of a party by industrial workers which would unite all sectors of the working class including students, I knew it was the best course to follow. My early memories of a strong-willed, creative industrial class had started with listening to my grandfather, an engineering patternmaker (I had a tramdriving uncle, a train driving cousin, and my father was a clerk).

I found that spirit in the party and – just last week – on visiting the picket line at Grangemouth oil refinery, where workers were out in strength, optimistic and taking action for their future and on behalf of the future



Scottish band Slip the Lead provided music and singing for the May Day celebration. British work songs were supplemented by songs from a visiting Chinese musician.

wellbeing of the whole class.

With that spirit we have survived the collapse of several socialist nations, and a warmongering Labour. I heard a union leader at April's Scottish TUC Congress in Inverness calling on the movement to "fight for the little people". That is not how to characterise the working class. On the contrary, it is skilled and strong.

Our responsibility is to harness that strength and now, too, build a resistance to the growing imposition of the European Union and the consequential disintegration of our class and country. Keep up that struggle and we'll be here to celebrate again in 10 years – a 50th anniversary and beyond.

In the first of a series of articles to mark the 40th anniversary of the CPBML by looking at the past four decades through the eyes of Workers and its predecessor, The Worker, we look at the epic 1970s struggle against state control of the unions...

The smashing of the Industrial Relations Act

WORKERS, JAN 2008 ISSUE



In 1970 a lead article in our Party newspaper The Worker gave an early warning against the coming corporate state. We reproduce the article below. By way of introduction, the Labour Party had started the attack on our trade unions with the Wilson government's "In Place of Strife", a 1969 white paper introduced by employment minister Barbara Castle, which proposed to curb the power of the unions but was never passed into law.

In 1971 the Conservative government led by Edward Heath passed the Industrial Relations Act, facing our unions with a fundamental challenge. Heath set up the National Industrial Relations Court (NIRC) and sought to impose state registration of unions, the power to impose binding procedures, punitive fines and sequestration of union assets.

From the first, the Amalgamated Union of Engineering Workers led the working class's struggle against the act. Its fight stood out as a political battle. At the 1971 TUC, the AUEW put a motion that "instructed" all trade unions not to register under the Act and to "take measures to remove themselves from the provisional register". It was passed by 5,625,000 votes to 4,500,000. But only the AUEW repudiated Heath's Act in practice and refused to acknowledge the Court's existence.

On 26 January 1971, the union's Executive Committee voted for strike action against the act, calling on all members to act. On 4 February 1971, the AUEW National Committee decided by 63 votes to 5 to call for a series of one-day strikes. On 26 February 1971, more than 150,000 trade unionists marched in London against the Act, a demonstration that the government tried to ignore. On 1 March, two million workers struck for the day, on 18 March, three million.



AUEW demonstration in 1973 against the Industrial Relations Act, Tower Hill, London, addressed by Reg Birch.

The working class rolled back "In Place of Strife" and the Industrial Relations Act between 1968 and 1974, but those involved knew that the role of the AUEW in its steadfastness, led by Reg Birch at key points, was so important. He cut the tools that others wielded. It was this that broke Heath, not the subsequent forms of action that took place.

On 1 May 1973, the AUEW called a political strike against the wage freeze. In 1974, the incoming Labour government imposed the Social Contract to cut back real wages. In April 1974, the AUEW

launched an overtime ban, and in May, strikes. True to type, the Labour government had left the whole apparatus of Heath's Industrial Relations Act in place, including the National Industrial Relations Act. When union funds were going to be sequestered in 1974, the AUEW declared that being sequestered meant that everybody stopped work.

Thousands of engineers rallied to the defence of the union, with hundreds gathering within an hour to stop police and bailiffs entering the union's head office. Reg Birch addressed the union members there, and warned against having any truck with the Social Contract, saying, "Unions which sign a contract have to police it."

The Worker, December 1970, lead article, headlined "Kill the Bill – Smash capitalism!", and subtitled: "Ruling class's Industrial Relations Bill attacks entire working class":

"The present Government's Bill attacking trade unionism, like the previous Government's 'In Place of Strife', proves that the capitalist class is in trouble. Where formerly the capitalists could live with trade unions – even if they found them a thorn in their flesh – now they are demanding state intervention to crush trade unions.

"This represents a major step in the move from bourgeois democracy to the

corporate state. It is a step dictated by the weakness of British capitalism, not by its strength. "But that the ruling class would consider so rash a step is also proof that the trade unions have been failing the working class. They have been content to live with capitalism. They have tried to stand still and have inevitably been pushed back. They have betrayed the Tolpuddle martyrs and all the other workers who have fought and suffered for the realisation of working class strength through organisation.

"Now the truce is over. We in the CPB(ML) welcome the forthcoming struggle. Neither we nor the workers whose party we are have ever feared conflict.

"We will not have Tory legislation or Labour legislation against workers. Nor will we have the TUC General Council acting as a semi-governmental body to deal with such legislation.

"And certainly our Party does not believe that the TUC General Council nor the Labour Party intend to put up a real fight on this issue. Workers will not be fooled by the shadow-boxing of the Shadow Cabinet. Barbara Castle, who is supposed to be leading the Labour resistance, paved the way for the Tory Bill with her own attack on the trade unions. In the Labour policy for industrial relations which she drafted she openly supported state intervention. 'The state,' she said, 'had to act at times to contain the disruptive consequences of the struggle for those not immediately affected.' This is exactly the attitude of Victor Feather [then TUC General Secretary] who at the TUC Conference stated that 'one man's strike was another man's lay-off.'

"We will have no such 'leaders' betraying the struggle before it even begins. We consider a 'token strike' as calling for the most timid response from the working class, showing no confidence in their courage and tenacity."

1969: Focus on the engineers, and on Britain

WORKERS, FEB 2008 ISSUE



Amid world turmoil and struggle, our party was formed in April 1968. Our founding chairman, Reg Birch, had issued a call to all interested persons in the labour movement and beyond to join our founding congress, which thus went on to create the only revolutionary communist party that Britain has ever known.

In those distant times the world was cluttered with so-called "Marxist-Leninists" who wore huge Mao badges and prattled on about every struggle in the world bar our own. But our fledgling party soon moved to the production of a newspaper. From the off, we were determined to establish our credentials and focus on the problems in Britain.

In October 1968 an issue called October appeared. October revealed from the outset that our party had a perspective firmly rooted in our own country, illustrated by the lead article reporting a forthcoming strike against the engineering employers, who were supporting the then Labour government's incomes policy. On the back page the paper included the thoughtful and rooted "Jottings of an Engineer", extracts of which we reproduce.

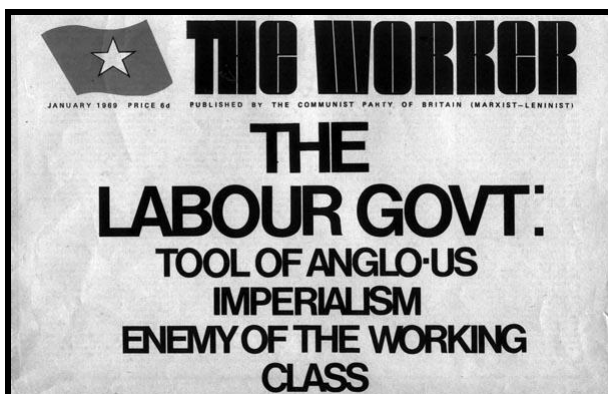
"What is the strike about? Ostensibly, the claim is for a minimum wage increase for all workers, a new wages structure, three weeks' holiday now and equal pay – and so it is – but the question goes much deeper. First, it is essential to remember that, for the past decade, engineering workers in particular and all other workers, have been steadfastly indoctrinated that they must work harder, produce much more, must not be avaricious, not work for improvement in wages and working conditions, that they can be faced with alleged technical developments and expected to throw overboard traditions related to craft and skill.

"It has been said that workers of all kinds must be prepared, in the course of a life-time of working to learn two, or even more, skills to keep pace with technical developments. The whole canvas has been that unless we produce more, the economics of this country must founder.

"The fact of the matter is that wages have never been related to production in terms of cost...

"We must say that there shall be no attempt nationally to interfere with the right of free collective bargaining at the point of production, that we must end the past history of procrastination and downright cheating by the employers. They must be taught that organised labour has come of age and their day is passing."

A couple of months later, in January 1969, a regular monthly paper, The Worker, was launched. In the first issue we returned to analyse the engineering strike that had not happened. Here is part of the article:



Issue number one of The Worker, January 1969.

"Following their failure to do battle with the Government and the employers there have come even more open declarations of war; legislation against the unions, 'cooling off periods', strengthening of the Donovan Report and so forth. If there is to be built a disciplined political movement of revolutionary character, then workers must accept the necessity of opposing the enemy in a political way.

"On October 19th the Executive of the [Amalgamated Engineering Federation] unanimously called upon its National Committee to endorse the call for strike action of members on October 21st. This was rejected by 27-25. Why was this?

"In all the hot house atmosphere of negotiations with the Engineering Employers, and not least of all with the First Secretary of State, over engineering wages and working conditions, nothing could change the general direction of the Government's drive to fetter the unions and assist the employing class except a frontal attack on both the Employers and their spokesmen, the Labour Government.

"When after hours and hours of negotiations, the breakdown came about in regard to women's wages, this was the time not only to call for but to demand battle by the engineering workers against their oppressors, to accept the unanimous decision of the Executive Council which said simply: 'In view of the unsatisfactory nature of the Employers' offer our members must be on strike from October 21st unless a satisfactory settlement is reached.' This would have placed the economic battle in a true political perspective.

"This [refusal to fight] comes about from incessant propaganda over many years, from the pressure of the Labour Government, from the Prices and Incomes Board, from all the hectoring that has gone on for a decade now about restrictive practices, about efficiency, mobility and flexibility, work measurement, modernisation, rationalisation and all the other jargon of bourgeois economists and industrial consultants hired by the bosses.

"This has bitten deep into the trade union and labour movement and has produced passive acceptance of wage freezes. From time to time artificial battles are fought on whether there should be an improvement in the economy of 2.5% or 3.5%; but the real issues have gone by default.

"This same acceptance of the enemy's case has entered industry, on the factory floor...In many factories now workers have entered into these dubious bargains for immediate gains. They have sold tea-breaks, washing time, have dispensed with mates, etc.

"The leadership in particular is permeated with this doctrine and has come to accept that workers have had as much as they can expect on present labour and must work harder, produce more, speed up, extend their versatility, increase overall output to get a little more back. It is the soup bowl of Marx all over again and we have forgotten his excellent advice – it is the size of the spoon we hold that matters!

"...Until such time as the workers force the leadership of the trade unions to give up their support of the Labour Government and its Incomes Policy there can be no change."

1969: Labour turns on the trade unions

WORKERS, MAR 2008 ISSUE



Quite soon after the birth of our Party, the social democratic Labour government headed by Wilson followed up an attempted wage freeze by moving to emasculate the trade unions with a set of proposals in a White Paper promulgated under the slogan, *In Place of Strife*. In the February 1969 issue of our paper, *The Worker*, our party responded to the government's threat advocating wholesale opposition to the proposed legislation. The first article was headed "**Combination Acts 1799**" and is reprinted in full. It is followed by extracts from the article "**In place of strife?: working class enslavement.**"

"IF EVER the Trade Unions are to learn from their past errors, then it must be now. Out of the Fabian philosophy of reform and gradualism the Trade Unions spawned a Labour Party whose last product is this monstrous Labour Government. This Frankenstein now stands ready to devour the working class, Trade Unions and all – the Trade Unions which are the first elementary bastion of defence of that class.

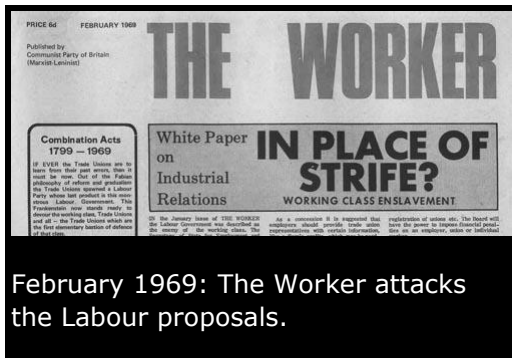
The introduction of the Combination Acts in 1799 was the direct evidence that a government is a class power and a class weapon. Notwithstanding all the prattle of freedom in Britain at that time, the ruling class and its Government, alarmed by the awakening of the working class and its industrial army, imposed this repressive measure. A quarter of a century later, through the power of the Unions, it was repealed.

Since that time there has always been the legend that the Unions are serving one interest, the working class, with which the employers are in opposition and conflict, and that the government of the day is not part of either but above the struggle.

The introduction of the White Paper "*In Place of Strife*" is the resurrection of the Combination Acts with the modern sinister connotation of corporate state fascism. Unless smothered, these proposals will render the Unions kindred to Dr Ley's Labour Front in Nazi Germany.

The Government has conspired with its masters to cheat and defraud the producing masses. It has ignored stock market manipulation, monopoly price-rigging, fiscal speculation; it has actively encouraged and approved the grotesque profits which have been made through gambling, profits from restrictions of production, from closures and mergers and take-overs. It stands committed to the idea that "profits are necessary to industry", it subsidises monopolies to dismiss workers under the Redundancy Act; it cares nothing for the millions of days lost from accidents, sickness and lay-offs, arbitrarily agreed and decided upon by the employers.

"This White Paper incorporates the terrible lie that the state must and does have a role in industrial relations, stands in the middle of two conflicting parties as a mediator, that the laissez-faire of these two parties must end and that the state, the Government, has the responsibility of intervening – all as if it were not directly the product of capitalism and the servant of the capitalist class!



In the rising tide of response by the workers to defend such an elementary heritage as trade unionism, whose very existence is now in question, they must beware – beware of the labour lieutenants of capitalism who collude with the Labour Government in the service of capitalism. They will suggest that we might fight the Government's legislation but, in the same breath, they

will say we must, as Unions, be more responsible. They argue, we would oppose prison for workers but could accept fines; display demagogic anger about a 90-day cooling-off period and rush to settle for a 28-day cooling-off period. As on the incomes policy question, they will say: reject the Government chains – and fetter yourselves voluntarily."

We must be clear. This issue involves all in working class society, professional workers, workers by hand and brain – everybody who is exploited.

Oppose any attempt to restrict the civil right of strike under any circumstances; and, in the mounting campaign that must and will surely arise, there must also be the political thought "destroy the progenitors of such proposals; destroy the system, capitalism, that brings it about."

"In the January issue of THE WORKER the Labour Government was described as the enemy of the working class. The Secretary of State for Employment had obligingly confirmed this charge with the publication of the White Paper, "In Place of Strife". This White Paper is the Labour Government's blueprint for emasculating the trade unions, depriving the working class of defensive organisation in the industrial struggles that lie ahead and proving itself the faithful servitor of monopoly capitalism.

Ignoring the guff, we can consider the following recommendations of this Policy for Industrial Relations – recommendations which if turned into law will affect for the worse every worker in Britain.

It is proposed to set up a Commission on Industrial Relations which will have an important part to play in trade union reform. Disputes between rival unions for recognition...will be referred to the CIR and the Secretary of State will be empowered to give effect by Order to its recommendations. Financial penalties may be imposed on unions refusing to comply.

Among the proposals which George Woodcock, General Secretary of the

TUC, speaking on behalf of the General Council, finds acceptable is the establishment of the Commission on Industrial Relations. The first appointee as full-time chairman of the CIR – George Woodcock!

...In order to incorporate trade unions even more firmly in the governmental superstructure of capitalism, they can apply to the CIR for grants and loans to aid their development along lines recommended by the CIR.

The Secretary of State will be given discretionary power to secure a "conciliation pause" in unconstitutional strikes. Strikers could be ordered to return to work and desist from industrial action for 28 days, subject to financial penalties.

The Secretary of State will be empowered to require unions to hold a ballot on the question of strike action. The Secretary of State would not intervene in the conduct of the ballot apart from giving approval to the form of question to be put to the vote!

Trade unions should register with a new Registrar of Trade Unions and will be required to have rules governing certain matters. Refusal to do so will make a union liable to financial penalties."

1971: British troops out of Ireland, Ireland one nation!

WORKERS, APR 2008 ISSUE



The issue of northern Ireland is a test of workers' internationalism, today just as it was from 1922 when Ireland was split and Northern Ireland annexed.

Very early in the life of the CPBML, it passed this test when all other political organisations failed. In November 1969, the Labour government used rioting by Unionists as an excuse to send British troops into Ireland. Its aim was to maintain the British state's rule over part of its oldest colony, to keep Ireland divided, by propping up Ulster's colonial minority regime against the civil rights movement's demand for 'one man, one vote'. The Ministry of Defence said that the Army was to "give strong-arm assistance to the local authority." The Army announced, "We are in aid of the civil power."

This open support for Unionism precluded peacekeeping and democracy. The Party at once called for the withdrawal of the troops and for respect for the Irish people's right to national independence and self-determination.



1978: British soldier on patrol.
Photo: Syd Shelton

On 5 September 1971, the Party organised a march ending in a rally in Trafalgar Square that called for 'Troops out of Ireland, Ireland one nation'. Our Chairman Reg Birch spoke from the platform, at the foot of Nelson's Column.

"Now is the testing time of workers here. We cannot be free ourselves except we fight for the freedom of Irish workers as they are fighting for us.

What shall we do? We call for the withdrawal of all troops – the Stormont Ku Klux Klan, the imperialist forces, the special Ulster 'defence' body, the lot. All workers here, the whole labour movement, all the unions, must support this demand. British soldiers were sent into Ulster by the Labour Government. Their policy of aggression was endorsed by the Tory Government. General Freeland gave the orders 'shoot to kill'. This brought about the armed struggle of people in defence of their homes, their families.

We as a Party say let us end this chapter in the history of British imperialism now! Let the workers of this country say once and for all – get the troops out of Ireland. Let the Irish people decide their own destiny themselves."

The October 1971 issue of *The Worker* carried an article, 'Workers demand: British Troops out of Ireland now!'

"On Sunday September 5th more than a thousand workers including a large Irish contingent marched through the centre of London to join with an even larger crowd in Trafalgar Square to demand the immediate withdrawal of British troops from Ireland.

This impressive demonstration of the solidarity of British workers with their Irish brothers in denouncing British imperialism was organised by the Communist Party of Britain (Marxist-Leninist). It was an event of political significance. It was the right demonstration on the right issue at the right time.

The situation in Ireland was correctly defined – a colonial war waged by British imperialism against the Irish people. British troops are in Ireland for no other purpose than to kill and terrorise all who challenge Britain's colonial rule which began 800 years ago.

It is a war against Irish workers waged by the same British ruling class that exploits and oppresses workers in this country. Therefore this is a testing time for the workers of Britain. We cannot be free except we declare

ourselves in the freedom struggle of the Irish people and take action with them against British imperialism, our common enemy."

1972: the US lashes out in Vietnam – and fails

WORKERS, JUNE 2008 ISSUE



In the 1970s, both Labour and Conservative governments continued to support the US government's wars of aggression against Vietnam, Cambodia and Laos. This complicity was one of the most shameful acts in British history.

The Labour government led by Harold Wilson backed the US April 1970 invasion of Cambodia. In December 1970, Conservative Prime Minister Edward Heath said that bombing North Vietnam would be 'justifiable'; on 13 June 1972 he praised President Nixon's 'unparalleled restraint'; and in December 1972 he backed the US bombing of Hanoi.

But however much the US government escalated the war, however much they spent (an estimated \$500 billion), they could not win. The US Air Force dropped more bombs on Vietnam than on all targets in all history. US forces killed possibly three million Vietnamese. Yet the heroic Vietnamese people decisively defeated the self-styled most powerful state in the world.

To celebrate the 40th anniversary of the CPBML we reprint below the lead article from *The Worker* of 1 June, 1972.

One War: One Strategy

Protracted War Victorious in Vietnam

"The United States, like a wounded beast, lashes out wildly. The bombing of Hanoi, the mining of Haiphong harbour, the new attempts to turn Vietnam into a raging inferno are last desperate lunges of a defeated Titan. Capitalism is a dying force. On its deathbed, with the hopelessness of the damned, it determines to take with it to Hell as many human souls as it can garner. Hence the viciousness of the vanquished.

Vietnam has lost some of its sons and daughters in this war. It goes without saying that without readiness for sacrifice the war could not have been fought. Workers, fighters may die but a working class, a people cannot die. Every last barbarity perpetrated by U.S. imperialism has been recorded and will not go unavenged. Blood debts are being repaid in blood; in April alone the Vietnamese people's forces took a toll from their enemy of 90,000 killed, wounded or captured.

For us it is time to take stock of this world-historic achievement of the Vietnamese. Vietnam is the international touchstone of our age – the contemporary classic of confrontation between exploiter and exploited, as instructive for us as the Paris Commune of a century ago. It has been in essence a third world war – a war in which no-one in the world could remain uninvolved and unmoved. And in this war, how have we the British people performed?



Three years later: victory as the South Vietnam Liberation Army enters Da Nang City on 29 March 1975

Governments, Labour identical with Tory, have tailed obediently three steps behind their Washington masters, excusing and explaining each new enormity.

The working class, with a few honourable exceptions, have tried to look the other way.

The various 'Left' factions in the social democratic circus have acted entirely true to form. The 'Left wing' of the Labour Party and the King Street revisionists, never daring to support the Vietnamese, made little deprecating noises about the bombing of north Vietnam. (The burning alive and bloody murder of people throughout the country was all right – just stop bombing the north). The Trotskyists were happy to support the Vietnamese as long as they were convinced the Americans would win – at which point they could condemn the 'treachery' of the Stalinists (i.e. Ho Chi Minh). When it became clear even to them that the Vietnamese were not going to lose they made themselves scarce, found other carrion to crow over.

A whole generation of youth in Britain received their political baptism of fire from the guns of the Mekong Delta. For them Vietnam has been an almost sacred cause, a rock of faith in a shifting, doubtful world. Yet they did not translate their faith into deeds. They did not build for victorious Vietnam a movement to compare with that built by their parents for defeated Spain.

Why? Why have we, the working class of Britain, failed in our internationalist duty? Why have we left it to the Vietnamese people, in the way an earlier generation left it to the Soviet working class, to carry the burden of revolutionary war without our taking the action here that would have complemented their struggle? Can we shake off this social democratic sleeping sickness before it numbs us entirely?

Ho Chi Minh said the only true internationalism is to make revolution in your own country. We rejoice with the Vietnamese people in their victories. We grieve with them in the destruction wrought upon their land. Let us now

vow that we the workers of Britain will match their intellect, their heroism and their achievement in the very heartland of the imperialist beast."

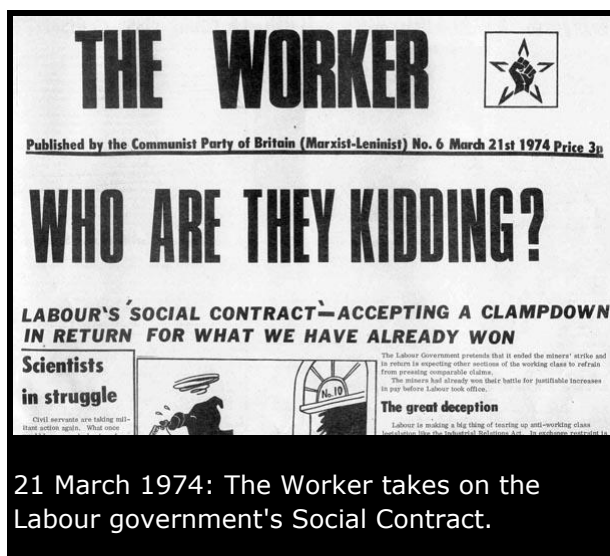
1974: The fight against the Social Contract

WORKERS, MAY 2008 ISSUE



As part of the celebration of our 40th anniversary, we look at our party's warnings about the dangers of voluntary emasculation inherent in the Social Contract introduced by the Labour Party in 1974. Following a series of confident working class struggles (including that of the engineers' toppling of the Tories' Industrial Relations Act and the miners' victory over Heath and his three-day week), the Labour Party launched its political counterattack, control of wages.

The lead article in *The Worker* issued on 21 March 1974 (see below), headlined "Who are they kidding?" and presciently subtitled "Labour's Social Contract – Accepting a clampdown in return for what we have already won", clearly and cogently outlined the threats posed.



21 March 1974: The Worker takes on the Labour government's Social Contract.

"The Labour Government pretends that it ended the miners' strike and in return is expecting other sections of the working class to refrain from pressing comparable claims.

The miners had already won their battle for justifiable increases in pay before Labour took office.

Labour is making a big thing of tearing up anti-working class legislation like the Industrial Relations Act. In exchange restraint is expected on the part

of trade unionists. But workers had already made this legislation inoperative by their own organised action.

Labour is apparently abandoning a wages policy and wants 'voluntary' self-denial on the part of workers as a fair quid pro quo. But workers had already made the Counter-Inflation Act unworkable by their mass industrial action.

In other words, workers are being told that what they have won by their own struggle is a gift from a labour Government. Then in exchange for this 'gift' workers are being asked to accept more intense exploitation.

The TUC has its usual role to play in this attempted deception. The TUC General Council said in a statement on the political and economic situation that 'in response to the policies of the new Government it would be possible to influence the size of claims and settlements achieved.' In return for the Government's giving 'priority to the immediate repeal of the Industrial Relations Act, the Government is entitled to understanding and support in its efforts to produce a solution to grave economic and social problems.'

This is the line taken by certain labour 'leaders' like the Secretary of the TGWU who has said that 'A government which is prepared to tackle these problems will certainly get the co-operation of the trade union movement and there will be moderation.'

There are millions of workers with claims outstanding – railwaymen, engineers, building workers, Ford workers and merchant seamen to mention only some. If they did fall for the deception the Labour government is trying to practice on them with the help of these so-called 'leaders', it would mean a punitive cut in workers' wages and even higher profits for the employers.

The National Institute of Economic and Social Research has predicted that there will be further rises in prices this year from 14 to 18 per cent, more unemployment of over a million, falling production and a wider trade gap. The CBI is calling for a spirit of sacrifice – on the part of workers of course.

This critical situation will be used by the Labour Government to smuggle back its own version of wage-freeze and anti-trade union measures. The blueprint for them already exists.

We workers will not have it. We will not let them use the fruits of our own victories as bribes to get us to renounce struggle."

Later that year, in the 27 June issue, The Worker returned to the risks facing workers from the Social Contract and we re-print the perceptive opening and concluding paragraphs.

"The Labour Party is the major vehicle for the advancement of the corporate state; a fascist state rule which seeks to destroy the weapons of workers' struggle and to subjugate the working class. The Labour Party's pernicious role is to attempt to secure the acquiescence of the working class to its own enslavement. Every struggle in which British workers are involved today must be seen as not only a particular fight to defend their standard of living in a situation of capitalist-induced inflation, but also as part of the whole class's general fight against the imposition of the fascist measure of wages fixed by government fiat.

The substitution of a government incomes policy for collective bargaining was itself a major step in the developing of the corporate state. However, there can be no doubt that the Labour Government wants something much firmer in the way of guaranteed wage restraint.

All these moves, TUC strengthening of the 'social contract', 'concern' for the

lower paid, cunningly devised threshold agreements, are just so many attempts to rob workers of a right they have to defend – the right to use their collective strength to wrest a living wage from those who exploit them. The right of collective bargaining, like emancipation of the working class, is not something which can be bestowed on us from high. It can only be won and maintained by our own continuous struggle.

Because of the growing strength of the working class and the increasing weakening of British capitalism, collective bargaining is a right the ruling class can no longer afford to concede us if the profit system is to survive. The struggle for it, therefore, is a revolutionary struggle – a necessary phase in our protracted war to smash a system based on profits rather than on human needs.”

Our fifth article to mark the 40th anniversary of the CPBML by looking at the past four decades through the eyes of Workers and its predecessor, The Worker. This month: Thatcher's Falklands War...

1982: War in the South Atlantic

WORKERS, JULY 2008 ISSUE



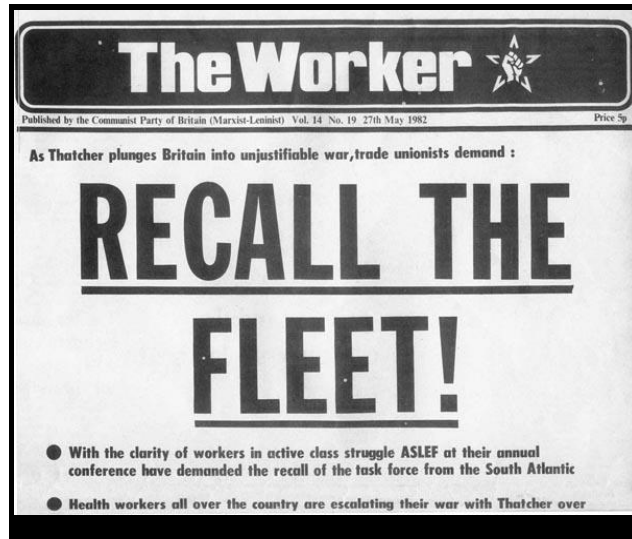
1968–2008

The Falklands War was probably the most important foreign policy event in domestic terms in the 1980s. It occurred when Thatcher was deeply unpopular, giving her the chance to gain support.

Thatcher insisted that the Falkland Islands had the right of self-determination and refused even to discuss the matter of sovereignty. This obstinacy clearly increased the risks of Argentine action to gain what negotiations were not allowed to achieve. On 26 March 1982, MI6 warned of an imminent invasion on 2 April. After receiving this warning, the government did nothing, perhaps to lure the Argentine government into attacking.

On 2 April, Argentine forces landed on the Islands. Thatcher decided that they had to be repelled by force. As Reagan said, "Maggie wants a skirmish." On 3 April, the UN Security Council passed Resolution 502 calling on both parties not to escalate the dispute and to settle it by negotiation. Thatcher vetoed the Resolution. Nicholas Henderson, Britain's Ambassador to the UN, later revealed that Thatcher would negotiate only after a war, not to prevent one: "if negotiations were going to lead to anything, this would only be as a result not of conciliatory noises but of direct and heavy military pressure."

British casualties were 218 killed and 777 injured; the Argentinians lost 746 killed. In Britain, a servile press inflated this victory into an equal of the war against Hitler, helping Thatcher to win the 1983 General Election.



We reprint below our coverage of these events at the time, when on 27 May 1982 The Worker's front page said:

"As Thatcher plunges Britain into unjustifiable war, trade unionists demand:
RECALL THE FLEET!

- With the clarity of workers in active class struggle ASLEF at their annual conference have demanded the recall of the task force from the South Atlantic.
- Health workers all over the country are escalating their war with Thatcher over wages in spite of her attempt to divert all attention to her vicious war over the Falkland Islands.
- Benn, Dalyell, Hart and 30 other Labour MPs defied the pusillanimous leadership of their Party and voted in the House of Commons to oppose Thatcher in their demand for an immediate cease fire.
- The Fire Brigades Union along with other unions have called for a cease fire in the South Atlantic so that negotiations can continue.
- The Inner London division of the NUT has called for the withdrawal of the task force and for a prosecution of the war against Thatcher at home.
- Engineers at Rolls Royce, Coventry, have blacked Harrier engines needed by the task force in a dispute over union recognition.
- Demos up and down the country reflect the growing opposition to Thatcher's war which only strengthens her hand against the workers of Britain.
- Make the June 6th demonstration to keep Reagan out of Britain a mighty rally to get

Thatcher out of the South Atlantic, northern Ireland, Oman and No. 10!!!!
Our war is at home"

On 10 June The Worker said:

"Thatcher is waging a completely unnecessary and totally unjustifiable war in the South Atlantic to strengthen her position for waging war against the working class in Britain. We shall pay dearly if we don't stop her.

We shall pay with our freedom. Thatcher says the war is being fought for freedom. She lies. It is being fought against our freedom. The fatuous chauvinism whipped up by the press, the phony nationalism from pulpits and on TV screens have fastened Thatcher's yoke on our necks tighter than ever. Each khaki election victory won is a green light for her to go ahead with her vicious attacks on our jobs, wages and unions.

We shall pay in cash. Already more than a billion pounds, representing schools, colleges and hospitals which could be kept open and industries which could be saved, have been blown away in this bellicose adventure. Many more billions will be poured down the same military drain while here in Britain monetarism is invoked as the excuse for cutting our public services' expenditure on our welfare.

We shall pay in national honour. Britain's name is beginning to stink in the nostrils of the decent people of Latin America and the Caribbean, of Africa and Asia. Her veto of a UN resolution calling for a cease-fire shows Britain's growing isolation. The barbarous howl of The Sun for blood, the savage cries of the SAS to hunt down and kill 'Argies' show that the hated voice of British imperialism is not dead. Thatcher, like some Cecil Rhodes in skirts, is talking now, to the cheers of a lumpen mob, of hanging on to the Falklands permanently for the export of more capital.

Thatcher says the war is being fought to punish aggressors. She lies. We are the aggressors. The Falkland Islands were stolen from Argentina by imperialist force a hundred and fifty years ago. Just before the Heath Government came to power, arrangements had practically been made to hand the Falklands back. The negotiations that will have to be held on the sovereignty of the Islands could have been held without any bloodshed. Over a thousand young men have died uselessly.

Britain once repelled an armada sent by a villainous king to reduce the British people to vassals of the Pope and Spain. This time the armada was despatched by a British Prime Minister to bolster up her power over the British people at home through belligerence abroad.

It is not too late to undo the shameful damage done in our name for the purpose of undoing us. Pull down the warmonger and pull out the troops – out of the South Atlantic, out of Ireland. They can be housed in the bases from which we expel the GIs."

1979: Thatcher Out!

WORKERS, SEPTEMBER 2008 ISSUE



Following the 1979 General Election, our Party quickly reassessed the political situation facing workers and concluded that it was not just business as normal for capitalism, that in fact the post war bourgeois consensus had been ditched and that Thatcherism was a dangerous governmental stance which was set to undermine and destroy the organised working class. We changed the basis of our line from 'Don't Vote, Organise for Revolution' to "Thatcher Out".

Typical of our swift response was the arresting call of the headline in The Worker produced on 29 November 1979: "Thatcher Government Must Go!" The article commented:

"Government policies have but one rationale. All resistance must be crushed. They are prepared to gamble everything on the slaughter of the organisations of the working class of Britain. Central to that policy is destruction of industry, while the ruling class decamps and seeks to shroud itself in the newer and more congenial institutions of the EEC. Every form of Government holding in industry is to be sold off at rock bottom prices to the carrion of the City and the international money markets. What remains of British industry is to be butchered and the workers taught to be humble."

In the same issue's editorial, we wrote:

"The Thatcher gang came to power on the promise of increasing incentives all around and using sound monetarist policies for creating an economic climate in which industry would thrive. There would be no need for an incomes policy and wages could be left to a 'free' system where the market was in control, and there was no need for interference by the central government.

This whole thesis was patently false from the start. It pretended that capitalism had departed from the pure laissez-faire system of Adam Smith out of some arbitrary whim and not because it had been forced to by its own internal contradictions. The nationalisation of industries which were necessary but not profitable enough to be left to the private sector, the intervention of the government on the side of employers to impose wage limits, the attempts to encourage by government action investment at home and to discourage

the export of capital were all efforts to shore up a failing system and not the result of some misunderstanding about how the system was supposed to work.

What this Government has actually done is to effect a severe wage cut by introducing soaring inflation and then, by applying strict limits on monetary growth, to bring about a sharp downfall in productive output. A major world-wide recession was on the way in any case and government action here has not only made it certain but also exacerbated its seriousness. Whatever faint hope there might have been that cuts in taxation would stimulate industrial investment has been completely swamped by the enormously high cost of borrowing money – the highest in Britain's history.

Are they mad then? Committed to increasing profits, everything they have done has led to a decline in output, to closures and bankruptcies of the small firms they were supposed to be helping and to a severe economic depression. No, they are not mad. They know that the main threat to profit is an organised working class which is strong enough to resist paying the whole cost of capitalism's decline. What we are seeing is an all-out attempt to destroy the will and the ability of the working class to resist by destroying production and creating even more massive unemployment, by eroding the value of wages with swingeing inflation and attacking the trade unions to break their strength.

The CBI recognises the strategy and even though the immediate effects are bad for business they know that the organised working class has to be smashed if capitalism is to survive in Britain."

The editorial ended by warning of punitive actions to come:

"We had better be prepared for it with everything we have learned from two hundred years of class struggle, plus what we think through now about ending a system which can only continue to exist on the basis of our complete fascistic enslavement."

How did it happen?

Thatcher's government drove unemployment up, even on conservative official statistics, from 1.3 million in 1979 to 2.4 million by 1981, and 3.5 million in 1985. Monetarist dogmas cloaked an assault on production because our working class was absolutely entwined in industry. Draconian anti-trade union legislation was pushed through. National assets were sold off cheaply.

Why did it all come to pass? The essential explanation lies in the fact that workers were ideologically ill-prepared to fend off the assault and many workers actually voted for her government and agreed with its views.

We are still circumscribed by the past to this day. We desperately need a resurrection of class thinking if we are to fend off new ruling class attacks and find our path to a better form of society, socialism.

a politic made in britain

WORKERS, JUNE 2004 ISSUE

This article is based on a speech given at the May Day rally organised by the CPBML on 1 May 2004 at Conway Hall, London — an evening of celebration which also saw the launch of Bellman Books' **Reg Birch: Engineer, Trade Unionist, Communist**.

Reg Birch's politics were made in Britain, and always focused on what the British working class — all those who have to go out to work to earn a living — needed to win a decent life, to win our class rights — the right to work and create in Britain, the rights to health, education, skill and housing, the right to sovereignty, the right to run our own affairs. Similarly, all workers across the world have class rights. We can only achieve these with peace and independence, when we no longer allow capitalism to rule.

All his life, Reg was proud to be a member of the engineers' union; he was a skilled worker, good at his trade. Our trade defines our trade union. If all IT workers were in one union, instead of scattered across fifty, they could hold all the employers to ransom. Some wrongly say, 'pay all equally', qualified and unqualified, skilled and unskilled alike. Some oppose unions and skill, and use the old discredited notion of "labour aristocracy", not a phrase Karl Marx ever used, and if he had, he'd have been wrong.

Picture a Muslim woman from Bangladesh who works in a Spitalfields sweatshop. Should she see herself as a member of a doubly oppressed minority, or as part of the vast majority, the British working class? Progress for her means she joins her union, she opposes her employer, even if he too is a Muslim from Bangladesh. Religion divides, an exclusive stress on gender divides; our unions unite the vast majority.

In Britain today, the capitalist class, that tiny minority of exploiters, is the root of all our problems. They gain when we do not produce what we want, when we buy it, on tick. They gain from record pay rises, bonuses, dividends, £15 million payoffs, tax havens and tax avoidance scams for top directors. They have built more prisons than schools, and sold off school playing fields and council houses. They are responsible for the premature deaths of Steve Thoburn, the metric martyr, and Des Warren, the Shrewsbury building worker. They are to blame for our long hours, low wages, the most restrictive trade union laws in the developed world and low investment. They gain from the free movement of capital and from the free movement of labour, both enshrined in the EU Constitution and which lead to a modern slavery.



Reg Birch (back row, second from left) with fellow members of the AEU's 1948 London North District Committee, which he had joined six years earlier while still in his 20s.

This May Day is also the day when ten countries join the EU. The Polish doctors' union and the Czech doctors already protest against the start of emigration of their doctors to Western Europe. The USA has "guest worker" programmes, so that big firms can recruit foreign, non-unionised workers, to compete with other countries' low wages. Some workers suffered 50% wage cuts. The greater the supply of workers, the lower the wage.

Capitalism means war

What could be more fascist than to attack another country then occupy it by force? Paul Wolfowitz, Donald Rumsfeld's deputy, said, "Economically we just had no choice in Iraq. The country swims on a sea of oil." Bush tries to hold Iraq, against a national resistance. Britain's senior diplomats call it an "illegal and brutal occupation... doomed to failure". Why reinforce failure? Capitalism has not brought independence and peace to Iraq, Haiti or anywhere else.

Capitalism means terrorism. The US built up the mujahadin, to attack workers and peasants in Afghanistan. Now the US state holds captive in Guantanamo Bay those it captured in Afghanistan, so it is nearly impossible to charge and try any of them fairly in a court of law. Workers oppose terrorism, because workers are those who suffer its effects. But the government uses the terrorists to take away all our freedoms, it rams through ID cards, ends the right to trial by jury, ends habeas corpus. People are being held in British jails, without charge or trial.

Those who think that they have to tell the British working class what to do, or how to think, or how to vote, patronise the class. The "left", the Labour Party, and the Conservative Party, all tell the class not to vote for the BNP. But they attack the wrong target, just as Bush and Blair attacked Iraq not al-Qa'eda. The BNP, whatever else it does, does not blow up large numbers of workers.

There are Christian fascists, Jewish fascists, Muslim fascists, Hindu fascists — every religion has the germs of fascism in it, a reactionary hatred and contempt for life. Class unites: religion divides and demeans. Belief in gods and spirits, pie in the sky when we die, and reaction, all go together. Italy's government, under Signor Berlusconi, has just banned the teaching of Darwin in schools. Materialism banishes gods and spirits; science and progress go together. Fascism is anti-worker, anti-union, anti-women, anti-progress, anti-communist, anti-Britain.

The European Union imposes the notions of devolved regional government and regional elections, to break down local government democracy, the unity of our unions, our labour movement and of Britain. Low turnouts for EU elections prove how all the peoples of the EU oppose the EU, especially the British working class.

EU vs US?

Some, for instance the French government, say build the EU to oppose the USA. Yet President Chirac joined with Bush to oust Haiti's elected government and impose their choice. The EU is not a lesser evil than the USA; it is the same thing - capitalist through and through.

Our Party has always opposed the social democratic trap of backing the lesser evil. The Viennese writer Karl Kraus said the "supreme principle of creative integrity" was "If I must choose the lesser of two evils, I will choose neither." The French novelist Henri Barbusse said, "minimalism (which is also called the "least evil") is really conservatism." Why choose this evil or that evil, when we could choose the good?

Forty years ago we got a new Labour government, surfing a wave of new technology, promising it would be progressive and modern. But it brought incomes policies, spending cuts and tied us to a US war of aggression. We have moved on — we had the giant demonstrations against war, swift exposure of all the government's lies, but we haven't moved far enough to link workplace struggles to the fight against war and capitalism.

Conventional wisdom says that foreign affairs don't win elections. But they can lose them! The Liberal Party took us into the First World War, and never won another election on its own. A Conservative government took us into the European Exchange Rate Mechanism, and hasn't won an election since. Blair took us into Iraq, which has at least wrecked his career. Each party betrayed British sovereignty by tying us to a doomed venture imposed by others. Each broke on the rocks of the British working class's independence of mind, our refusal to be dragged into something that was not in our interests.

Over the last year, we have had struggles by airport staff, car workers, transport workers, journalists, postal workers, youth workers, university lecturers, students, tenants in Camden, BBC workers, nursery nurses and civil servants, but it's not just those who have had to go on strike who have made progress. Teachers, firefighters, health workers, musicians and ambulance workers for example organise against government schemes to divide and destroy.

A world of workers

Most of the world's people now are workers. In February, 50 million workers struck in India. Workers in Spain, Cyprus, Venezuela, Bolivia and Cuba, Turkey, Palestine, Iraq and North Korea all refuse to kowtow to capitalism.

Reg always said that his greatest achievement was founding this Party, a democratic centralist party. This simply means that after free and open discussion, the party takes a decision, and its members carry out that decision.

The strength of our Party is that we are rooted in the material needs and real interests of the British working class; we oppose what the class opposes — the EU and its constitution, capital, foreign wars. We want what the class wants — the NHS, education, jobs, industry, to rebuild Britain.

We cannot rely on anybody else to do the job for us; we cannot devolve our responsibilities to MPs; we are not looking for pie in the sky. There is always a way forward — not in parliament, but in workplace and trade union: assert our class demands, peace and independence, no war, no capitalism!