

socialist

# REVIEW

Monthly Magazine of the Socialist Workers Party

## Today Mitterrand tomorrow Benn?



# MARXISM

## July 10-17 '81

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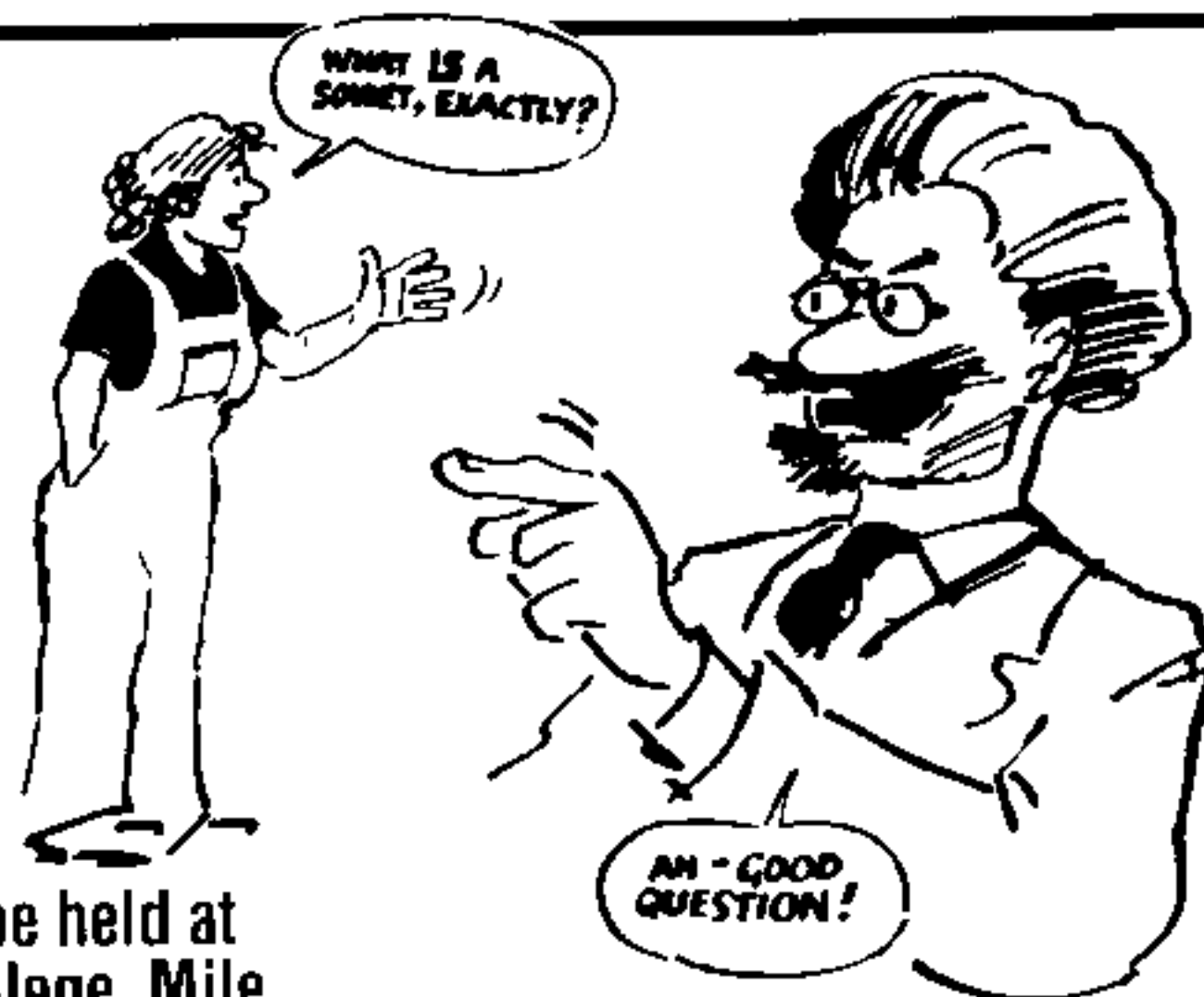
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## Where is the Benn wagon rolling?

The press are already hysterical. We can expect the hysteria to get worse as the summer passes. For the bid by Tony Benn to become deputy leader of the Labour Party looks closer to success than most initial calculations—ours among them—thought possible.

The calculations were based upon a simple—and correct—assumption. This was that the heads of the big unions and majority of the *Tribune* MPs would do their utmost to avoid Benn getting many union votes at the autumn election, because this would upset the stability of the Foot leadership and drive still more right wing MPs to desert to the Social Democrats.

What this did not allow for was the extreme—in some cases unprecedented—difficulties union leaders have had in controlling their own conferences.

The most graphic case was the ASTMS conference. The arch-fixer Clive Jenkins came completely unstuck in his attempts to serve the unions vote up to Healey. The mass of delegates turned against him and forced through support for Benn.

At the NUPE conference the feeling was just as clear—although the final vote on the matter has been referred to a branch ballot which Benn should easily win. As one Labour activist put it, 'After the 1979 low pay dispute, there's no way you can push Healey—the pill is too bitter.'

At the Fire Brigades conference Benn only had to appear in the visitors' gallery to get a standing ovation. At the Postal Workers, it is true, that the right leadership got a majority vote for Healey. But it is also true that the Broad Left, formed only last year, got a third of the votes for Benn after the first political discussion at a conference for

years, and that 200 delegates and another two hundred observers heard Benn speak at a fringe meeting.

Suddenly, the big one, the conference of the giant TGWU at the end of this month no longer seems a walk-over for those who would rig things for Foot and Healey. If there is anything like the same groundswell of support for Benn there that there has been at other conferences—and preliminary soundings suggest there will be—it could be touch and go for Healey in October. Even if Benn narrowly loses the deputy leadership, he could get enough votes to make him the obvious heir apparent.

Hence the most sordid manoeuvre of them all—the running of Silkin as a 'left' candidate in opposition to Benn, designed to grab the TGWU vote and ruin Benn's chances.

No one on the left in the unions should be fooled by such manoeuvres. Whatever Benn's role in the last Labour government (and nothing has altered our view that someone who was prepared, as late as 1978, to

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threaten troops against Windscale strikers is not to be trusted), to hundreds of thousands of union activists support for him is seen as a repudiation of that government's record.

Support for Benn is one expression of a political upturn inside the working class movement. The impact of the Tory government and of the world recession is pushing a new layer of activists to seek political responses. There are other expressions of the same trend—the recruitment of a claimed 60,000 new Labour Party members in two or three months, the size of the Labour Party demonstrations called in Liverpool and Glasgow, the big response to the People's March in many areas, and, in a slightly different milieu, the flourishing of CND.

Left wing ideas are being discussed on a wider scale than before. And revolutionary socialist ideas can be part of that discussion.

However, they can only gain from such discussion if something else is recognised: the *limitations* of the political upturn. For, by and large, it is not a result of any great new feeling of self-confidence and power on the part of workers, but rather of frustration. People don't feel able to fight against the tidal wave of redundancies, the six per cent public sector norm or endless cuts, and so put their faith in producing a different sort of Labour government at some point in the future. Put crudely, the political upturn is, in part, a reaction to the industrial down turn.

So at many of the union conferences—for instance, the FBU, NUPE, ASTMS—the shift to the left on the Benn issue has not been matched by a similar shift on issues concerned with the industrial struggle.

There are two ways in which socialists can respond to this state of affairs. The first is a facile optimism that takes the political upturn at face value, without seeing its limitations when it comes to the crucial ques-

tion of real social power. The logic of this view is to join in the rush for the Labour Party and the general adulation for Benn.

It is a wrong response. The Labour left and Benn can raise certain questions about what is wrong with society. But when it comes to answering them, what they have to offer is pitiful.

Look at Benn himself.

He raises the question of how the large firms can turn their economic power into a

## Left wing ideas are being discussed on a wider scale than before, and revolutionary ideas can be part of that discussion

political power greater than that of elected left wing governments. And then he attempts to answer it by calling merely for the government to buy shares in certain firms (the very 'revisionist' argument that even *Tribune* denounced when Harold Wilson first suggested it back in 1958) and for the 'three sides of industry' to sign planning agreements.

He raises the question of the anti-union bias of the media. And he answers it by suggesting that the BBC takes over *The Times*, even though he himself emphasises that the BBC is biased.

He raises the question of the partition of Ireland. And he answers it by calling, not for a campaign to get the British troops out, but for the sort of UN force that has proved so useless in Cyprus and Lebanon.

Above all he raises the question of the desperate need for workers to find some way out of the present crisis by challenging the power of business and finance. But the only answer he can suggest as to how this is to be achieved is through a Labour government in which the MPs will have more control over the cabinet than in the past and the constituencies more control over the MPs.

All this is Pie in the Sky for those suffering under the present government. It means leaving solutions to urgent problems at least until Thatcher decides to call an election. And actually leaves then much longer. Both Ken Livingstone of the GLC and Nigel Stanley of the Bennite Labour Coordinating Committee have emphasised to *Socialist Review* in interviews that reselection of MPs will not produce what Livingstone calls a 'socialist Labour Party in parliament' until 'the general election *after next*'.

Meanwhile there will be more factories closed like Linwood, more use of courts to break struggles as at Bestabells and Chlo-

ride, more defeats like that recently suffered in the banks and now threatening in the Civil Service, more demoralisation where it really matters, in the workplaces where the value and surplus value are created that keep the system going.

Under such circumstances, there is not even a guarantee that at the end of the day you will get a Labour government. As the working class as a whole is thrown on to the defensive, the political radicalisation of a minority of workers can be accompanied by passivity, even rightward tendencies, among the majority of the class.

It does not have to be like that. Organisation in the workplaces is on the defensive. But it is not yet defeated. Indeed, the last couple of months have indicated that in certain sections—usually those where people feel to some extent protected from the further ravages of the recession—there has been a limited revival of militancy. Witness the strikes in Halewood and Longbridge, the occupations at Lawrence Scott and Lee Jeans, the struggle of the Ansell workers. The moment there is any real 'bottoming out' from the recession there could be a deluge of similar such fights.

The fact that a struggle takes place, however, does not mean that it is automatically won. If effective leadership is lacking, it can all too easily be lost.

This is shown all too graphically by the cases of Bestobells, Ansell, Chloride, the civil service—as articles later in this *Review* show. In each case opportunities to arrest the retreat before the offensive of the Tories and the employers were lost. In each case, the reason did not lie with the membership on the shop floor, but with the deliberate refusal of union officials—including officials who back Benn—to give a lead. In each case, a stronger organised socialist presence on the shop floor could have built resistance to the stance of the officials and tilted the balance from defeat to victory.

Such a presence cannot be built through Bennism or the Labour Party. The whole orientation of the Labour Party is towards separating the industrial struggle from the political struggle. Bennism continues this tradition. Despite token references to support trade union struggles, its whole emphasis is on what takes place inside the Labour Party, not on interventions to win industrial disputes, if necessary criticising the conduct of union officials who back Benn.

Not that the political upturn is passing the workplaces by. There are hundreds of thousands of supporters of Benn in the factories, offices, docks and mines. Every effort has to be made by revolutionary socialists to pull them into joint activity. But such activity cannot be effective if it leads away from the workplace towards the Labour Party, substituting resolutions for action, token gestures for the development of real struggle.

We make it clear at every union meeting or Bennite rally that we support Benn as against Healey. But we go on to insist that *relying* on Benn or on changes in the Labour Party will get people nowhere. Instead, we urge the Labour left to help us initiate joint activity against redundancies, the six per cent limit, the cuts, the decline in trade union membership and the dangers of working class demoralisation.



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Bobby Sands' funeral

## Angry mourning

Four prisoners have now died the most painful deaths in the H-Blocks. Bobby Sands, an elected MP and former TGWU member; Francis Hughes, a legendary fighter for the IRA in South Derry; Raymond McLeesh, and Patsy O'Hara, the leading imprisoned member of the INLA, who was due for release in two years time if he had conformed. The deaths have unleashed a massive wave of anger in the Catholic working class areas of Northern Ireland. Kieren Allen writes from Dublin

The anger was shown in the widespread stoppages of work that marked Bobby Sands', and to a lesser extent Francis Hughes' death. It was shown in the large scale rioting by youth so large that areas of Belfast and Derry have been brought under a regime of military terror. During the past month and a half, four people have been murdered with plastic bullets—the latest an 11 year old girl.

The anger was also shown dramatically in the recent local elections. There the former leader of the SDLP, Gerry Fitt, was ignominiously thrown off his seat on the Belfast city council after topping the poll in the area for years. In Belfast in particular, the SDLP was driven into second place by candidates associated with the H-Block campaign. The fact that the SDLP held its number of seats and votes overall is to some extent accounted for by the fact that the H-Block campaign did not field official candidates in every area—due to the abstentionist politics of the Provos.

Nevertheless, with the news of every death in the H Blocks there has also been a growing sense of despair. Quite clearly as long as Thatcher can confine the mobilisation to the North, that despair will rise. Her army has ten years of experience in containing riots in West Belfast or Derry. Barricades erected in an area are simply removed the following morning. Young petrol bombers or stone throwers are treated as legitimate army targets. And the mounting frustration at the containment leads to young rioters picking on local targets, thus alienating older sections of the population.

That's how Thatcher's generals in the British army see their job. For them the H-Block campaign is an extension of the military war waged by the IRA. A defeat for Thatcher on the issue would be in real terms a blow against the army. And such a demoralising blow would open the door to the withdrawal of the British army.

The stakes are extremely high. The enormous possibilities that would follow on a

victory, the confidence that comes with that vision and the strength of the mass movement, clash with feelings of desperation as the deaths mount. Derry was at one stage at the forefront of the struggle with a massive one-day general stoppage. But it fell dramatically behind when it came to organising subsequent industrial activity. Victory on the hunger strike depends, finally on involving the weaker areas, in bringing them up to the level of the stronger areas when it comes to mass strike activity. And the key area is the South.

The stability of the South has been a strategic priority for the British ruling class in the last decade. That consideration forced them into a reform policy after Bloody Sunday and it put a limit on the scale of military repression or the concessions to Loyalism. By and large they have been successful in keeping the South stable. As a result, ten years of the most rotten traditions of Southern isolation, of fear for law and order, have developed in the Irish labour movement. One indication of that is that up to recently the North was simply not discussed at union branches.

For the first time in a decade that tradition is being successfully challenged. The best illustration of that is probably one town—Waterford in the South East of Ireland. Traditionally, it has been a right wing, Fine Gael town with the British based ATGWU (ie the British TGWU) recruiting the majority of workers. There has been no major republican sentiment there. Yet when Bobby Sands died, an emergency meeting of the 11/64 T&G branch of glassworkers demanded that the trades council organise a general stoppage. Reluctantly it issued the call as others organised. The town was stopped totally for Bobby Sands and subsequently for Francis Hughes. Put simply, a totally new tradition was being established.

To some extent Waterford is exceptional in that there is a strongly organised socialist presence in the factories and trades council, with ten years of organising and experience

behind it. But, in fact, when the first two hunger strikers died other towns such as Dundalk and Drogheda, border towns, stopped. The scale of the stoppages varied, with half-day or full-day stoppages, with total, near total or minority walk-outs.

But given the tradition in the South, given the opposition of the bureaucracy and even trades councils, and given the relative weakness of an organised presence of H-Block supporters in the factories—the response has been amazing.

Two points need to be made. The stoppages did not simply arise from spontaneous overflowing of deeply felt nationalist instincts. In fact in some of the strongest nationalist areas—eg Cork—there were few stoppages. The work stoppages had to be organised for—often by shop stewards committees. There was also a feeling in the stoppages that it was workers who had the power, rather than simply cheering the republicans.

The second point, though, is this. The stoppages were completely ineffective in Dublin where only building workers and workers in one or two areas came out. Essentially Sinn Fein the Workers Party and the CP are better organised in Dublin, and there is also a much stronger rejection of nationalist politics. Unfortunately, the revolutionary left did not have a sufficient base in the workplace to put over the argument in class terms.

Most of the response in industrial terms came immediately after the deaths of Bobby Sands and Francis Hughes. Unfortunately, after that the campaign lost impetus, and because it did not go forwards went backwards. What happened?

Firstly, the National H-Blocks Campaign has not placed a central importance on the involvement of workers. It has looked on the strike movement merely as a welcome bonus. As a result it has had absolutely no strategy for developing the stoppages or even coordinating them. It has become difficult for militants to push continually for one day stoppages in response to every funeral.

Secondly, the National H-Block Committee has pushed for a dignified, quiet response to each death and, as a result, silenced the anger to some extent. But when Francis Hughes died the bubble of frustration burst. Three thousand people spontaneously marched on the British embassy in Dublin. They were met by a crowd of baton waving police. As a result, waves of unemployed youth went on the rampage and smashed up cars and buses. Dublin had seen its first Belfast-style riots for a long period.

The weaknesses of the H-Block campaign are not unconnected with what it sees as its central goal—the forcing of premier Haughey to speak out for the prisoners. As a result it has placed central emphasis on winning over the rank and file of Fianna Fail. It demands respectability to even be in a position to get that rank-and-file to listen. And the prospect of a massive strike wave of workers would terrify the conservative middle class of Fianna Fail.

The H-Block campaign has already come out of the doldrums. But the key to victory is very much dependant on it jettisoning its orientation to Fianna Fail—and in building for mass workers' action.



events in Northern Ireland since 1969. The *Daily News*, another New York paper, had a reporter with the Sands family at the end, and began a series on the history of Ireland since 1170. A column by Jimmy Breslin said of Sands "He was a rare one, a young man who thought enough of the place where he lives to want to die for it."

Besides these, the *Wall Street Journal*, the *Washington Post*, the *Washington Star* the *Philadelphia Inquirer*, and the main New Jersey paper *The Trentonian*, all led with the death of Sands.

When you come to examine content, the difference between the British and the world press is even more glaringly clear. Shortly after Sands' election the British press — and the BBC — ceased to refer to him as an MP. (Compare its unflinching grant of the title 'Reverend' to Ian Paisley.) Instead it constantly attached the label 'terrorist' or 'convicted criminal' to his name. The foreign press on the other hand, whether sympathetic or not to Republicanism, always correctly reported that he was an elected representative.

Even among newspapers which have a reputation for 'objectivity' — the *Guardian*, the *Sunday Times*, the *Financial Times* — the reporting cannot be compared to that of foreign 'quality' papers, like the *New York Times*, and *Le Monde*. The *Sunday Times*, which ran some good articles in the early seventies about the army's activities, has recently more or less reproduced the government's publicity material on the H-blocks (which is along the lines of a grotesque holiday brochure) in the colour magazine.

Republican attacks on the army and security forces are reported consistently, with condemnations of the IRA. But the deaths of four people including a 13 year old girl, from plastic bullets, are reported as 'due to street violence'. Even where it is admitted that the fatal bullets were fired by the army, the assumption is always that they were justified in their action.

Compare the front page editorial of *Le Monde* on the day after Sands' death:

"It does not seem that Mrs. Thatcher envisages anything other than the re-establishment of an order contested by so many of the combatants. She rests on the quasi-unanimity of British opinion, of the entire press and of the Labour opposition itself."

It describes Thatcher as the 'iron lady' 'faithful to her legend to the point of caricature' and says that the memory of Bobby Sands 'and the meaning of his sacrifice are heavy with an emotion which several times this century has aroused the passions of the world against Great Britain'.

The *New York Times* editorial on 6 May ran:

"Mrs Thatcher deplores the IRA terror but seems unable to address the grievances which make terrorists like Bobby Sands heroes to the Catholic minority. Power remains in the hands of an unyielding Protestant majority, whose leaders in 1914 preferred mutiny against the crown to home rule in a united, predominantly Catholic, Ireland. After partition in 1921, Protestant diehards shaped a politics that

## The truth begins at Calais

Nothing it seems, can alter the sickening complacency with which the British press views Northern Ireland. Army hand outs continue to be regurgitated as 'the truth' in the papers and on the TV. But the deaths of the hunger strikers has focussed international press interest on the province. And the reaction from reporters who do not feel that it is 'their' army that is involved in repression has been quite different to that of the 'impartial' British press. Sue Cockerill looks at the contrasting responses.

The extent of international reaction to the death of Bobby Sands was such that even the British media was forced to take note of it. Not of course by modifying its own reporting — if you can call it that — of the situation, but by showing some of the demonstrations, some of the speeches of criticism, and even some of the foreign newspaper headlines.

Mostly, these reports dealt with the United States, since the media has long practice at dismissing protests in America about the Irish situation ('after all, there are a lot of Irish-Americans') and moving on quickly to denounce Americans for 'misguidedly' supplying arms to the Provisionals. Demonstrations in Athens, Paris, Sydney, Oslo and Calcutta were mentioned, but only the one in Oslo got much publicity — because the Queen had something thrown at her.

In fact the royal family has figured largely in the British popular press over the issue: the *Sun's* lead story on the day after Sands died was "Charles' love calls put up for sale". Sands' death got a column at the side. The *Mirror*, reporting a day later, had 'Letter Bomb is sent to Charles' and 'What the Ripper told his Wife' on the front page, rather than any follow-up stories on the Irish situation. The *Express* and the *Mail* both led on Sands' death, but neither devoted the whole front page, both carrying more 'row grows' and 'royal fury' nonsense about the phone bugging.

The difference between foreign reporting and British shows up even in the foreign tabloids: the *New York Post*, owned by none other than *Sun* boss, Rupert Murdoch, had its whole front page taken up with two words 'Sands dead'. There were three stories inside, one a history of

kept Catholics out of office, and they have since refused any rational power-sharing.

"It would take uncommon leadership to rise above cold logic to speak frankly about the bigotry and meanness that make Ulster a battleground. Mrs. Thatcher showed on Zimbabwe that she knows the meaning of bold diplomacy — far from home."

In Portugal, deputies in parliament observed a minute's silence on hearing the news of Sands' death. The *Popular Daily's* headline was "Hunger for Freedom killed Bobby Sands" and the editorial asked "How much longer can Britain retain the distinction of being the only country in free Europe to hold part of the continent as a colony?"

In Belgium, hourly news bulletins reported on the hunger strike, and on the reasons and motives behind it. The Belgian paper *Le Soir* also referred to Thatcher as the 'dame de fer' — the iron lady.

In Britain, the *Mirror's* coverage was probably the most nauseating, and also the most important — since it is read by millions of people, is regarded as a Labour paper, and because it has openly taken a troops out position. Besides the usual 'mobs on the rampage' and 'brutal gunmen' stuff, the *Mirror* managed to sneer in all sorts of small ways.

John Edwards wrote on the day after Sands' funeral "Sands, who committed suicide on hunger strike, a man never blessed with genius, rode in his coffin". Although Edwards admitted that the mourning column was 'huge' (no numbers given) nevertheless, "it was a pathetic end for a man who never played more than an average part in the deadly moves called by his IRA masters." This unsubstantiated opinion was accorded the importance of an entire page quote. He went on to imply that many of the shops were closed because of intimidation. "On the day Bobby Sands was buried the whole of Catholic Belfast had to be seen by the world to be behind him", he comments, after references to phone calls and visits from men with serious threats.

What clearly stuck in Edwards' throat was the fact that the whole of Catholic Belfast was behind Sands.

A similar note of hysteria was evident in the *Mail*, *Express* and *Sun*. "The IRA propaganda machine" was blamed constantly for the election of Sands and for the widespread support for the prisoners' demands in the rest of the world. That support could no longer be ignored. Nor could the willingness of these men to die for what they believed easily be reconciled with the usual picture of the "cowardly terrorist". The media predictably fell back on the 'fanatic' explanation. The *Sun* even suggested that Sands had a 'macabre death wish'.

The trouble is, more men have now shown themselves ready to die, and worse still these 'fanatics' command mass support. The hunger strikes have raised more questions in Britain about Britain's role in Northern Ireland than for many years. If we needed any more evidence of the fact that a war is going on in Northern Ireland, a comparison of the British with the international press should be enough.

## Waiting for the war



The world seemed very close to a new Middle East war last month, as Israel and Syria moved towards confrontation over the stationing of Syrian anti-aircraft missiles in Lebanon. Phil Marfleet and Jon Bearman have just returned from a three week visit to Palestinian camps in Lebanon. First they describe the feeling there, and then they explain the background to the confrontation.

*Saida, Lebanon, Monday May 11th*

It is 8.00pm. A mile offshore the lights of an Israeli gunboat announce the nightly visit. Red marker rockets shoot high then fall slowly over the town—we know what will come next. With a whistle and then a devastating crash Israeli gunners shell the town. Who will they kill tonight? They cannot tell—they do not care. This is just the usual treatment.

Already, half a dozen times, Phantom jets have flown in high over the sea. This time, they did not use their bombs and rockets. They content themselves with rattling every door and window as sonic bangs boom across the town.

But by 8.30 it is clear that tonight will be different. At one of their many bases Palestinian commandos wait for the night's events to unfold. The news does not disappoint them. Commandos race to the beach to take up their defensive positions, all available transport is mobilised, the heavy weapons are brought out and prepared.

Israeli helicopters have landed troops in three places inside Lebanon. At one Al-Fatah base there is already heavy fighting.

By 9.00 the Israelis are in five places. By 10.00 they are in ten. Their nearest strike is only two and a half kilometres away.

'Ten o'clock now' says the commander, 'that means they'll be in twenty places in half an hour, fifty places by midnight. We must assume that this is war.' His deputy laughs, 'Good, our enemy is coming.'

Though it is the commandos who operate the communications system, the news travels fast. The town is silent, the streets empty. Only jeeps and trucks of fighters race to new positions. Ears are strained for the sound of the Israeli bombers—or will it be the helicopters carrying troops for the invasion?

For hours we wait. At three comes the sound of intense firing. Israeli boats have

tried to enter the harbour. They are repelled. By four, the raids are over, the helicopters gone.

Next day we collect the evidence. This has been the biggest Israeli operation in Lebanon since the war of 1978. There have been many helicopter landings—but none have been successful. Everywhere the Israelis have been driven off.

What were the Israelis trying to achieve? More of their 'softening-up' operations? If so, they have failed, for everywhere the Palestinian and Lebanese leftist fighters are now on the alert, and confident they have fought off at least this further test of their determination.

The Palestinian commanders confer. Their new mobile rocket launchers are prepared. 'We will see if the Zionists are serious. Do they want war? We are ready, we'll see if they are.'

That night volleys of lethal rockets, in batches of thirty at a time, are despatched into 'Hadadland'—the area under control of Lebanese fascist Saad Hadad but which, the Palestinians know, is filled with Israeli troops and tanks.

The damage, we know will be enormous. In the west no-one will hear of such attacks. No-one will hear of the 'mini-invasion' which has just taken place. Only the news of American Habib's 'diplomatic shuttle' is approved reading.

This twenty-four hours of strike and counter-strike makes up the life of the people of Lebanon. In the cities—Beirut, Saida, Tyre, Nabatiyyah—there is no respite. At Saida and Tyre the gunboats have an evening appointment with the town. At Nabatiyyah Israeli bombers and helicopters make regular raids—for this is the Palestinian base which Israel must break if it is to control the guerrilla forces in the south.

But it is in Beirut that the pressure is most relentless. Here the Israelis are present—though in a different form. They have armed



**Begin in Lebanon three years ago—he must prove his military effectiveness to persuade the US to arm and finance Israel.**

the fascist militias of the Maronite community—the *Kataeb* of Bashir Gemayel who claim to represent the Christian community of Lebanon and the 'destiny' of the Lebanese nation.

Their claim is feeble. The Maronite community is divided into warring sections. In the north of Lebanon Maronite leader Franjieh—Gemayel's bitter enemy—is meeting Lebanese leftists to form a front against the *Kataeb*. In Beirut and the south as many as fifty per cent of the Palestinian movement's fighters are themselves Lebanese. Many are Christians.

But for Israel it is important to maintain the illusion that Gemayel and his friends are true representatives of an independent Lebanon, and that the Zionists' task is to defend them against the 'genocidal' attacks of the murderous Palestinians and Lebanese left.

It is not so simple. For years the Israelis have armed the *Kataeb*. These fascists—who originated with the *Phalange* formed in the 1930s on the European models of Italy and Spain—possess the most up-to-date heavy weapons. They daily shell the Palestinian camps and densely packed areas of West Beirut.

The fascists' favourite weapon is the phosphorus bomb. Illegal under the Geneva Convention, but eagerly supplied by Israel, this loathsome object is flung into the streets of West Beirut where it detonates to spray phosphorus which like napalm adheres and consumes all it touches.

On May 18th the fascists for the first time shelled the Palestinian district of Fakani—'headquarters' of the Palestinian revolution. Their phosphorus shells incinerated seven cars. Four of the occupants were fried alive. Passers-by were ignited and ran screaming and burning, helpless to brush off the flames which consumed them. Friends looked on in terror. Then as they rushed forward to help survivors a carefully-calculated second battery of shells fell within yards of the first explosions.

'What can we do?' asks a Palestinian doctor, 'we tell the people, do *not* go into the street and pick up the injured. You must wait. It is terrible but you must wait. Of course, they never can. So more die. The fascists know exactly what they are doing.'

### Grief

There is a siren in the street outside. Commandos rush for their guns. Surely the fascists are not *here*? It is a funeral. A commando has been killed in yesterday's attacks. An ambulance carries his open coffin, behind three Land Rovers with armed fighters of his party, a jeep carrying a heavy machine gun and the red party flag.

The victim's mother and brother are beside themselves with grief. This is the fourth son, his the fourth brother to be lost. The mother collapses, friends hold down the young commando who is shaking with anger and distress. Even here, where death is expected, onlookers cry openly. Nobody can deserve a fourth son killed.

There is the sound of rocket launchers projecting their missiles away to the East. We know what it means. Palestinians are shooting back—the fascists in turn will reply. The dreadful attack and counter-attack goes on. At night no part of north west Beirut is safe. The shells and rockets—hundreds of them, will whistle and crash along the front line. In the month of May 300 were killed and 1000 injured in Beirut alone. Most casualties were in the west, but from the heights above Beirut, at Aley, Palestinian and Syrian gunners can also create havoc in the Maronite areas.

The daily pressure in Lebanon is appalling. Everyone is under pressure, but as usual it is the Palestinians who are made to suffer most. Since expelling them from Palestine in 1948 the Israelis have maintained a continuous offensive. Palestinian camps in the south are under permanent attack.

In 1974 the Israelis completely destroyed the camp at Nabatiyyeh. 12,000 were made homeless, hundreds were killed. This camp is now an overgrown wreck, a graveyard for those whose bodies were never found. Everything in it has been smashed.

At Rashidiyyeh camp, near the border with Israel, more than half the 22,000 inhabitants have left since the Israeli invasion of 1978. Still the Israelis bomb the camp—in every street there are the remains of recently-destroyed homes. Just a few kilometres from 'Hadadland', Rashidiyyeh is also open to the fascist shelling. The camp is



dotted with underground bunkers. 'We spend half our lives down there', says a Palestinian woman, 'but we're not going to go. Let them come here. We are waiting for them. They have been chasing us for sixty years. We won't go, you now. We shall fight them. They took our land, we shall fight them'.

The Israelis aim to squeeze and squeeze the Palestinians. Already they have restricted the Palestinian resistance to the south and west of Lebanon. Their overwhelming military force, their American weaponry, means that in direct confrontation they can in the end always beat down the Palestinian guerrillas.

In Rashidiyyeh, in Nabatiyyeh, in Beirut the Palestinians do not give up. They are proud of their intransigence, proud of the way in which, in 1978, a few hundred fighters held off the 33,000 invaders with their tanks and aircraft. For days the Israelis were unable to despatch the guerrilla force.

Today the Palestinians are better armed, better trained. Will Israel invade again? Are the Zionists prepared to accept the bloody battle, the many deaths of their young soldiers which will result? Their mania to crush the Palestinians suggests that sooner or later they will. Will they go on, as Begin promises,

## Middle East end game?

Why has there yet been no 1981 Middle East war? All the ingredients are there, but so far Israel, which traditionally initiates such conflicts, has held back.

The Israeli leaders are convinced that it is time to again prove their military 'invincibility' in the region. Since being caught unprepared in 1973, their strategists have been seeking a chance to make a decisive strike—they hope to prove to their American patrons that they are indeed the West's most secure and reliable ally.

### Credibility

With a new US president in office, the need has become even more pressing, and so in April Begin prompted his allies in Lebanon—the fascist militias of the *Kataeb*—into an attack on an important route under the control of the Syrian forces.

Begin's short-term aims seem to have been unclear—a fact which has not helped his own credibility. But it seems that in the long term he hoped to force the Syrians to climb down from their position of dominance in Lebanon, to link up his fascist allies in the north and far south of the country, and to move again against the Palestinian resistance.

Begin, and doubtless some of his Pentagon advisors, had miscalculated. The Russians have long been eager to strengthen their own shaky position in the region, and are equally eager to impress the new American president. Moscow encouraged the Syrian forces with a guarantee of unlimited military support. The *Kataeb* were soon smashed, and retired to their mountain bases. For the first time in years an Arab state had responded to Israeli aggression in kind.

Begin replied by upping the stakes—

to 'eliminate the Palestinians'? This is the logic of their record of repression over sixty years.

Until now, there is no war. But the raids continue, the gunboats, the helicopters, the bombers are active each day and each night, somewhere in Lebanon. Where the Israelis do not yet feel confident to reach, their friends the *Kataeb* dutifully perform for them.

'Still the Palestinians do not surrender their hopes, nor do they sink into the sorry racism of which the Israelis are guilty.

'No, we have nothing against Jewish people', the fighter in Rashadiyyeh insists. 'Nothing We are not fighting Jews, though Begin wants the world to believe we are. We are fighting Zionism—that means we are fighting imperialism, the United States, its friends, their obsession with controlling this part of the world, its oil, the Arab countries.'

'I am sorry for the Zionists, I am sorry for the fascists. These fascists are nothing without the Israelis standing behind them. Lebanon is not our country, but while we are here the Lebanese people are our allies. We have something in common—as long as Israel exists we shall have to fight—together.'

Lights appear off the beach. The gunboat starts its nightly patrol.

shooting down two Syrian helicopters. With the new self-confidence born of super-power backing, Syria introduced SAM missiles and Begin's bluff was called again.

He was in a cleft stick. By making the Syrian missiles his propaganda target, he felt obliged to remove them. To strike them out meant risking a dangerous counter-strike by Syria into Israel,—and perhaps all-out war. With an election just weeks away, with the opportunist Israeli opposition already labelling him the 'war-monger', Begin dare not risk the gamble.

In Syria, president Assad is delighted with the course of events. Like Begin he has the problem of growing internal opposition, in particular in the shape of the Islamic fundamentalist Muslim Brotherhood. His 'national mobilisation' against the Israeli war threat has helped to ward off the resentment against the Alawite minority ruling faction.

Internationally too, Begin seems to have done Assad an important favour. Syria has been increasingly isolated in the Arab world, the only apparently serious 'confrontation' state opposing Israel. Suddenly Assad has new friends. Saudi Arabia and Kuwait have sent messages of support. Hussein of Jordan has travelled to Moscow to endorse the Syrian-Russian alliance. Libya has placed its forces 'at Syria's disposal'. At a stroke Begin has at least temporarily reunited the Arab states in an alliance that Israel had spent so many years reducing.

It is not the case that Assad's motives are unblemished. His ambitions in Lebanon are quite cynical. In 1976 he invaded 'on behalf of' the Palestinians, only to round on them and attempt to smash their movement with the greatest brutality. Today he needs the Palestinians and Lebanese left. When his



project for a Lebanon under his control reaches a new stage, he will again turn to destroy these 'friends'.

While Begin hesitates, the Israeli forces maintain their daily attacks on Palestinian and leftist areas. This at least, he hopes, can provide some evidence that his promised 'elimination' of Palestinians in Southern Lebanon is going ahead. But the Palestinian forces are responding. More rockets have fallen in 'Hadadland' and in Israel proper near Kiryat Shemona. This evidence of Palestinian intransigence does not fit well with his election promises.

### Chessboard

Begin would dearly love to invade and crush the Fedayeen. He knows that now this is no easy task. A huge invasion force will be necessary—at least the 33,000 used in 1978. For, now there are more Palestinian and leftist commandos. Their weapons are more numerous, more sophisticated. Their forces are skilled and mobile—as the Israelis discovered to their cost last time round. And there is no guarantee any such strike would not sooner or later lead Israel into conflict with Syria, thereby again posing Begin with his problem of the missiles and an open war with Assad backed by the Arab states, and of course, Russia.

This is the usual chessboard pattern of Middle East politics. But this time round it is taking a form the Americans do not like. Saudi pressure on Washington is particularly telling, and the Habib 'shuttle' is motivated by American uncertainty that Israel could strike quickly and effectively enough to crush Syria and the Palestinians before the Arab states were genuinely involved. In addition the shadow of the Kremlin planners hangs over all the Pentagon's analysis.

Here is Begin's dilemma. He must prove his military effectiveness to persuade the United States to arm and finance Israel. Yet Israel's loss of military credibility means that the US will not yet allow Israel to strike out with impunity. Before long Israel must resolve the problem. The odds are that the traditional Zionist methods will again be used, that Lebanon, and of course the Palestinians, will be the victims. But already the strike against Syria has been costly. How much more can Israel afford?

G.N. Cookson (Socialist Challenge)



## Leading London leftwards?

Labour's victories at the local elections have been seen by the press as a precursor of what could happen nationally as the tide of Bennism rises within the Labour Party. Nowhere has this been more so than in London, where, the day after the defeat of the Tories, the Labour group on the GLC threw out its own old right wing leadership. Many on the left are saying this proves the value of working inside the Labour Party. We disagree. But the arguments raised by the left's victory are important, and so we sent Pete Goodwin and Chris Harman to find out from the new leader of the GLC, Ken Livingstone, what the left expect to achieve. We hope our readers will let us know their views for the next issue?

We've had the experience in Camden, and in Lambeth of left councillors coming to power with the best intentions and soon finding themselves so circumscribed by the government's financial regulations, that they end up not only having to implement the cuts, but forcing up rents and rates as well. Do you think you can avoid this at all in the GLC? We try to avoid people rushing away with the idea that this is a revolutionary council that's going to bring down the government or transform life in London.

We've set out sights very much lower. We haven't been able to avoid the rhetoric of the Tory press, convincing everyone that it's revolutionary. But certainly in dealing with the left press we've tried to make it clear what the position is. Of the fifty Labour members, twenty to twenty four could be described as left, and the remainder break down pretty well equally, about ten people on the ideological right and the rest in the centre of the party.

What we have got here is a broad majority within the Labour group, around a commitment to implement the manifesto. The manifesto is not revolutionary. If it's carried out it will be a major breakthrough, because in simple reformist terms it will be a bold step forward. It is a step that a capitalist society could live with—wouldn't like, but could live with. Most of the things in that manifesto have been done somewhere else, usually under governments which are in no sense socialist.

But it's taking the whole package together, plus the fact that the media and the Tories detect that we have a Labour group with a determination to carry it out (which is

quite unusual in Labour Party terms) which has given the GLC election result the significance the media have attached to it.

But we are trying to avoid the sort of over-enthusiasm that there was in Lambeth. Bear in mind that Lambeth took place at the time of a Labour government. They didn't work a strategy for what they should do in the advent of a Tory government until after it happened. They've spent two years defending the present level of service, so that no-one's seen anything improving—things have been getting progressively worse, and the rates have massively gone up.

We're committed to obvious, noticeable improvements in service, so perhaps we're in a slightly easier position in defending a rate increase. But also what's happened during the campaign is that for the first time Labour Party activists have been out on the doorsteps in a big way discussing the question of rates and services with the public. And that campaign has clearly changed the perception of the Labour Party about the issue of rates.

I myself feel that perhaps the only reason why the Lambeth results were so bad is the supplementary rate—Lambeth Council were forced into making a supplementary rate in a rushed fashion, unplanned, without any way of discussing it with people beforehand or involving the movement.

Clearly in Lambeth that caused a lot of people to be confused about where the blame for the present conditions lies: whether it was wholly with the government, or the council, or whatever. In an area like mine in Paddington, where there was the same red scare and rates scare, simply

because everyone has lived under Tory councils for as long as they can remember, there was no diffusion of the responsibility for the crisis. People voted overwhelmingly Labour, in the face of the most incredible publicity from the Tories, because there you haven't had a Labour council trying to protect them from the effects of government policy. So the issue was sharp and clear.

Now the lessons I take from that are that we've got to get it across that rate increases are very much a last resort measure—they have to be used simply to defend the programme. Instead of approaching the thing in a defensive way we have to argue the offensive against the government, to demand the restoration of the money that's been cut from the government, to put on the spot the individual Tory MPs for London who voted to cut rate support grant for London and to bring home to people that all the rate increases they've had in London this year are solely the response the government policy.

Take away inflation and debt charges and the switch of resources from London and no-one would have had a rate increase. All the three factors that have increased the rates are centrally determined by government.

Don't you still think that the danger is that you'll get through a few improvements, which will certainly be very popular. Then after a couple of years it will be like it is in most long established Labour boroughs in London—fantastic cynicism among ordinary working class people about the Labour council, the councillors being remote from them, and the rate increases hitting them just as hard as rent increases used to?

To succeed in carrying Londoners with us we've got to produce the services. Now, the key one is going to be public transport. If we can avoid U-turns or defeats on that and stick to our policy of introducing the initial fare cuts and simplifying the system—improving the number of buses on the roads—people will perceive that as an improved public transport service, and, I think, will defend it in the way they have in South Yorkshire.

In South Yorkshire you get on the bus and say to people: do you think it's right that you should be paying these higher rates in order to keep fares down; they're over the moon, delighted to be doing so. Part of the problem in Lambeth was that having led the fight, when it was forced to back down Lambeth did go for cuts. I think that was a mistake. It would have been better to go for an even larger rate increase and avoid any of the cuts.

So you wouldn't envisage any circumstances in which it would be correct to go for maintaining services but having no rate increases? You mean the bankruptcy option, as Ted calls it.

Yes. Clearly there would be a circumstance—if you are in the sort of situation where the life of the government is threatened and that by taking that option you can provide another factor into bringing down the government. But short of that, no, because you're in a

position where the government has all the cards in its hands. That bankruptcy option is credible when you've got trade union and mass support. But when the government isn't threatened with defeat, to take that option merely opens the way for the government to set you aside.

Heseltine will be making some move against overspending councils again soon—the possibility is they'll introduce a limit on rate increases in the industrial sector, or a limit on rate increases generally. Clearly the government's not happy to see the rates option used. They have no doubt in their mind which option most benefits their class. We should not have any doubt in our mind that the rate increase option does benefit our class, certainly in London, rather than cutting services.

We called meetings in Kilburn ward (which I represented on Camden council) in the run-up to this year's rate debate and said to them: Look, the options before us are either redundancies in the building department and cuts, or a massive rate increase.

We had unanimous support—nobody was in favour of cuts and redundancies as the alternative. I think working class people have a much greater degree of sophistication about what a Labour council and the Labour Party can achieve in a capitalist society than most of the left groupings give them credit for.

You do tend to get a lot of populist reaction because people perceive a lot of waste within the council bureaucracy. That's why we've set out here in all our pronouncements to make it quite clear we do not see an increase in central bureaucracy as one of our objectives. We believe we have to be clearly identified with cutting out all the opulence and chauffeur-driven cars and municipal bean-feasts, seeing trips abroad as synonymous with councillors.

Over a period of time, if a Labour GLC is identified with the industrial struggles that take place in London, the defeats that we will suffer should not break the link between the working class and the Labour Party, shouldn't lead to cynicism. ordinary Labour voters do not expect that electing a Labour GLC is going to produce some sort of heaven on earth in London. They just expect us to fight as hard as we can to defend their interests as best we can.

We've gone through sixty years of the most appalling leadership locally and nationally in the Labour Party. Now that is beginning to change. We had, in parliamentary terms, this drift of people who went from comfortable upper middle-class homes through university into the PLP and had no connection with the working class whatsoever. On local councils all these old municipal deadheads—because the left never considered councils with interest—got on there and built up their little empires, enjoyed the comforts of being on the council, loved the status,—these are the people we're now shaking out. But I don't believe that they were all little Ken Livingstones and Ted Knights when they were in their early twenties and that somehow they've been lost.

I think there are different people coming into the party now, people who have had a majority on the regional executive.

**So what would you say to the claim, I think it was in *the Times*, that of the new people elected to the Labour GLC, there are only three people who immediately prior to the elections had been manual workers? That fits in with our impression that the bulk of the people are lower professionals, especially people professionally involved in local government work, social workers, community workers, and so on.**

It depends how you define class. Many of the elements that you would consider most important to have removed from the party are those that have the skilled manual background, people that have been providing the 40% of the Parliamentary Labour party, which is lobby fodder for the leadership, who've arrived in parliament as their reward for years of hard work in the local factory, or whatever. They are not necessarily, just because of their factory background, likely to be radical.

The incoming group is, I think, fundamentally working class. Now, it may be that a lot of them are in non-manual work or professions, but then there aren't many manual worker professions left in London. The skilled working class have long since gone. What you've got in London is a population that works in service industries and public administration, which is where the shift to the left in trade unionism has come over the last ten years. These are very much post-1968 in terms of the formative key forms of political experiences and I perceive those people as working class. The fact that a lot of them have gone to university does not disqualify them.

**You talked about the Labour group on the council supporting industrial struggles, and winning further support through that. How would you envisage that?**

Well, that's really something that comes from the book *Red Bologna*, which most of the incoming members seem to have read and taken a lot of lessons from. In Bologna, in any industrial struggle, the local council puts the facilities of the council at the use of the strikers and is down there on picket lines with them and so on. If there is an industrial dispute in London and there are GLC facilities that can be used for the benefit of strikers they'll be made available. Mike Ward is setting up a trade union resource centre which will provide support and extra background research facilities for London trade unions and particularly concentrate on those areas where trade unions are weakest—in service industries, tourism and so on.

I've been struck by some of the letters I've had in from ordinary party members, who are just delighted to see the left has won something at last—not people who've been terribly active—people who've stopped me in the street and congratulated me, and so on. It has got through to a proportion of the population that there's been a breakthrough here, and this has been very well received.

We will fight on a whole range of issues right the way through, but we are not going to throw ourselves like kamikaze pilots, as Ted Knight's fond of saying, into situations which are hopeless or for which there isn't popular support. We'll try and choose the

ground in a way that actually benefits us rather than the government.

Now, our scope in all this is limited; the government is in a position to be able to choose most of the ground on which it will move against us. But we will be fighting. We're currently convening meetings in every borough to discuss how we should implement the fares cuts. We're producing our own GLC free giveaway newspaper, which will go to every household in London explaining the stand we're making.

We'll also use that newspaper to campaign round issues which go beyond just the scale of what this building is responsible for. The ethnic minorities committee we've set up will use the newspaper to explain our opposition to the Nationality Bill, to urge people to write and complain to their MPs about it.

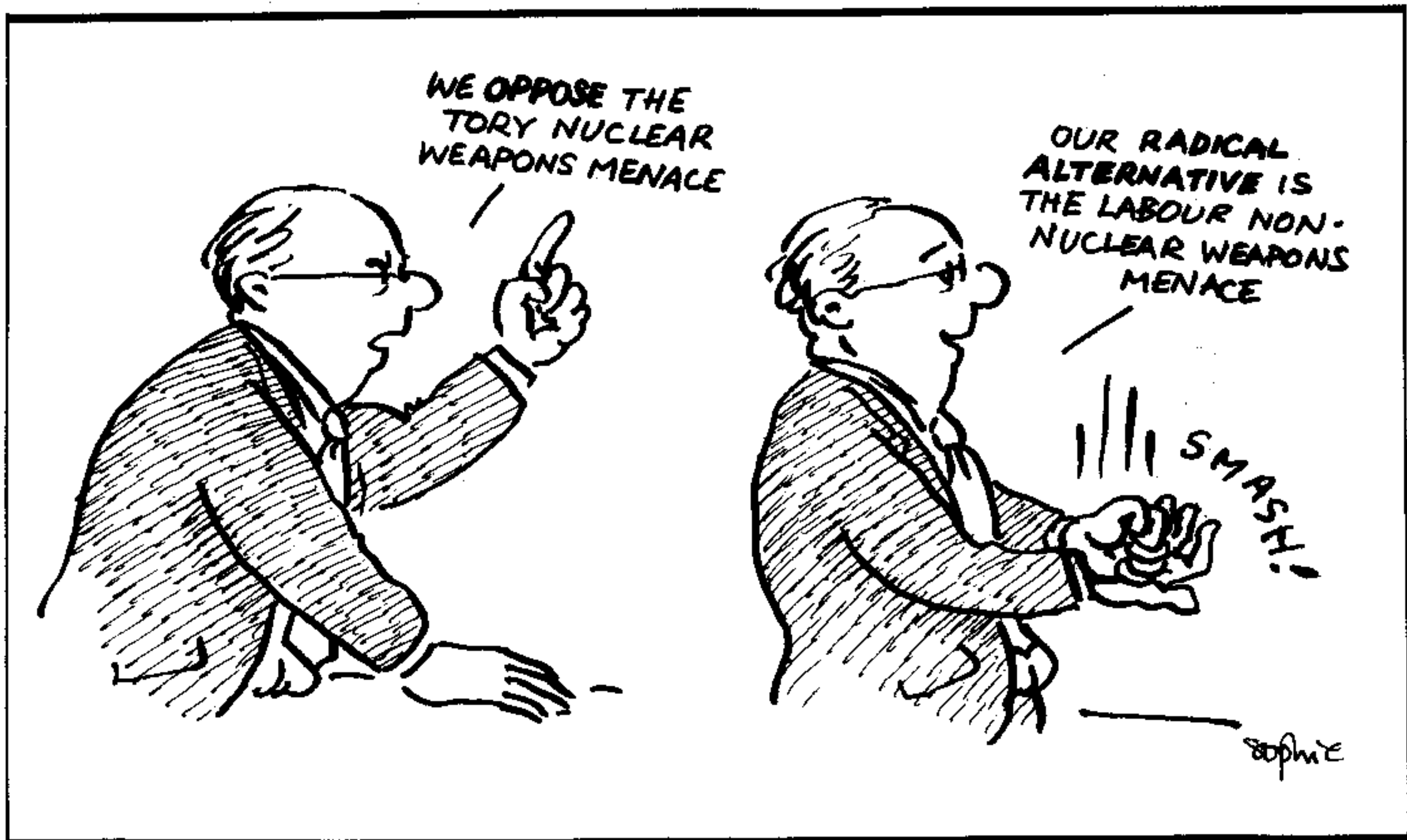
**The real disagreement between us is that you end up having a choice between being the people who actually do the dirty work for the government, perhaps a bit nicer than a Tory council would, or you end up in a Clay Cross or a Poplar situation, and the attempts to skate between the two, which is what Ted Knight's been trying to do, are not very successful.**

My record is that I don't mind, as in the 35 hour week/£60 minimum wage row at Camden, taking a risk and trying to break through that system and its constraints. But you want some guarantee, some chance of success. Now, I don't perceive, as you clearly do, that rates are just doing the dirty work of the government. The London Chamber of Commerce goes screaming bananas at the thought of it—which is why they're in and out of Heseltine's office demanding that he stops us using the rates option. Anything that takes £2.7 million out of the city of London every time we put a penny on the rates is not perceived as a betrayal of the working class in the City of London.

**Some people would argue that you may take in out of the City of London but that you put it straight back in—50% of the GLC income goes back in interest payments.**

Well, convince the City of that. Part of the problem is that a lot of the tendencies on the left, in a desire to maintain their own credibility when they're outside the main stream of the movement, always have to find an issue on which they can differentiate themselves from the left within the Labour Party. The rates issue has been used in that way quite cynically by some of the Left tendencies in an attempt to say the Labour Party are betraying.

I have nothing but contempt for those left tendencies who have sought really to go over Ted Knight and attack Lambeth, while bypassing the appallingly right-wing councillors that have passed on every cut in order to keep the rates down right the way across London. One would almost have the feeling that there was only one council in London—it was Lambeth and that was the centre of the fight. I think that's been very counter-productive, and I think that reflects the bankruptcy of some of the tendencies on the left, in their own desire to try and recruit members in the most cynical way.



## Nato's spending spree

Admiral of the Fleet of the Soviet Navy, SG Gorshkov, is not a figure familiar to most readers of this magazine. Sergei Gorshkov became an admiral at the age of 31, commander of the Russian fleet at 46. That was 25 years ago.

Since then he has become probable the most admirable admiral in the view of the Royal Navy; for he has done all that they would like to do. The Russian navy has emerged from being an almost insignificant force to being the second-largest in the world (second to the US of course)—more than 300 submarines, 37 cruisers, 75 destroyers...a vast array of boats capable of all sorts of combined operations.

Sergei Gorshkov did not appear personally in the middle of the 'great defence row' that convulsed the Tories recently. But it is the combined respect and fear that the British admirals have for his fleet which led to their outrage when they heard that their government might be going to cut back on some of their precious surface ships, in order to spend the vast increases in the UK defence budget on other armaments. Most notable

on the Trident nuclear project, the cost of which began at £5 billion, has now reached at least £6 billion, and is widely estimated to be eventually about £10 billion.

If anyone was more outraged than the admirals and the Tory right-wing—those to the right of Thatcher, to be perfectly clear about it—it was the Labour Party. The House of Commons debate on defence on 19/20 May saw many impassioned speeches by Labour MPs against the waste of the Trident project, the horror of nuclear weaponry, even the need for unilateral disarmament—but nothing about the fleet except praise and a desire to preserve 'Britain's maritime strength and our national defences.'

Labour MPs pursuing this line stretched right over from the ill-named James Wellbeloved to Stuart Holland. They all had one common underlying theme, sometimes stated overtly, sometimes implied, that the point of nuclear disarmament—unilateral or multilateral—is to preserve and improve the integrity and conventional weaponry of the British armed forces.

Stuart Holland even suggested that it would have been easier for the US to intervene directly in Afghanistan if it had not been 'muscle-bound by nuclear power.' Bob Cryer (another member of the Bennite-Marxist faction of the Labour Party, to use the Wellbeloved phrase) said: 'Of course, we shall preserve our conventional forces. Of course, we shall preserve defence facilities in Britain. We shall do so, so that we may use those conventional forces if and when the need arises.'

These constant protestations of Labour loyalty to Britain's established armed forces and to NATO, which were repeated

throughout the debate in parliament, are extraordinary in the light of the recent defence white paper, its statements about the role of conventional forces and the cost of modern non-nuclear weaponry.

If you look at the total cost of defence, the strategic nuclear force—ie Polaris and Vulcan bombers—in itself takes 'only' 2.2 per cent of the budget. The navy takes 13.6 per cent. European theatre ground forces rake in 15.3 per cent. Naturally, this is a slightly bogus argument. Defence expenditure cannot really be separated out so neatly, and the nuclear weapons deployed by Britain (rather than by US forces in Britain) are nearly all closely integrated with parts of the navy. Nevertheless, the economic arguments which Labour uses about defence are simply wrong.

In political terms they are even more disastrous. First of all there is the argument about spending more on the navy, the air force, etc., to 'preserve British industry' and jobs. Labour MPs from shipbuilding areas, notably the Lower Clyde, Tyneside and Barrow, are now calling for massive warship expenditure to keep British Shipbuilders afloat.

The sums involved are colossal. The cost of one nuclear powered submarine (whatever its armament) is £175 million. The latest type 22 frigates cost £120 million each. A mine counter-measures vessel costs £30 million. The projected cost of a Tornado aircraft—the main replacement for the RAF—is about £14.5 million. As a result the amounts taken from the tax paid by British workers to pay British military contractors is enormous.

Labour is caught in a central contradiction over defence—one which is going to become much worse in July when the government actually announces its restructuring of defence expenditure.

It cannot call into question the 'blocc of

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terror', NATO and the Warsaw Pact, because the different factions think, in different ways, that both are necessary and, indeed, desirable. It cannot call for real cuts in defence spending—the place where they would have to hit hardest would be the navy and the RAF (assuming the Tories themselves cut expenditure on British forces in Germany, which is probable). Worse, the Labour Party is by implication wedded to the central NATO role for British military forces, the control of the Greenland/Faroes sea entry into the North Atlantic.

This is again because of their passion for the navy, and the fact that by treaty with the US, 80 per cent of this North Atlantic defence is controlled by the UK. This particular requirement has, incidentally, had another effect. It is that the British navy is almost incapable of operating at full stretch in the North Sea and the Channel—supposing such a thing were necessary—because the majority of surface ships are unsuitable. Not only do the needs of the Western Alliance and conventional warfare in the nuclear age demand huge expenditure: they are also incredibly specialised needs.

The essential difficulty for the British ruling class and its governments—Tory and Labour—in dealing with arms expenditure is that costs are now escalating so rapidly and strategic demands for integration have become paramount.

The balance of nuclear forces as such—'catching up' with the Russians—is not the main issue—despite what the Tories and the Labour right-wing say. A paper by the head of the International Institute for Strategic Studies given to the Trilateral Commission last year started from the premise that 'in the nuclear strategic field, a rough balance of forces...exists. There are no doubt asymmetries between the Soviet and the American strategic effort. These would tend, in the first years of the decade, to give the USSR certain theoretical advantages through the vulnerability of US land-based intercontinental missiles; in the second half of the decade, however, new US strategic programmes—if they are implemented—will not only neutralise that Soviet advantage but actually provide the US with a clear measure of strategic advantage over the Soviet Union.'

This passage is quoted at length because it shows what liars we have as rulers. The IISS is their think tank; they know what it says is true. The propaganda about a Russian lead is designed to provide a cover for a massive increase in defence spending throughout the whole of the capitalist world, by three per cent a year in *real* terms (on top of inflation) each year.

But this extra expenditure is not particularly of their choosing: it is the logical extension of what went before, massive investment in nuclear arms systems and their conventional back-up systems which have become increasingly specialised, sophisticated and costly. And as arms have become more and more costly, the world economy has moved into recession; expensive weaponry has become a terrible burden on the weaker economies, particularly Britain, as it has on Russia and the Eastern bloc.

Britain under the Tories is now committed to arms spending of approximately £75

billion at *current prices* in the period to 1986 because of the joint agreement recently signed by NATO defence ministers. Russia is currently spending about 13 per cent of the country's entire out-put on arms; the US plans to increase its 1980-81 arms expenditure—\$142.7 billion—by 17 per cent in two years: \$200 million a year, give or take a few dozen million.

It is the scale of this expenditure which has led the Tories to look at how they can restructure within even their vastly increased budget: if they do not, the total cost will be even greater. Because defence costs are rising in a virtually uncontrollable way, the government is forced to look for ways of making cuts in certain areas while maintaining the commitment to NATO to increase real spending by three per cent a year.

July's defence review will attempt to do this for the period up to 1990. It has to look as far ahead as this—without the government having a clue what will happen in six months time, let alone ten years—because of the time it takes to plan, build and put new weaponry into the field.

This will in itself lead to ludicrous decisions. To quote just one example, given by Tory Defence Secretary, John Nott, the anti-submarine warfare aircraft carriers, which are still undergoing trials are now deemed to be irrelevant. 'I do not believe,' said Mr Nott, 'that we would order them if we were making the decision today. Times have changed. However, I am going to the launching of the Ark Royal.'

The Tories have now realised—probably better than the Labour Party—the mess that arms expenditure has got into. It is fantastically difficult for the NATO powers to plan ahead and to integrate their forces (as the Warsaw Pact does, because the Russians control it rigidly). So they are having to spend more and more, often in competition with each other, for lucrative 'third world' contracts, and are enormously vulnerable to unforeseen events. The fall of the Shah for example, meant that the cost of the new UK Challenger battle tank (initial order £350 million) has fallen much more heavily on the British defence budget.

There are some conclusions to be drawn from this mess. First the amazing dishonesty the Tories are engaged in. This has been pointed out elsewhere in this article: a more

sinister example concerns nuclear strategy. Compare these two quotes:

'Selective air attack with nuclear weapons against specific targets might be necessary to demonstrate political will and to induce an opponent to stop aggression.'

'The idea that any Western democratic nation could conceive of Trident or any other nuclear weapon as being required for 'war fighting' is too fanciful for words.'

The first is the defence white paper; the second is John Nott.


Secondly, the defence debate really does show up the Labour Party—and especially the Labour left—as reformist cretins. Their entire approach is to protect the armed services *as they are* at all costs; to bolster up their power; to reinforce the arms race in conventional weapons, while saying that they support unilateralism.

Above all they do not want to question why NATO exists and why the Warsaw Pact exists. They go along with the system: even if it means reinforcing those sections of the forces like the marines, the paras, parts of the navy which are specifically designed for counter-insurgency and repression.

Often these attitudes are covered up—sometimes, to be charitable, perhaps they are unconscious. The most pitiful spectacle is a Labour MP begging for *more* conventional arms expenditure to 'save jobs'. Part of the process of technological development in arms manufacture is to cut jobs, anyway. The first computerised factory in Britain is Normalair-Garrett in Crewkerne. It makes bomb release mechanisms for the Tornado. It employs five people.

Meanwhile, certain Labour MPs are very good at putting the CND position in parliament. The groundswell against nuclear weapons has clearly got the Tories worried; over and over again they repeat they hate the bomb and that the arms race is mad. They know they could be on a loser. But for our part we ought to be putting the arguments more strongly: that the enemy is militarism, that the fight is against NATO and the Warsaw Pact and that the solution is international socialism.

Dave Becham



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# Strikes which could have won

The mighty TGWU holds its biennial conference at the end of this month. Most of the press discussion on the event is concerned with whether the union will back Tony Benn in his fight for deputy leader of the Labour Party. But however important this may be, other struggles are taking place—and being lost—of immediate relevance to TGWU members. At Ansells' brewery in Birmingham one of the most significant struggles against the destruction of jobs this year is threatened with defeat—because of the role of TGWU officials. At Chlorides Gaedor's distribution depot in Essex, the union seems to have given in to the first injunction actually served under the Tory Employment Act—despite its continual claims to be opposed to the Act. And at Bestobell's on Clydeside, union officials refused to support an occupation that was finally smashed when the courts imposed fines.

Barry Blinko, a member of the strike committee, and Sheila MacGregor tell the story of the Ansells struggle. Then Christine Kenny looks at the issues behind the Chloride injunctions. Finally, Dave Sherry compares the defeat at Bestobells with the occupation that is still going on at Lee Jeans.

# Birmingham's bitter men

The first shots in the Ansells dispute were fired in January this year, when management introduced a four day week, based on retaining full production. This was not, as they claimed, because of falling trade for local beers, but as a 20% wage saver, and a means of carrying out demanning. Despite being a poor time of year for brewery strikes, branch confidence was high enough for the membership to vote to strike on January 14th.

The brewery was isolated in various ways from the rest of the working class movement. The cutbacks in labour, and short-time working of the previous years had not affected us. Disputes tended to be short, mainly one day departmental affairs. Unlike elsewhere in the Midlands, where workers' morale had been shattered by defeats, Ansells workers were confident in their own ability to win a dispute that could take a long time. Compare the length of strikes at Longbridge under threat of sackings, and that in Ansells in the same city.

It was quickly realised that there was a need to picket. It was decided to cover the brewery and the two depots, where all the manual workers were on strike, the wholesalers who had supplied the pubs in Warrington with beer during their 13 week strike the previous year, and the major managed house pubs.

This strategy was initially successful within its own limits. The wholesalers arranged for the pickets to monitor beer from the inside rather than have all their beer stopped (a sign of weakness on the part of the strikers). It was also difficult for the pubs to get deliveries and the majority stayed dry. The TGWU managers of the pubs supported the strike at this stage.

Delegations were arranged by the SWP to go to Manchester and London. These trips had a profound influence on the four delegates where they were introduced to new ideas. The SWP argued that the fight had to be extended beyond Ansells to Allied Breweries as a whole, that the days of winning against local management had long gone and the struggle had to be taken into the rest of the working class movement. The SWP also argued that the strike had to be organised properly with a strike committee and that fund raising needed to be a priority with delegations sent out all over the country.

As a result of such discussions, a strike committee was set up and a decision made to picket the Burton brewery, but after the intervention of the branch chairman four days later this vote was reversed, 5-4. This was a turning point in the dispute. It was early enough in the dispute (5th week) for the involvement and confidence of the pickets to be high enough for a picket on Burton to be effective. Things were different when the decision was retaken over eight weeks later.

The main activity, apart from the pub picketing, was dealing with the trade union bureaucracy, and, after the company had announced the closure of the brewery on 9 February, involving local MPs and councillors. Regional Secretary Brian Mathers

and Divisional Officer Doug Fairburn tried at two mass meetings to get the members' agreement to end the dispute. Both times they failed miserably with almost unanimous decisions to continue the fight. Mathers told a local TGWU steward "The TGWU has never won a fight against closure and Ansells is not going to be the first." Local Councillors' support for Aston Brewery (the brewery not the jobs) and local MPs' meetings with management did not help the dispute but rather tended to deflect it into lobbying or petitioning rather than picketing. The fact that the strike leadership were prepared to allow this diversion is another indication of their weakness.

Because of the official union's inactivity in helping to win the strike, a delegation from the strike committee went to meet Alex Kitson, the TGWU Deputy General Secretary, who stated that the unions were not in the business of selling jobs.

Six days later, at a crucial meeting of the TGWU pub managers, who had received an ultimatum from Ansells to reopen with scab beers, Doug Fairburn refused to allow a vote and indicated the managers should reopen. His reasoning was based on the fact that many of the managers had left the TGWU and joined the National Association of Licensed House Managers in order to be able to reopen. Another indication that picketing the consumers, not the producers of the product, was a mistake.

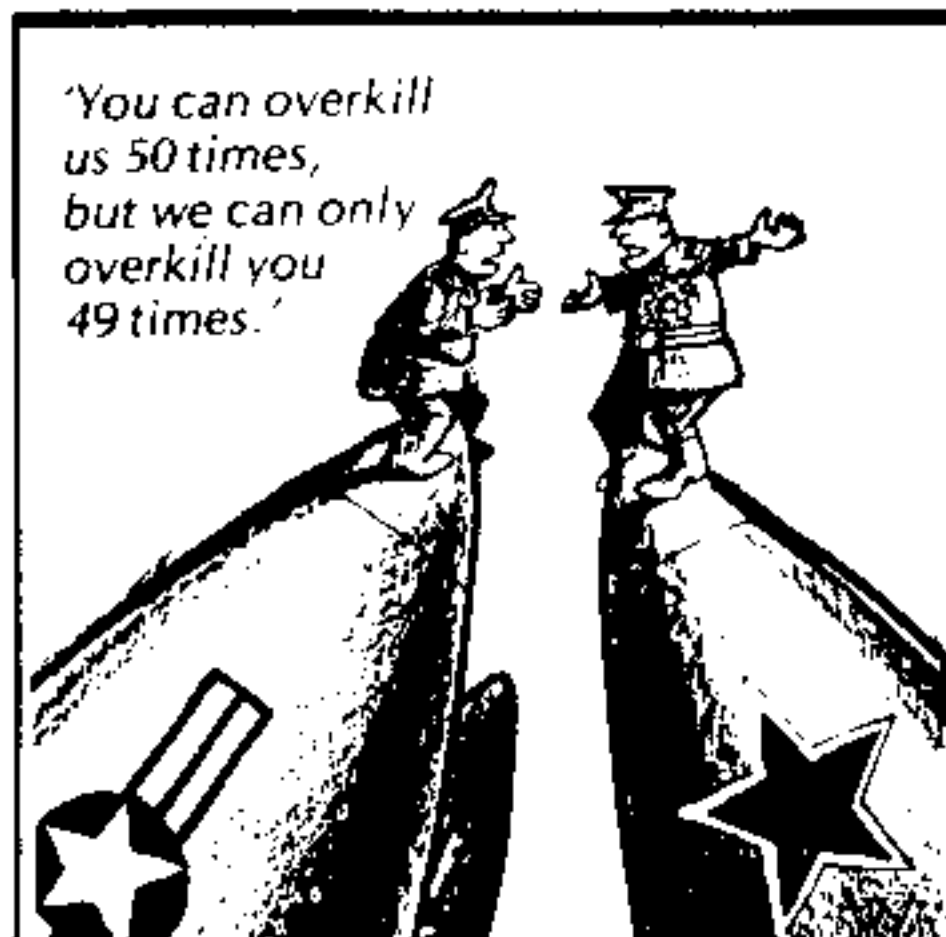
The strike committee decided to picket another Allied brewery. A strike bulletin argued for a change to this strategy, volunteers were got, and a decision to picket Romford was finally taken on Sunday 22nd March.

The TGWU officials broke the picketing at Romford, by declaring that the strike was only official in Region 5 and that drivers should therefore cross the lines. Drivers who would have respected the picket line in the area were afraid to for fear of losing their jobs and not getting union backing if they did. Finally Terry Austin, Region 5 district officer, instructed the pickets to return from Romford on the basis of a deal done with his counterpart in Region 1. He threatened that the strike would lose its official status if the pickets did not return.

On Friday March 27th, the delegates' meeting of Allied Breweries finally took place, carefully supervised by TGWU officials. This meeting agreed only that the other breweries would do nothing to undermine the strike and would not supply beer into the area!

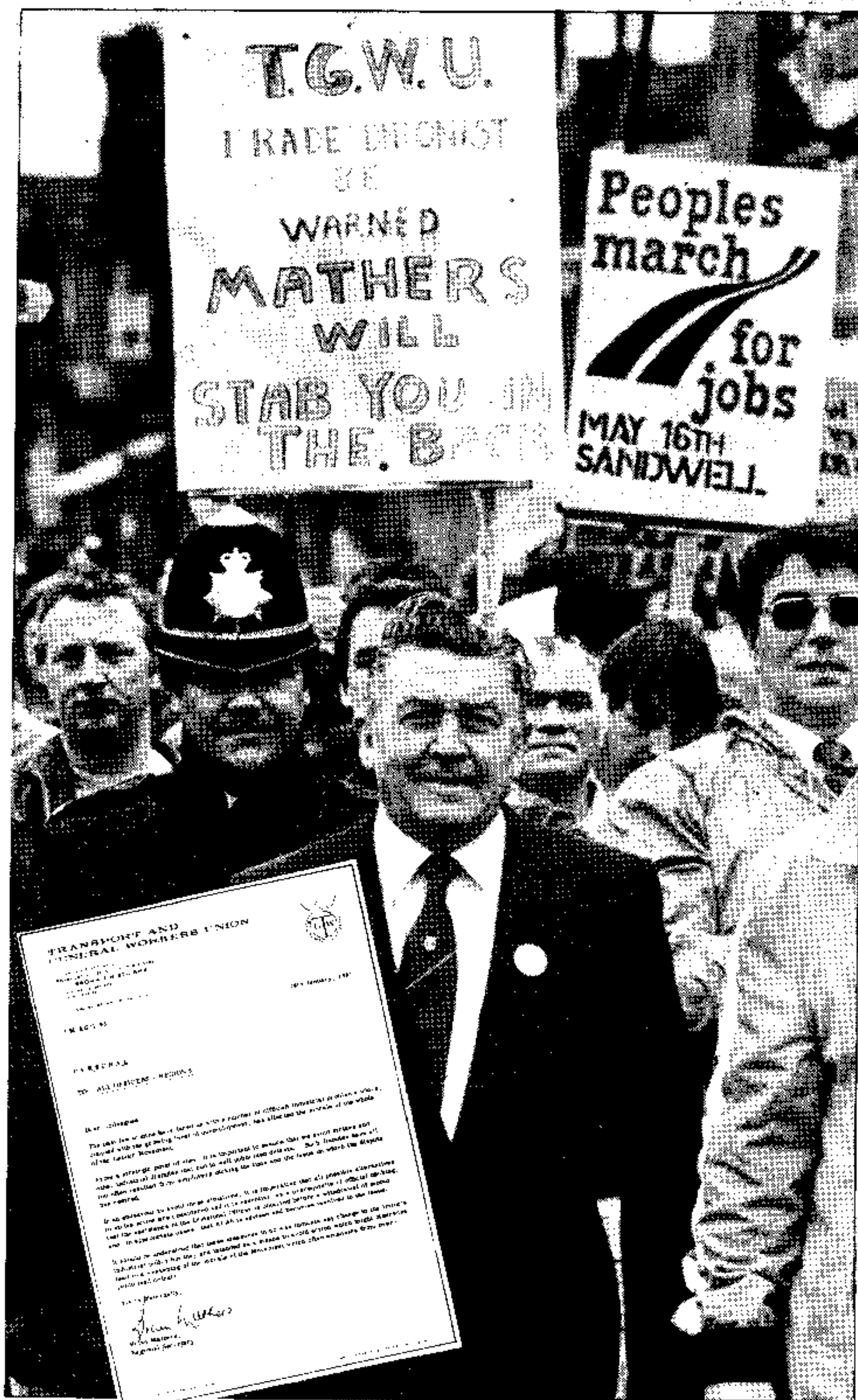
Meanwhile Alex Kitson met the brewery without success and we were told that if any other brewery came out on strike it would immediately be made official. The impression was given that any escalation of the dispute would find official favour. A further branch meeting again voted overwhelmingly on Easter Friday to continue the strike and to start picketing other breweries. Based upon this pickets were sent to Burton and Romford on April 23rd.

This picketing was once again undermined by the full time officials telling drivers



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their addressing system for the ballot.

With the strikers delivered up the management then put the boot in, offering fewer jobs on terms and conditions that would seek to prevent any effective trade unionism in the future. The jobs would be offered to those selected by management on company terms, based on a long list of qualifying points such as discipline record, co-operation record, efficiency, age, fitness etc. The jobs were for re-engagement not reinstatement. So bad was this offer that the officials (Mathers and Fairburn) have not been prepared to accept it and have refused to sign. So far, they have stayed silent and not told the strikers what they should do next.

The branch has decided to picket the depots from resumption of work on May 28th and continue the strike for more jobs and better redundancy pay, and a better agreement for those who return to work. Unfortunately, although the company will now be more vulnerable since it is desperate to reopen the depot and get back to normal for the summer season, the morale of the strikers is probably now so low that they would not have the energy to take up picketing Burton again.

Ansells is a fight which could have been won. Allied Breweries is highly profitable and so is Ansells itself, providing just under a third of the profits for the brewing division. The membership were confident and prepared to fight with a high level of rank and file involvement at the beginning.

What went wrong?

The TGWU leadership want to keep their heads down and wait for a Labour Government. They are happy to rely on demonstrations as a means of protest in the meantime. A Region 5 circular tells officials to 'avoid strikes and other industrial disputes that end in well publicised defeats!!! In other words they have no intention of encouraging industrial struggle as a means of fighting unemployment. Nor do they have any intention of sticking to TGWU conference policy on the Employment Act and defy it. The determination and unity of the Ansells strikers has been a constant embarrassment to Mathers instead of a shining beacon in the Midlands, which has been taken to the cleaners by Michael Edwardes so many times over the last couple of years. It took the officials to break the fight against closure where Allied management had failed.

However, there are also other reasons for the lack of success at Ansells. The branch leadership which had proved so capable in peacetime conditions at work was not equipped to deal with the class war started by Allied Breweries.

As a brewery Ansells was isolated from the rest of the Allied Breweries. There was no inter-union organisation which would have enabled the workers at Ansells to call on real support from other Allied workers. In fact, the workers at Burton were glad to see Ansells close because that meant they would get Ansells' work and would therefore escape redundancies themselves.

In this situation, the picket line was crucial to the success of winning. Mathers knows that and Mathers broke it.

to ignore the picket lines this time because they were only official inside Birmingham (Birmingham is in Region 5). Eventually the Romford pickets returned demoralised.

On May 5th the pickets at Burton had had enough. They occupied Transport House in West Bromwich, and kept Mathers and Fairburn there for five hours trying to get a written instruction to drivers not to cross the picket lines. They refused. Their reasons are revealing: that the TGWU did not want an injunction and they were not prepared to put the funds at risk.

Mathers had also argued that he could not give an instruction not to cross the picket line. He conveniently forgot that he had done precisely that over blacking of steel in Wolverhampton during the steel strike in 1980. His instruction then was

effective. And when Ansells picketed the Biggs brewery in Salisbury they were effective because the local official stood on the line with them.

Mathers also argued that the TGWU were doing quite enough in supporting the strike by paying out £9,000 a week strike pay!

With the strikers increasingly getting demoralised and feeling the pinch, the stage was now set for the Regional Secretary to prove that they had been right all along to get the members to accept the company's offer. Mathers balloted the membership in a secret ballot, with choices worse than any management could conceive. With such rigging he got a decision to allow the officials to negotiate on the company's offer and not continue the fight for the reopening of the brewery. He used company envelopes and

# No spark at Chlorides

The injunctions served on seven T&GWU members at Chloride Gaedor's distribution depot in Romford, Essex, on 8th May, could mark the beginning of a new legal attack on trade union organisation. Although not the first injunctions to have been granted by the courts against 'secondary picketing' under the Employment Act, these are the first to have been actually served, and to have been effective.

Although the Employment Act has been in force for nearly a year, employers have so far seemed to be wary of using its provisions on picketing, so it is useful to look at the combination of circumstances that led Chloride management to take this step.

Firstly, let's not be surprised that it should be at Chloride that this should have happened. It's not so long ago that Michael Edwardes left Chloride to go to Leyland, and the style of management there still bears his stamp. For example, almost every written instruction from management is accompanied by the threat of dismissal if it is not complied with.

Secondly, it has a poor record of union and workplace organisation at the depot at which the strikers work. It's tiny—only nine employees. Although there was a successful ten week union recognition strike there in 1976, since then there has been little activity—the workforce has dropped from fifteen to nine without too much complaint, overtime was cancelled, and then reintroduced, without pay, some time later. Pay itself is pathetically low, ranging from less than £40 to under £70 per week. While union organisation at the main Chloride Automotive battery plant a few miles away in Dagenham is relatively strong, there is little communication. Wages and conditions are negotiated separately, and the workers at the distribution depot are in a different T&G branch (a Fords branch!).

The isolation of the strikers has been compounded by the effects of the recession in the motor industry. Demand for batteries has fallen by 40% this winter; the consequent threat to jobs in the industry is likely, therefore, to be one of the reasons why the strikers have not, so far, been able to get the support of the workers at the Dagenham battery plant.

Thirdly, there's the question of the union involved, the Transport and General Workers Union. Even for a company as large as Chloride, there's a calculated risk involved in taking on the country's biggest union, especially when the fundamental issues at the heart of the dispute (pay bargaining, lock-out, the Employment Act) are so clear. But so far, Chloride's gamble appears to be paying off.

As soon as the injunctions were served, the T&G full-time official advised the strikers to call off the 'secondary' picket while the union thought it over. Their first thoughts, apparently, were that the wording of the injunctions might be incorrect, and could be challenged in court! Their second thoughts have yet to be revealed. But there's no doubt that the T&G are petrified by the possibility of legal action being taken against any of their officials, for the Employment Act not only removed the previous indemnity against legal action for pickets, it also removed indemnity from

union officials who organise 'unlawful' activities in connection with disputes.

So while the T&G have been muttering about the need for some sort of mass demonstration or picket to defy the injunction, once they are seen to organise it, the way is clear for Chloride to claim damages for loss of production, breach of commercial contracts, etc. And they are very frightened indeed of anything that might have such serious financial repercussions. So frightened that they even told the strikers that they weren't to talk to the workers at the main Dagenham plant, or to the BOC or Texaco drivers delivering supplies, as that might be construed as inciting a breach of contract.

However, not wanting to be seen to be doing nothing, the local T&G bureaucracy have been parading up and down outside the Chloride Automotive plant in Dagenham for half an hour a couple of times a week with anti-Employment Act placards, while their locked-out members are on their 'own' picket line a few miles away.

## A tale of two sit ins

Talbot Linwood closed last month with the loss of nearly 5000 jobs. It was a serious defeat and it seemed to doom for the time being all hope of any decisive struggle against unemployment. But socialists on Clydeside need not despair. In the last few months there have been a rash of small disputes; the combatants have included water workers, librarians, engineers, busworkers, and even unorganised teenagers on the phony YOP schemes. But the most significant indications that there exists a minority prepared to fight have been at Bestobells and Lee Jeans.

Regular readers of *Socialist Worker* will have followed events at these disputes. Why are they significant? They started off as unofficial actions, developed into militant occupations and challenged the full might of the law. Yet despite their initial similarities there are sharp contrasts in the way these two struggles have developed.

As we go to press, the contrasts in the two disputes have been starkly drawn. Today as I write, the clothing workers of Lee Jeans in Greenock have achieved a decisive breakthrough. After a 16 week occupation, and after a lot of hesitation they have finally gone for a blacking campaign and have won the immediate support of the dockers. The occupation has been promised an all out national blacking campaign on the VF Corporation (Lee Jeans' American-owned parent company).

Ironically, on the same day the Bestobell workers, out of sheer isolation, have reluctantly returned to work, their organisation weakened though not broken.

Let's first look at the Bestobell occupation.

The dispute involved 60 skilled insulation workers, commonly known as ladders, working for Bestobell Insulation Ltd., a large and profitable firm which specialises in marine and oil-related insulation work.

There's no doubt that Chloride management saw very clearly the dilemma the union would be placed in by their recourse to law. On the one hand, to win the dispute, the T&G would have to be prepared to risk a large amount of money, on the other, they would have to face the consequences among the membership of being seen to back down over the major piece of Tory anti-union legislation. Chloride's betting has been that for just seven members, the T&GWU would give in.

And they seem to have been right. Chloride's decision on Friday, 22nd May to close four distribution centres, including the Romford one, at an hour's notice, and four more the following week, will have been accelerated and strengthened by the reluctance of the T&G to fight over the lock-out of its members at Romford. The success of legal tactics in getting the pickets on the Dagenham plant withdrawn will mean that the workers at all the Chloride Gaedor depots will have a much harder fight on their hands if they try to defend their jobs. The T&G's policy of 'backing' all members fighting redundancies is meaningless in the context of court injunctions and claims for damages. The union's job is not to be 'behind' its members, but to be *leading* the fight against the Employment Act, by calling and organising for mass pickets of Chloride Automotive plants in defiance of the injunctions.

Generally, ladders, because of their militant record and fiercely independent organisation are not popular, particularly with union officialdom. The Isle of Grain strike was an illustration of this.

The struggle at Bestobell, like the Isle of Grain, was seen in some quarters as a "messy, complicated" issue. That worked against the ladders from the start.

*Socialist Worker* of 2nd May explained the background to the occupation:

'The ladders all under contract to Bestobell have taken action because of the company's attempt to smash their union. By putting six boilermakers onto jobs done by ladders their union branch is under threat. The Company have done this despite the jobs being awarded to the ladders by ACAS.'

The reason for their aggressiveness was that the ladders have been well organised and militant, while boilermakers, without this militancy, are prepared to work under conditions the ladders would not tolerate.

After three weeks the ladders decided to go to the heart of the enemy and took over Bestobell's headquarters in Glasgow. The police told them they were breaking the law and a court order was served ordering them off the premises. They ignored it.



The occupation continued for another month. Eventually the police moved in, the ladders were arrested, taken to court and fined over £6000 for contempt. They continued to picket for another week but have now reluctantly voted to return to work, although there is a possibility that they will strike again on the same issue.

There were three main reasons for the occupation being defeated.

1) The full-timers of the T&GWU refused to make the dispute official. Hugh Wiper, CP member and Scottish Regional Secretary of the union, made sure of that.

The officials claimed that an agreement had previously been signed with Bestobell to allow a limited number of boilermakers onto the contract. The ladders had never seen this agreement and had never been party to it.

The officials were able to sow the seeds of confusion and doubt among the other shipyard shop stewards on the Lower Clyde. Without strike pay the ladders had to rely on unofficial sources for funds. The Clydeside yards, normally generous to those in struggle, gave no support whatsoever. Many people were led to believe that it was an inter-union battle and not a principled stand for trade unionism.

2) Despite the militant tradition and courage of the ladders there is no doubt that they were seriously intimidated by the police and the massive court fines imposed on them. The prospect of fighting the employers and the state on their own proved too daunting.

3) Given the interference of the law and the opposition of the T&GWU hierarchy, the only thing that could have turned the tables would have been the ladders themselves mounting a widespread campaign for financial support and mass solidarity picketing.

The potential was there. After all, the issue which provoked the dispute—management's attempts to end demarcation and to cut safety standards—strikes a chord with many shipyard militants who are facing the same threat. Even more significantly, when the law moved in it could have become an issue for *all* trade unionists. Clearly, here was a case of 'an injury to one being an injury to all'.

Yet the only 'outside' support was from the SWP, who produced collection sheets, raised the dispute in other workplaces, helped with picketing, and carried the ladders case in *Socialist Worker*. But that kind of support is only effective if it moves bigger forces into active support. It didn't do so, and here the weakness of the ladders' own organisation has to be examined.

The Glasgow ladders had fought hard over domestic issues—particularly wages, conditions and health and safety. Experience had taught them a healthy distrust of union officials and they tend to ignore or bypass them. Good 'site' militants, they are traditionally self-reliant fighters capable of looking after themselves.

So far so good, but as often happens har-

dened militants have problems too. The ladders, because they are so self-reliant, have an insular style of organisation. In the Bestobell dispute they didn't appreciate that the old ways of organising no longer apply. They had to put pressure on the officials and they could not afford to ignore the union machine as they did. They had to get out delegations raising money and putting their case to other workers, they had to involve others in their pickets and occupation, but they did none of these.

It's a truism that it's often the weakest not the strongest who see the need for solidarity. The ladders, traditionally strong, were beaten because they didn't realise that with all the odds stacked against them they could never win on their own. Widespread solidarity was the only way to overcome those odds.

Now let's look at Lee Jeans.



Lee Jeans is a small factory in Greenock. Owned by the multi-national corporation Vanity Fair, it is one of the 40 factories they own throughout the world. The firm's British operation consists of three factories in Northern Ireland and the Greenock plant.

Last year, VF moved their cutting room from Greenock to Ireland. Over there government grants are higher and the workforce are reputed to be more amenable. The writing was on the wall for Greenock. Four months ago the company worked out that, on their terms, the factory was no longer viable, and decided to close it, throwing its 240 workers onto the street. The company never expected trouble. The plant was unionised but the organisation concerned, the National Union of Tailoring and Garment Workers, is usually regarded as a push-over. (As one of the Greenock workers later said, 'a real Mickey Mouse union'.)

More importantly, the workforce, nearly all women, and the majority of them teenagers, had no tradition of struggle or organisation. So with an inexperienced and isolated workforce, the company seemed to have it all going for them. Better organised places on the Clyde were crumbling without

resistance. Yet the company experienced what they considered a 'temporary setback' when, on the day the announcement was made, the women occupied the plant. Clearly it appeared a desperate, forlorn response. But 16 weeks later those women are still there.

They have fought as if their lives depended on it, and that's not surprising. In a town with 16% unemployment and no jobs, the women know they have no future outside the factory. One 20 year old had been made redundant five times from five different factories that have closed. This is the first time she's been able to fight back.

Acutely aware of their own weakness, but strengthened by their desire to fight, the women accepted support and advice from 'outsiders' right from the start. Thousands of collection sheets were distributed, shipyard shop stewards helped set up a local delegate trade union committee to organise support. The Right to Work Campaign initiated delegations from the occupation to local factories and to workplaces round the country. Women who had never spoken in public carried their defiance to union meetings, trades councils, factories and demonstrations throughout Britain. Shop stewards from Gardners were invited to the occupation to explain how they won. After six weeks, the reluctant union leaders were forced into making the occupation official. That in itself was a victory.

Support began to flood in. Lee Jeans quickly became a symbol of struggle for a dispirited movement. The big shipyards and engineering factories were inspired into organising massive weekly levies to keep the occupation alive. Morale in the occupation rocketed, and the Lee Jeans struggle became so popular that even the STUC put out the red carpet at their Rothesay conference. Clearly the official movement was being forced to respond to a groundswell of rank and file support.

The key to winning the dispute lies in blacking VF—preventing the movement of goods from the Irish factories and cutting off their source of revenue. For too long the women accepted the official advice and shied away from blacking because it might dent their image. But after 16 weeks, they now knew there was no other way to win. The dockers have immediately responded to their call and if the blacking is fully implemented then the jobs can be saved.

Lee Jeans shows that by fighting workers can overcome both their own fears and the odds that are stacked against them. It's clear that in every dispute the question of solidarity is more crucial than ever. When the Bestobell management took out a court order against the ladders' occupation, they succeeded because the ladders remained isolated. When VF tried the same tactic at Lee Jeans, it backfired. On the appointed day of eviction, the Lee Jeans factory was surrounded by hundreds of mean-looking shipyard workers prepared to fight alongside the women.

The lesson from the sit-ins is a simple one. To stand any chance of winning, you have to involve other workers in your struggle. It means involvement at every level—collecting money, standing on the picket line, blacking goods. It applies to the strong as well as to the weak.

Contrary to most predictions (including our own in *Socialist Review* two months ago) François Mitterrand has become President of the French Fifth Republic, the first clear-cut victory for the left in French politics since the onset of the Cold War in 1947. Street celebrations that have been in all seriousness compared to the events of 1968 leave no doubt as to the enthusiasm that has greeted Mitterrand's victory.

But how real are the prospects for change? *Tribune* (15.5.81) looks to Mitterrand's victory as being the 'first salvo in the attack to drive back the madness of monetarism which has affected so much of the Western industrial world.' But Mitterrand may find the road ahead much more arduous than his supporters expect. Ian Birchall explains.

Mitterrand's victory was, of course, a narrow one. He took 51.75% of the vote as against Giscard's 48.24%. In 1974 Giscard won by 50.81% to 49.19%. This represents a total swing of only just over 2.5% - ie only one voter in forty has shifted sides since 1974.

Indeed, since Mitterrand did particularly well among young voters voting for the first time, the result could have been achieved simply by Giscard's supporters dying off while Mitterrand's came of age, without anyone changing their mind at all. Certainly not an indication of a massive shift in popular consciousness.

Secondly, Mitterrand was able to take advantage of the fact that the open representatives of the French bourgeoisie were in a state of disarray. In the face of growing economic crisis, the corrupt and authoritarian Giscard did not have the confidence of a significant section of the French ruling class. Hence the Chirac candidacy.

At the same time Mitterrand brought off the difficult tactical feat of getting substantial support from the Communist Party electorate without making any significant political concessions to it. Mitterrand was able to do this because of the deep crisis raging in the ranks of the Communist Party. The CP's greatest growth in recent years came during the period between 1972 and 1977 when the CP was campaigning jointly with the Socialists for a Common Programme of government. The members recruited during that period have found it hard to follow the more recent swing to a line sharply critical of Mitterrand and the Socialists, and many more long-standing members have also drifted into opposition.

Many traditional CP voters seem to have switched their votes to Mitterrand on the first round. Hence the CP's catastrophic performance, with some of their biggest losses coming in their traditional strongholds such as the Paris suburbs. CP voters seem to have believed that (a) they might as well vote from the start for the only candidate who had any chance of beating Giscard or (b) that it was better to vote for an openly reformist party than for a reformist party rather inconsistently pretending to be revolutionary.

While some observers may have been premature in writing the CP's obituary, it is clear that the situation posed great difficulties for the Marchais leadership. If they had called for anything other than total support for Mitterrand on the second round, they would have faced a massive revolt from their own ranks and ended up looking very foolish. Yet this left them in the role of being mere voting fodder for



## And now for some

Mitterrand without being able to impose their own demands on the situation. Despite Marchais' bluster in calling for guarantees of CP ministers in Mitterrand's government, they found no way out of this trap.

Mitterrand's victory, then, was that of a clever political operator taking advantage of a favourable situation. This is indeed what one might expect of someone of his political background. Mitterrand was a minister on no less than eleven occasions under the Fourth Republic and showed himself to be a loyal agent of the French bourgeoisie and of French imperialism. When the Algerian national liberation struggle began on November 1st 1954, Mitterrand was the Minister of the Interior. It was his responsibility to organise the dispatch of CRS riot police to Algeria to try and suppress the rising. Mitterrand was one of those who insisted from the beginning that there could be no question of independence for Algeria.

'The only negotiation is war', he told the National Assembly on November 5th 1954, and on November 22nd he elaborated: 'We want the Algerian people to be more and more integrated into the French nation, and it's because we cannot allow it to be separated that we are having recourse to force, as the ultimate means of maintaining national unity.'

Likewise Mitterrand could be relied on to show the priorities of the Cold War period. Serving in the Mendes-France government, he declared: 'We are not a government which confuses an anti-

communist policy with constant victimisation.' Clearly the former was quite acceptable, while the latter might be tactically undesirable. Mitterrand was responsible, as Minister of the Interior, for banning the traditional Communist Party demonstration on July 14th.

With this record Mitterrand proved which side he was on. His opposition to de Gaulle in 1958 was purely tactical. With so many politicians rushing into the Gaullist camp, it was necessary for someone to keep their hands clean and bide their time, just in case the Gaullist strategy didn't work.

But Mitterrand's main achievement over the last decade was the reconstruction of the Socialist Party. The old Socialist Party - the SFIO led by Guy Mollet, to which Mitterrand never belonged - became discredited through its support for the Algerian war and its capitulation to de Gaulle in 1958. By the sixties it had lost most of its members who made any claim to socialist politics - and many of those who didn't. In the 1969 presidential elections its candidate Gaston Defferre got a derisory vote of around five per cent.

The new Socialist Party was formed in June 1971. It was based on a fusion of various social-democratic groupings, and chose as its leader Mitterrand. It made

every effort to stress its discontinuity from the old rightist SFIO; it made great play of *autogestion* (workers' participation), and openly sought an alliance with the CP, as well as coopting much of the PSU, a party formed in the early sixties by left dissidents from the SFIO. Some of its leaders, notably Michel Rocard, came from the PSU, with a suitable aura of leftism about them.

In June 1972 the SP signed a common programme of government with the Communist Party. Mitterrand's strategy was already clear - to ally with the CP so as to equal it and then to dominate it, in order eventually to be able to go it alone. Mitterrand made no secret of his intentions. The day after the Common Programme was signed he told the Vienna Congress of the Socialist International:

'Our fundamental objective role is to rebuild a great Socialist Party on the ground occupied by the CP itself - to demonstrate that of the 5,000,000 Communist voters 3,000,000 can vote Socialist! That is the reason for this agreement... The reconstruction of the historic bloc by escaping from Communist leadership.'

The CP accepted the union, despite Mitterrand's open boasting, because they thought their superior industrial base made them invincible. But the SP remorselessly overtook them electorally. In the 1973 general election the SP was only 3% behind the CP, and by the municipal elections of 1977 it had caught

up. Although considerably weaker in the workplaces, it began to catch up there too; in 1971 the SP had only 51 workplace branches, but five years later it had nearly a thousand. At the same time it developed its links with the bureaucracy of the CFDT, the second largest union federation in France.

If its members were predominantly white-collar and supervisory workers, and teachers, it was beginning to break into the CP's electorate. A 1976 opinion poll showed that 38% of industrial workers would vote Socialist and only 34% Communist. At the same time the SP was also able to get the support of some managers and employers – in 1976 some CFDT militants were disciplined for producing a poster showing a boss sitting on a worker's shoulders, with the caption 'Like your boss, join the SP'.

It was this irresistible ascent of the SP that forced the CP to break the Common Programme and make a 'left' turn in 1977. But it was all in vain. The SP's electoral rise continued and culminated in Mitterrand's victory.

It is not surprising, therefore, that Mitterrand's victory was perceived by the French ruling class as something less than a total disaster.

True there was a sharp fall in prices on the Paris stock exchange in the week after

workplace in Marseilles where a Trotskyist militant took champagne to work on the morning after the election – and where the CP members could not make up their minds throughout the day whether to drink any or not.)

In some places the result had a clear effect on the morale of workers – and of management. In a hospital near Rouen the management called a meeting to announce that all disciplinary penalties imposed since the beginning of the year had been cancelled.

It is certainly indisputable that Mitterrand's victory has provoked considerable enthusiasm and goodwill. But this seems to arise from a general welcome for the prospect of change, rather than any very precise expectation of what that change will mean.

As a result some sections of the left seem to have developed exaggerated expectations of the implications of the result. Thus *Rouge* paper of the French section of the Fourth International:

'An immense hope is born. The French workers have just won a substantial victory. It needed the general strike of 1968, then years of struggles and battles, often fought under difficult conditions, to lead to the defeat of the bourgeois parties and the opening of a new period. The victory of François

Mitterrand is not only evidence of the rejection by a majority of the policies carried out for seven years by Giscard and the employers, it is also the expression of a victory of a will for radical change, a will to get rid of a society which exploits and oppresses the workers.'

The first hurdle that Mitterrand faces will be the parliamentary elections now set for June. Undoubtedly the presidential success will produce a certain band-wagon effect and produce a good result for the Socialist Party. Some polls show 38% of the vote going to the SP and their close allies, the Left Radicals. But even this will not be enough for the SP to govern alone, especially since the present electoral system, established by the Gaullists in 1958, is deliberately rigged against the left, with some constituencies (generally left-wing ones) having more than six times as many electors as others (generally right-wing ones).

Talks between the CP and the SP on an electoral agreement (for the first time since the 1978 elections) have been resumed. The CP need such an agreement, since without it they are likely to have their parliamentary representation catastrophically reduced. But Mitterrand will doubtless take good care not to get himself too closely tied to the

# Nothing completely similar

the second round, but that was the result of speculation rather than a long-term collapse. The franc fell on international markets over the same period – but not catastrophically – the sharpest fall, from just before the election to just after, was from 11.28 francs to the pound to 11.55 francs to the pound. (For a British tourist that would make a 25-franc meal just five pence cheaper.)

A certain amount of financial nervousness will continue until the parliamentary elections in June – indeed it may be deliberately engineered to scare some voters back into the right-wing fold. But there is scarcely any indication of rampant panic among the ruling class. Indeed, many of them have taken the Socialist victory very philosophically indeed.

One French banker told the *Economist* that Mitterrand's nationalisation plans would 'change nothing in reality. Already no big business decision is taken by French industry without the implicit, or explicit, approval of the government.'

And Marcel Dassault, head of one of the big aircraft firms facing nationalisation has said: 'If the majority of the French people decides that armaments manufacture should be nationalised, then I can only accept. There is not a shadow of a doubt about that.'

On the working-class side, there is no doubt that Mitterrand's victory was felt as a great step forward. There are numerous reports of spontaneous demonstrations, and of workers taking bottles of champagne to work (*Rouge* tells of a



# ROUGE

Legislatives:  
souscription exceptionnelle P2A

## 'The left have run the risk of seeming to be the cheer leaders for Mitterrand'

Communists. Any decision about the vexed question of Communist ministers will be left until after the election results. Mitterrand would doubtless prefer an Italian-style solution, whereby the CP give support to the government but do not actually vote for it.

Mitterrand's provisional government does not contain any Communists. It does contain Claude Cheysson, former member of the European Commission, Jacques Delors, who in 1971 was economic adviser to the Gaullist prime minister Chaban-Delmas before deciding to become a Socialist, and Michel Jobert, a former Gaullist minister.

Whether these will serve as a bridge to more formal links with the Gaullists as an alternative to an alliance with the CP only time - and the election results - will tell. Mitterrand may prefer a series of ad hoc alliances in order to get specific measures through.

Two things, however, are clear. Firstly, whatever the formal designation, Mitterrand's will be a thoroughly bourgeois government. The fact that a man like Delors now sports the label 'Socialist' does not make the government he belongs to into a 'workers' government'. Whether or not Mitterrand openly governs with the Gaullists, his regime will be based on class collaboration. And secondly, whatever happens, Mitterrand will have some good excuses for not carrying out all of his programme - his allies or lack of them can always be blamed for that.

Some observers have seen parallels between the present situation and that of 1936. In 1936 a Popular Front government - based on an electoral alliance of Communists, Socialists and Radicals - was elected on a programme of anti-fascism and social reform. The enthusiasm this electoral victory gave rise to sparked off a series of strikes with factory occupations, and before the Popular Front government even took office there were hundreds of thousands of workers occupying their factories. Despite being sold out by the Socialist and Communist bureaucrats, the mass strike achieved important economic concessions - notably two weeks' annual holiday for all workers - and potentially could have set off the process that led to a revolutionary situation.


APRES GISCARD,

## BATTONS LA DROITE AUX LEGISLATIVES

POUR UN GOUVERNEMENT PS-PC

POUR UNE MAJORITE PS-PC A L'ASSEMBLEE

POUR EN FINIR AVEC L'AUSTERITE ET LE CHOMAGE



Doubtless the Mitterrand victory, like that of Blum in 1936, has produced great enthusiasm. But the French working class is a very different phenomenon from what it was then. In 1936 the French working class was still substantially unorganised. At the beginning of the year the membership of the CGT was only around one million - by the end of the year it had risen to five million. The strikes were largely spontaneous - in some cases workers occupied and then came to the union officers to ask what the demands ought to be. 1936 was the struggle of a working-class which had not yet been coopted by reformism - and which, in the absence of a revolutionary leadership, fell into the hands of the Socialists, Communists and CGT. The French working-class of 1981 has a long tradition of trade-union and political organisation behind it. Its response to a Mitterrand government will initially be one, not of revolutionary euphoria, but of goodwill and cooperation.

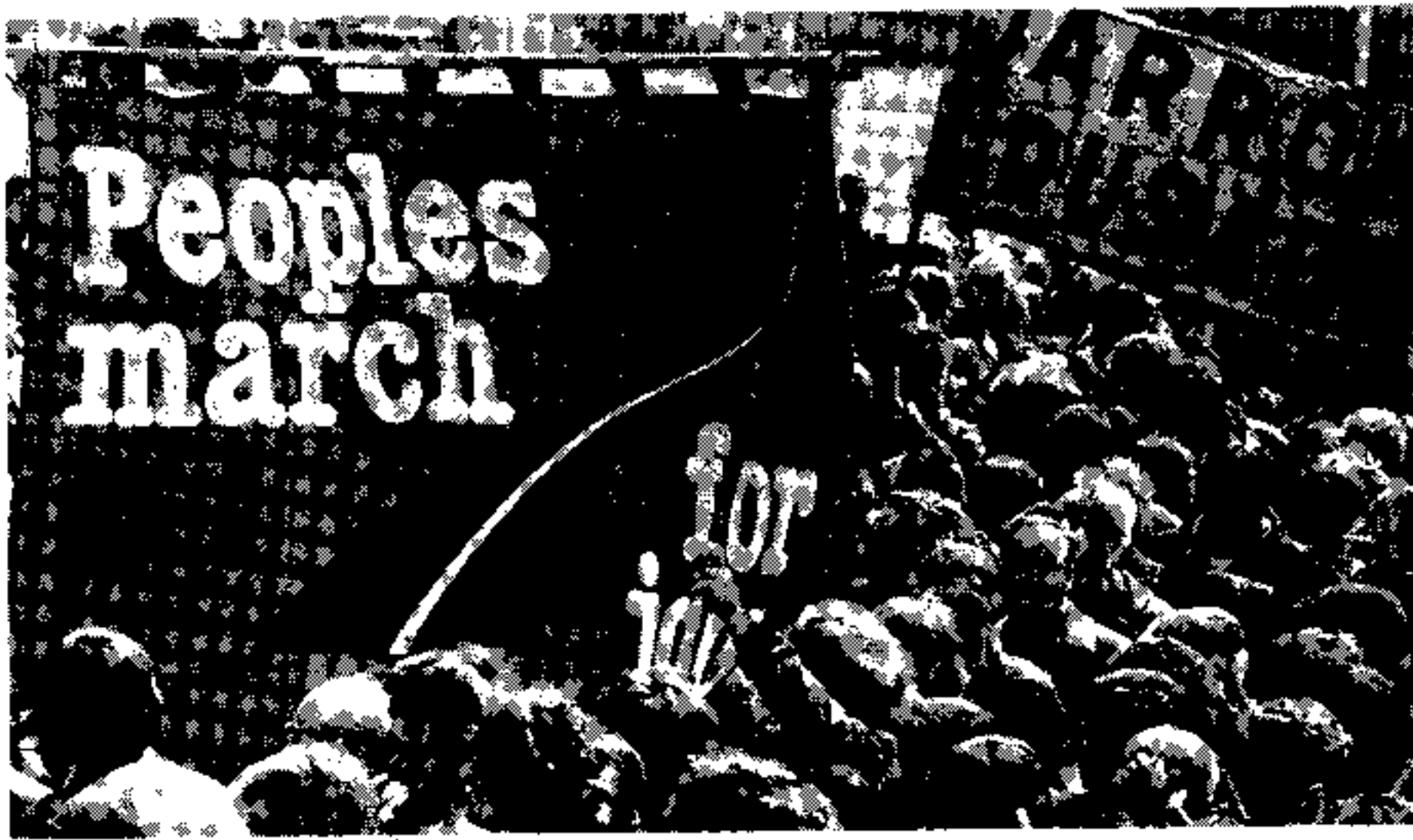
The real crunch will come when Mitterrand proves incapable, in a crisis-ridden world, of delivering his promises, and seeks the support of the workers' organisations for a policy of austerity. That will be the point at which the right - probably led by Chirac - will be able to start making a come-back. Then it will be a question of whether there is any force in the working-class able to resist

demoralisation and a drift to the right. Otherwise Mitterrand is all too likely to act out a Wilson-Callaghan scenario - social contract followed by return of the right.

In the short term the election has been a shot in the arm for the revolutionary left. So much had been invested in the electoral perspective that a win for Giscard would have certainly led to colossal demoralisation.

But all sections of the left will have to break with the political habits acquired in the pre-election period. Thus the LCR (Fourth International) have devoted so much attention to calling for left unity to defeat Giscard that they have run the risk of seeming to be cheer-leaders for Mitterrand. The danger is that they will now get caught up in metaphysical abstractions about whether Mitterrand has capitalist ministers or not, instead of preparing to lead a real fight. As for *Lutte Ouvrière*, they have devoted themselves almost exclusively to pure propaganda; ceaselessly proclaiming that the workers must rely on their own struggles, they never explain how such struggles can be organised.

The next period will be more testing for the revolutionary left than any in the last decade. If they do not rise to the challenge, then 1981 will go down with 1936, 1944 and 1968 in the catalogue of missed opportunities.



## The People's March: a view from the inside

A resounding success. That must be the verdict on the People's March. If it did nothing else it provided a public focus for the anger and discontent brewed by the ever-rising tide of unemployment. In every town through which it passed there was, as well as the litany of bishops and church bells, an enthusiastic and large working class response, complete with token strikes in a number of important industrial centres. Paul Bryden marched the first week of the Liverpool leg of the march, and Colin Sparks visited it in the last week to hear from members of the Right to Work Campaign about its progress. Here is their assessment.

Organised through the official structures of the regional TUCs, the march was bound to get a much larger response than previous attempts to organise demonstrations of hostility to unemployment, like those of the Right to Work Campaign. They had to be fought for in the labour movement against the bitter, entrenched hostility of the very people who have today been giving their official blessing to a march which seems very similar. Only the colour of the jackets has been changed.

Yet, for the TUC to restrict itself to backing such an event is, to put it very charitably indeed, an evasion of its responsibility. Whatever its weaknesses, the TUC still has enormous organising capacity and a deep well of support and credibility amongst organised workers. That social weight could have been directed towards support for the real points of resistance in the movement: making sure that Lee Jeans win their fight; giving the confidence born from the knowledge of massive support to the Linwood workers before their crucial vote on whether to resist closure; helping the workers at Plansee and Ansell's and a dozen other little fights which are the real stuff of resistance to unemployment. Measured against those tasks, any march, no matter how well-supported, falls very far short of being adequate.

From well before the first green anorak left Liverpool the organisers displayed a definite determination that the march would have as little as possible to do with ultra-left nonsense like strikes and occupations. Len Murray greeted the start of the march as 'another compelling call for compassion', and many of those more directly involved gave every evidence that their real interests lay more with clergymen and even employers than the militant unemployed. Even getting on the march was hard going, with a battery of tests applied to weed out the 'less suitable' marcher. It was clearly designed to

be a passive and ultra-respectable event which would refuse to act as a catalyst for any general resistance.

But the best-laid schemes of mice and bureaucrats don't always work out and the actual development of the march showed a constant tension between the mood of the marchers and the rank-and-file of the Labour movement on the one hand and the wishes of the respectable leaders on the other. For a start, the vetting system did not work very well, and the final composition of the marchers contained a lot of 'less suitable' elements, including a large number of people with experience of Right to Work marches.

The internal organisation of the three prongs of the march provided a working model of just how the trade union bureaucracy like to think about the world. At times it seemed that even to breathe you had to have your credentials. A couple of marchers arrived late and missed out on the regulation-issue green anoraks. This made them targets for instant interrogation by the officials.

Another marcher found that his new boots had cut his feet to ribbons about eight miles into one of the longer stretches. A steward and the march nurse inspected his feet and told him: no more marching that day. The nurse sent him off to find the casualty bus. When he finally hobbled up to it, the very same steward who had been helping him not half an hour before refused to let him on without a written note from the nurse—so it was back again to get the proper chitty.

Such deadening routinism, with its obsession with following precisely all of the detailed, and preferably written, minutiae of the agreed procedure, coupled with a crying inability to relate to the real needs of a situation, typifies the trade union bureaucracy. Its representatives on the March had gained their spurs through years on endless sub-

committees of endless minor bodies. They showed just how far away from the needs of a living, developing, fighting movement the bureaucracy has become.

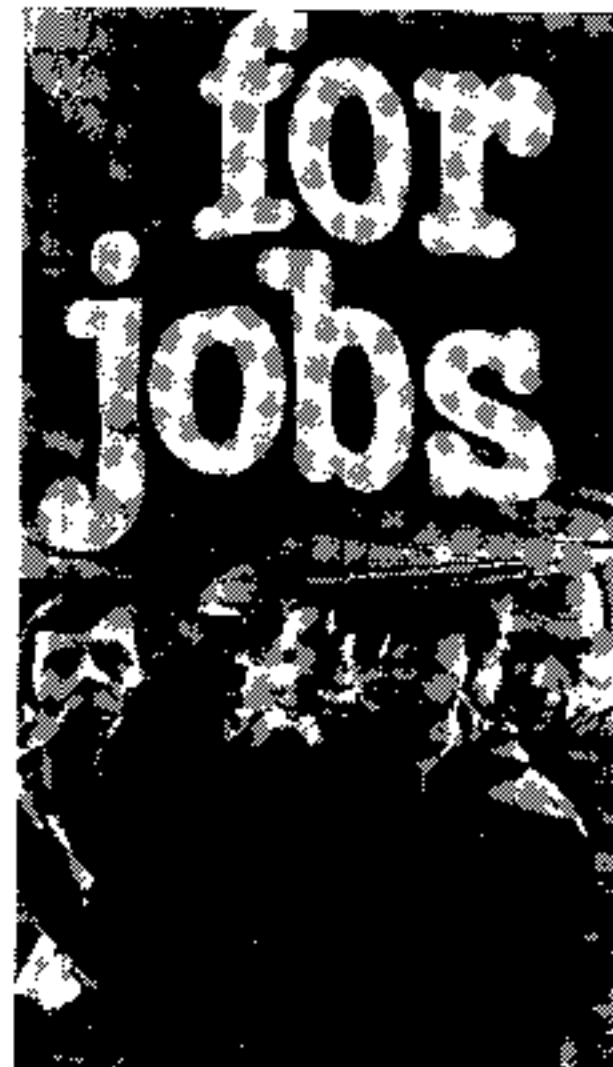
The aim of all of this petty routine is not the exercise for itself. It has a very clear and definite objective in mind: it enables the bureaucrats to keep a tight reign on everything, to make sure no-one gets any fancy ideas of their own, to keep the wildmen at bay, and generally police their own patch. That was the aim on the March, too. Faced with a large number of young people of unknown views, and lacking a well-thumbed rule-book, the first recourse of the organisers was to make one up. Armed with a set of rules, you can then get rid of anyone who causes even the slightest upset.

The basic organisation for the marches reflected this intent very clearly: at the top there were appointed TUC marshals, and beneath them were appointed stewards. There were meant to be no mass meetings, no march council and no elections at all. It is worth contrasting this with the organisation that has evolved on the Right to Work marches. These are democratically organised from top to bottom.

The reason for this has little to do with abstract principles: it is simply the only efficient way of harnessing the energy and enthusiasm of the unemployed marchers and of giving the leadership of the march the sort of prestige which can allow it to carry through its decisions without constant opposition and obstruction. Democracy, after all, is the only efficient way of organising anything.

As it turned out, the very dynamics of the marches put this rigid organisational structure under severe strain. On the Eastern leg, starting in Yorkshire, the stewards were able to keep a very tight grip on things. Any sign of opposition was pounced on very quickly and a number of people were kicked off the march. The Liverpool leg, on the other hand, larger and perhaps more determined, saw a long series of disputes which resulted in the election of stewards to act alongside the appointed stewards, with fairly regular mass meetings to discuss the progress and problems of the March.

Any march of this type requires fairly



tight discipline just to keep going. Not only are there a myriad of strains and crises but the marchers, particularly the younger ones, develop very strong group loyalties and a lot of confidence in their collective strength.

Tensions invariably arise within the march, often focussing on the slightest and silliest things, and can quickly escalate to quite nasty situations. The only way to minimise these sorts of ructions is to direct the anger and tension of the marchers on to an outside enemy: for example, the Tory government. Because the organisers wanted to keep the March respectable, they did not want even that very obvious focus. Consequently they had to fall back all the time on purely administrative discipline, which might drive the tensions underground but only really re-inforces them for a later eruption.

On the Liverpool leg, the victory of the

left-wing meant that things could be kept well under control, but the other two had much more serious problems.

On the Yorkshire leg, for instance, a condition for joining the march was that everybody had to sign a form saying that they would obey the organisers' instructions. As the march developed, the extremely autocratic chief marshal came under pressure as a result of, for example, banning marchers from the Plansee strike going round factories to raise support for their dispute.

Eventually, this led to the first mass meeting, which was presented with a choice: either the marchers voted to re-affirm their obedience to the organisers or the march would be stopped there and then. Under this sort of blackmail, the march continued, but the atmosphere was one of constant tensions with the danger of internal fights only just kept under control.

## Getting muscle behind the march

The success of the march did not just depend, however, upon what took place among the marchers. The key question was how much support it was able to generate outside. It clearly had the potential to attract more support than any previous protest against unemployment since the thirties. But whether it was going to succeed in utilising this potential depended upon how the political arguments within the marches were resolved.

Although the organisers undoubtedly wanted both publicity and a good reception in the towns they passed through, they clearly had not thought through the best ways in which that could be done. For the first week of the Liverpool leg of the march, there were no posters or leaflets for the marchers to hand out, and the occasional visits to factories were seen as almost ritual gestures. On the eastern leg of the march, this was to be the dominant tone throughout: there were no factory visits at all by that leg, although there were numerous church services.

The relatively more democratic western leg was able to do rather better. Once the leaflets were eventually produced, experienced people from the Right to Work campaign were put in charge of factory visits and were able to get things moving rather more briskly. After a week's work, it was reported that, with a minimum of three factory visits a day, more than 400,000 leaflets had been issued and £3,500 raised for the march directly from local trade unionists. Between Stockport and Nuneaton, 30 big workplaces

were visited, all of which agreed to send large delegations to the London rally on the 31st. Hearn Heath Colliery alone pledged to send two coach-loads from the one pit.

John Deason, secretary of the Right to Work Campaign and the marcher put in charge of factory delegations on this leg, reported back to a mass meeting:

'Almost without exception our delegations have been very warmly received. Ordinary trade unionists are without doubt proving the best allies of the march. The only real constraint has been transport problems—which doesn't say much for the power of prayer, given that we are supposed to have God on our side. What's kept those vans on the road have been very atheistic mechanics.'

The march got a similar response at trade union conferences that were visited. The NUPE conference gave the delegation a standing ovation and the executive donated £2000. A bucket collection raised another

£316. (Incidentally, against the wishes of the platform the conference went on to affiliate to the Right to Work Campaign.) The same good response was obtained at the ASTMS conference and at the London delegate conference of the NGA.

Even the right-wing trade union leaders found it difficult to isolate the marches. Although Frank Chapple of the FETPU was able to stop a relatively inexperienced delegation speaking to conference or collecting money outside, others were not so lucky. The UCW leadership tried the same trick, but the delegation persevered and £1063 was collected. Outside the CPSA conference the collection raised £151.90 and the platform was forced to read out a message of thanks from the marchers to the delegates. Even Royal College of Nursing delegates raised £321. And despite an error by the march organisers which resulted in no delegation, delegates from NATFHE still coughed up £200.

The importance of these visits is not just in terms of the money raised and the enthusiastic support from organised workers. Equally important was the effect of such visits in mobilising people to make sure that the turn-out in London was massive and gave the march the sort of finale which it needed. Deason, again, comments that:

'There could be as many as 10,000 extra trade unionists mobilised for the 31st by delegates from the march in just one week. It's a crying shame that so many opportunities were missed at the start of the march and on the Yorkshire and South Wales legs.'

The politics of the march organisers have in fact worked against the attempt to mobilise as many organised workers as possible. In keeping with its title of a 'People's March', there have been attempts to downplay any mention of the class struggle. Instances of this range from the ridiculous to the disastrous. There is, for example, a 'British only' rule, which meant that the Liverpool leg, desperately short of transport, was unable to use an offered car because it was made in Japan. This rule apparently did not apply to the *Morning Star* whose van accompanying the march was a decidedly unpatriotic Volkswagen.

Much more serious events took place on the Sheffield leg. There the organisers banned all slogans and stickers with an anti-



Tory line, and the convenor of a long-running strike in Sheffield, that at Plansees, was refused permission to speak on the platform on the grounds that the organisers thought that the local bishop, who was also on the speakers' list, did not approve of strikes. Again, when some of the younger marchers occupied a local Tory office to protest against government policy, they were disowned by the march, which sent one of the marshals along to make an official apology to the Tories.

### Contradictions

The local organisation of reception committees was left in the same sort of hands as the organising of the march and as a consequence, there were many of the same sort of mistakes. Where the organisers did the work, there was a fantastic turn-out. In Sheffield and Chesterfield on the Eastern Leg, the AUEW and the NUM worked well and there were very large crowds. In Stockport, on the western leg, the local AUEW, dominated by the Broad Left, managed to get three large factories to stop work early and send mass demonstrations to join the march. On the Welsh leg, support from the pits, from Fords and throughout the area was generally very good indeed.

On the other hand, when the work was not done, the turn-out tended to be smaller. In Manchester, the Broad Left dominated trades council did not do the work, and ended up with only a couple of hundred supporters at the rally in Crown Square.

The Birmingham reception illustrated very clearly the contradictions faced by the official organisers. They worked hard and the 12,000 turn-out, in the pouring rain, was excellent. It included a large delegation from Longbridge, who came out despite a threat of disciplinary action direct from Edwardes himself, and large delegations from other big car plants. This was very good indeed since recent heavy unemployment has tended to demoralise the unions in the area.

The organisers, however, very nearly managed to ruin it. First of all they asked the 12,000 people to attend an open-air church service, which attracted all of 300 with the rest shooting off to the pub. Nevertheless, hard work by the marchers, themselves managed to pull together 3000 people for the official rally. This almost collapsed into chaos. One of the local organisers was Brian Mathers of the IGWU, fresh from selling

out the Ansell workers, who made up part of the demonstration. He was prevented from speaking and an Ansell worker was forced by public acclaim onto the platform. A local Tory councillor was shouted down when he tried to speak.

Slowly, the organisers got the message, and the official platforms featured fewer and fewer Tories and came to be dominated by trade union and ethnic minority speakers. They still made horrible mistakes, like advertising the Nuneaton reception in a scab paper being picketed by journalists, but this sort of thing was more the result of their distance from the day-to-day struggles going on rather than a conscious political decision.

The fact is that, despite the concessions made by the organisers, the bulk of the support for the march has been from working class people; the other forces the organisers looked to provided very little indeed. Not all of those people were organised workers, but certainly the vast majority were. They also tended to be to the left of the official march line. One marcher went to a factory meeting in Manchester and put more or the less the official march line, plus a bit of Tory bashing which he could not resist. This all went down very well, until question time, when he was bombarded with demands to say why the march was not supporting the call for a 35-hour week and wanting to know why, if the speaker wanted to bring down the Tories, he was not also arguing for building socialism.

### Slogans

When the three marches joined up their different political developments caused a few problems. While the Liverpool march had been chanting 'What do we want? The Right to Work! How are we going to get it? Occupy! Organise! Kick the Tories Out!', the Sheffield wing had only been allowed to chant: 'What do we want? The Right to Work! (When they were feeling particularly rebellious, they had added: 'How are we going to get it? We're not allowed to tell you.') At that level, the Yorkshire organisers were instantly overwhelmed, since their contingent was greeted by the others with mass chanting of the banned slogans.

They kept on trying, however. Brendan Bates, chief marshal of the eastern leg, told the South Wales marchers: 'We don't want any democratic assemblies', and the South

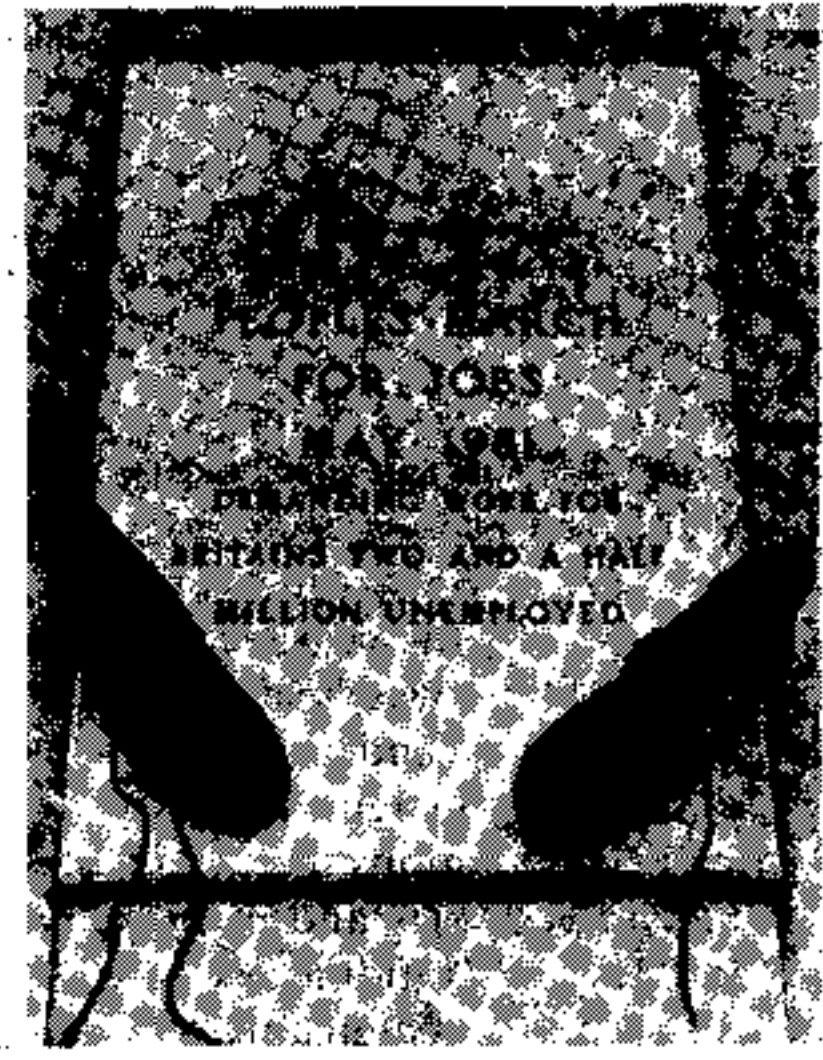
East Region of the TUC started to flood the march with new full-time stewards fresh from their offices in London. The organisers even tried to keep the contingents separate: the eastern leg tried to move off twenty minutes before the rest, to maintain themselves free from dangerous contamination, but were thwarted by the police, of all people, who refused to handle two separate marches a mile apart. At another level, the London organisers were reluctant to put Tony Benn on the platform, at the big rally, preferring Michael Foot.

The overall picture of the march is one of substantial success. At the rank and file level its importance is best summed up by the Coventry reception. Perhaps 30,000 people stopped work and 10,000 actually marched, including delegations as big as 200 workers from places like Massey Ferguson. It was the biggest work-time demonstration in the city since the early seventies. One long-standing militant said:

'This was the first time since the Heath Industrial Relations Act that I have been able to raise my head in the workplace about a directly political strike. I certainly could not do it last year about the TUC's Day of Action.'

There is, however, a real danger that the fantastic working class support for the march will dribble away. Whatever goodwill and anti-Tory feeling may exist at the rank-and-file level, it cannot be organised and given direction by people who see their main task as allying with building employers, Cyril Smith MP, Tory mayors and a Tory-appointed Archbishop of Canterbury. Nor can it be sustained on a series of one-day marches. The Labour Party demonstrations in Liverpool and Glasgow may have been big, London may have been big, Cardiff may be big, but sooner or later the movement will have to deliver something more than coaches to rallies or it will start to lose its support.

And even though the march focused attention on the question of unemployment, it hardly scratched the surface of organising the unemployed as a mass. Three thousand people, mostly in work, saw the march off from Liverpool, but there are 80,000 unemployed in that city alone. The fact that employed workers are ready to stand up



John Sturrock (Network)

against unemployment is a fantastic bonus, but it needs to be supplemented by real trade union organisation amongst the unemployed.

At the same time, there is resistance amongst employed workers to closure and redundancies. It is still scattered and small-scale and we have seen nothing like the Upper Clyde Shipbuilders struggle of the early 1970s, but the resistance is still there. Sooner, or later, any real movement against unemployment will have to link those two strands together, and start relating to struggles.

The fact that, after the lonely years when only the Right to Work Campaign did anything about unemployment, sections of the official movement have at last organised a march is a great step forward. If we look at the composition of those pushing the march, a picture emerges which gives some hope that it will be possible to build a stronger movement in the future.

The hardest fight for 'no politics', with bishops and Tory mayors came from the Communist Party. It was they who dominated the eastern leg of the march which had all of that in its purest form. But the Liverpool leg was rather more open, and included

a number of Labourites who were significantly to the left of the CP.

Again the union conferences which the march visited showed that a new layer of militants is emerging in the official structures of the unions. Those people who ten years ago would have been content to be convenors of one works are now forced by the generalising effect of the crisis to take their union machine and its conferences that much more seriously.

One of the things that the march did do was to begin to lay the groundwork for united front work with these people. In general they are much more open than the hardened sectarians who cling to a dying Communist Party, and it is undoubtedly towards them that any future united front around unemployment will have to look. Of course, because of their political positions, they will tend to see things in electoral terms and thus subordinate all activity to the great goal of 1984, but on the other hand the evidence is that, so far at least, they are ready to fight the bureaucracy and to support initiatives on unemployment. If it has done nothing else, the march has begun to reveal the contours of a new left constituency in the labour movement.

On the larger Liverpool leg these politics were, happily, defeated, thanks largely to significant SWP and Right to Work Campaign presence. On the Yorkshire leg the CP succeeded (at least until the link-up). They succeeded largely because the Yorkshire leg was largely organised from Sheffield, now probably the only industrial area where the CP has the dominance it had in a dozen areas twenty years ago.

The CP would defend the politics it tried to impose on the march by claiming that it was building a 'broad' movement. But in fact these politics were well to the right of the traditional 'Broad Left' approach. Tories on the platform are offensive to the most moderate Labour Party activist. The church services and bishops so favoured by the CP can only have been viewed with embarrassed resentment by the vast majority of those who greeted the march.

Such a right wing stance by the CP is not unprecedented. For many years now, in the teachers unions, NUT and NATFHE, the CP has found itself in electoral alliance with Tories and at the forefront of disciplining militants. In the National Union of Students it is the CP that has pressed hardest for extending the 'Broad Left' into the 'Left Alliance', including the Liberals, and the conscious depoliticising of the union. As a result it is now opposed from the left by the hardy-militant National Organisation of Labour Students. And in CND Communist Party members have been among the most vigorous advocates of keeping the movement 'non-political', right down to opposing CND participation in the People's March itself!

But the teachers, students and CND could, at a stretch, be seen as the exception rather than the rule. The CP after all has increasingly become a federation of networks in different unions and movements, each of which adapts itself to the pressures of its own particular environment.

With the People's March the exception appears to have become the rule. For this was the major CP initiative of 1981, presumably closely monitored by its central apparatus. The party as a whole chose to approach it from this distinctly right wing angle.

The CP is already overshadowed by a resurgent Labour Left. If the Communist Party's special contribution to the movement is to become Tories, bishops and 'no politics' then the future for the CP looks very bleak indeed.

## The CP: a feeble last gasp

The People's March was initiated by Communist Party members in Merseyside. From the beginning of the year the *Morning Star* gave a daily report of the build up to the march. And at the start of the march Communist Party members had a near predominant place in its organisation.

After several years in which the CP has found it extremely difficult to take important initiatives this should have added up to exactly the sort of fillip that a declining party so desperately needed. But did it?

The answer quite bluntly is no. There are two reasons why.

The first is the organisational decay of the party. Despite attempting to stack the cards against the 'ultra-left' participating in the march, the organisers eventually discovered that the CP alone could not fill out the marches. And despite their consistent pre-march coverage the *Morning Star* did not out-sell the 'ultra-left' papers on the march. It had neither the numbers of sellers nor the flare of presentation to do that.

But even more important is the politics

that the CP brought to the march. It was the CP that pushed most strongly for:

- \* sponsorships for the march ranging from a Liverpool-building firm belonging to the CBI, to Rochdale's Liberal MP, Cyril Smith;

- \* Tories and church dignitaries on the platform, and church services as a prominent feature of the march;

- \* the banning of 'political' slogans, insignia and papers on the march, right down to, on the Yorkshire leg, banning the slogan 'Tories out!', prohibiting the wearing of stickers supporting the Plansee strike and even, for a few days stopping the sale of the *Morning Star* in their efforts to stop other paper sellers.

These politics the CP attempted to enforce by the most shameful bureaucratic means, including vetting of marchers, expulsions from the march and a refusal to let the march democratically control itself.



# Letting them off the hook

This year's conference of the Civil and Public Service Association saw the left win some important victories—at least on paper. Success, however, did not extend to the burning issue of winning this year's pay campaign.

The pay debate was headed by a motion from the *Militant* Tendency which called on the CPSA to 'campaign within' the Council of Civil Service Unions for an all out strike at the ports, airports and passport offices. Failing this, the National Executive Committee should 'campaign amongst the membership' for a five day all-out strike.

An attempt was made to change the agenda so that another motion instructing the NEC to organise an immediate all-out strike, with or without the agreement of the other unions. It came from 13 branches—mostly with *Redder Tape* supporters as active members. The attempt failed narrowly and the *Militant* motion was passed. It committed the NEC to absolutely nothing. In fact, at the first meeting of the Civil Service Unions after the conference, the five-day strike call was ignored and no effective escalation was agreed on.

This sort of things typical of the *Militant* Tendency. Their performance in the pay campaign consisted of little more than trying to persuade the 150 unofficial strikers in Scotland to go back to work. Kevin Roddy, one of their leaders, is so fond of telling his supporters to 'stand firm' that they have all become rooted to the spot!

On a more positive note, CPSA has finally achieved the election of full-time officials on a five yearly basis. This is something that the left have been fighting for a long time and the next step is to ensure that they are subject to recall. The NEC were all set to slip their blue-eyed boys into the three top positions of general, deputy, and assistant secretaries. All three have scandalous records of inactivity and sell-outs. Fortunately, conference was not ready to buy this sort of thing.

There were literally hundreds of motions censuring the right-dominated NEC for their refusal to carry out motions passed last year.

Their worst effort has been over new technology. Two years ago a model new technology agreement was passed calling for no job loss and a shorter working week, with maximum benefits to the membership. Two years later, with one circular from the deputy general secretary Alastair Graham saying that such an agreement was impossible, they moved a resolution asking us to be content with no compulsory redundancies. Conference, realising the enormous potential for the sale of jobs in this policy, rejected this motion and re-affirmed the 1979 policy.

One of the best moments of the conference was when an overwhelming majority voted to affiliate to CND—the vote was 117,566 to 76,143. After a heated debate, many of the Ministry of Defence delegates walked out singing 'Rule Britannia'; those who remained received a standing ovation. This victory is largely down to *Redder Tape*, who provided the organising force behind

the newly established 'Civil Servants Against the Bomb'. The night before the debate we held a meeting to which around 250 delegates turned up to see *The War Game* and hear Peter Binns and Dan Smith



speak. A committee will be formed with other civil servant trade unionists and a campaign launched to build groups throughout the country.

Another small step forward was that, for the first time in six years, a motion calling for affiliation to the National Abortion Campaign was heard. In previous years, it has been filibustered off the order paper. This year hardline Catholic president Kate Losinska was forced to hear it but declared a motion of 'next business', moved by one of her lackies, carried before a vote on NAC was taken, despite demands from the floor for tellers.

On the whole the intervention of *Redder Tape* was very good indeed. We produced a bulletin every day and sold hundreds of

## Ken keeps control

The annual conference of AUEW-TASS in Bournemouth revealed yet again the problems of a union dominated by a well-entrenched Broad Left leadership. Since the conference procedures were changed several years ago to a system of divisional conferences before the main conference and a drastic reduction in the number of delegates, the annual jamboree at the seaside has become more or less a rubber stamp for the executive's policies. The divisional conferences act as a filter to any motion voicing criticism of the general secretary and the bureaucracy and also act as a method of screening out difficult delegates.

While on many issues (such as race, S Africa, unemployment, etc) this process allows the left to pass worthy resolutions without fear of molestation from the right, it also means that the conference lacks an life and worse, the passing of numerous soggy

copies of *Redder Tape* and *Socialist Worker*. As well as the CND meeting, there was a successful SWP meeting with Tony Cliff, which attracted 70 delegates, and a *Redder Tape* meeting on new technology, with Diane Ridout from DHSS Manchester speaking.

By comparison, the Broad Left were very feeble. While they are still competent on the floor of conference, they are more and more just an election machine. This year, at the cost of £9000, their massive election campaign raised their NEC representation from one to 10 places, but Roddy, their presidential hopeful, trailed a bad third after Losinska and Len Lever, an independent candidate. If they do as well on the NEC as they have done in the pay campaign they might as well pack up and go home.

The other civil service conferences displayed different problems. At the Society of Civil and Public Servants (SCPS)—the union for management and executive grades—the CPSA situation was reversed. In the SCPS, the leadership is often the left of the membership and have difficulty in winning support for militant action. Thus they passed a similar motion to CPSA on escalating the pay campaign, but it was the only item on the agenda and was moved by the executive. A motion to affiliate to CND was lost, despite a meeting beforehand which was fairly successful. The intervention of *Redder Tape* was good and we now have two people on the executive. This is one up on last year, and both are SWP members.

At the conference of the Inland Revenue, Staff Federation (IRSF), the vote on the pay campaign was even vaguer than elsewhere. It did call for escalation but was not at all clear as to what this should be. Since their Standing Orders Committee refused to allow any motions not directly related to the Inland Revenue the CND motion did not appear, but its fringe meeting was small but enthusiastic. Des Bailey, an SWP member on their National Committee, has now been elected vice president.

Sally Bild, CPSA.

motions which say very little about how to fight on the issues in question. Virtually all motions are passed overwhelmingly and the period for debate is extremely short. In comparison the EETPU and APEX conferences at least have a veneer of democracy.

Some examples of the kind of motions passed give a good idea of how TASS Conference operates. A motion condemning the government's monetarist policies was passed without opposition but nowhere does the motion mention how members are to fight those policies. Instead the union is urged to campaign to change the government's mind. Similar motions on de-industrialisation and British Aerospace offer no real strategy for today either. On organising the unemployed members of the union the executive gave only qualified support. A motion calling for the election of full-time officials was lost and the union resisted attempts to take it out of the AUEW

amalgamation and seek a merger elsewhere. Every motion, in the end leaves it up to a future Labour government to do the job for it.

On the issue of nuclear disarmament the conference voted for unilateralism but this was slightly contradicted by another motion calling for the Ministry of Defence to buy only British designs (or collaborative designs in which Britain was involved) to fulfill its aircraft and missile requirements. A motion on nuclear power which called for an end to expansion was successfully amended by the bureaucracy to call for more investment and investigation into the disposal of nuclear waste.

A motion on Northern Ireland calling for an end to the bi-partisan approach by the Labour Party was passed but it called instead for implementation of the TUC/ICTU Better Life for All Campaign and a Bill Of Rights. Two speakers from the Birmingham and Coventry division argued forcibly for an amendment which would

allow a complete reappraisal of the union's policy on Ireland but it was massively defeated.

The moribund nature of AUEW-TASS conference reflects a general malaise of Broad Left organisation. The bureaucracy believes that the majority of the members are right-wing and that the only way to keep control of the union is through machine politics. Debate is therefore stifled and any voices raised against the status quo are roundly condemned as 'Trotskyist trouble makers'. Holding onto office becomes the main objective. And TASS provide the best example of a Broad Left firmly in control. However, as in other unions, the bureaucracy can only ride the tiger for so long. Without any real attempt to involve members at grass roots level. The union can only mouth militant noises and pass motions which say nothing. If Brother Gill and Co one day go the way of the Broad Left in the AUEW engineering section, they will only have themselves to blame.

Encouragement for the left came on three issues. On private health, the Executive lost two to one after the conference had altered the agenda to ensure that it was discussed. On the Isle of Grain debate, the motion in support of the Executive disappeared. The motion from Edinburgh No 2 against crossing picket lines was declared narrowly lost by chairman Tom Breakell, although many delegates thought it went the other way. He simply rushed on to next business. On branch democracy, the Executive lost to a motion from North London Plumbers condemning arbitrary closures.

Many delegates have been using the conference as a seaside holiday for many years. Many represent small branches which barely meet. Considering all of this and the fact that closures and unemployment are very heavy in EETPU industries, the left did fairly well. *Rank and File Contact* members worked hard and made an impact well above their numbers. The Labour left, too, was more active and had some new facts.

One of the most significant events of the conference was the lobby against unemployment on the second day. This was organised by *Rank and File Contact* and supported by the Campaign to Re-open London Central Branch. Unemployed and workplace delegations came from Glasgow, Liverpool, London, Birmingham, Manchester and South Wales. Members of the Labour Party, Communist Party and the SWP united on the lobby—a significant forward to step for unity in action in the EETPU.

One of the best things about the lobby was the large turn-out from the Midland Branch, which is still fighting the closure of the branch after 18 months. They have a growing, active, shop-floor based campaign. There are important lessons to draw from this campaign. Only by open campaigns, taking disputes, closures and election campaigns to the shopfloor can a big enough movement be built to change the union.

Another important development was the sign of a small but important revival in the Broad Left. There was more activity from Labour Party members than previously and it is essential that SWP members unite with these people on issues like London Central. Most of the Labour left will follow the well-worn CP path of concentrating on elections and supporting opportunists, but some are more serious about fighting the right wing. At the same time as striving for unity in action, we must always work to draw new people into the rank and file movement from the sites and the factories.

**SWP Sparks**

## Making contact

The recent EETPU biennial conference in Blackpool saw Frank Chapple and the Executive maintain their grip but with some small encouraging signs for the opposition.

As usual proceedings were dominated by the platform, with a fog of long speeches, bad compositing and soggy Executive motions to avoid debate. New delegates were amazed by the lack of involvement of the conference floor and the contempt for delegates shown by the platform.

The main move towards the Executive's retaining control was a rule change which was carried with two speakers for and none against. This allows for re-running Executive Council elections where the winner under the existing transferable vote system does not have 50 per cent of the votes, the top two candidates going into a second ballot. Thus Wyn Bevan, a Labour Party left who had to win twice to get elected for South Wales last year, would have been less likely to defeat the right wing, whose vote was split.

In the current Division 10 election in WMST London, three right wing officials standing against one Labour Party left, John Patrick. Under the new rules, the chances of a right-wing victory are much greater. Unable to control the ambitions of the officials, the Executive have changed the rules. Chapple's repeated boast that, with transferable votes and postal ballots, the EETPU is

the most democratic of unions, now looks a bit sick.

The rule change motion was half-heartedly supported by Fred Gore, a long-time Broad Left supporter from London Airport. But opponents like Southampton's Ginger Pearse were not called to speak.

The policy debates were limited by the rejection of many motions by Standing Orders beforehand, including the one from Basildon in favour of electing branch officials. This was a simple repeat of their motion carried at last conference and since ignored by the Executive. Of course, under rule, motions are not binding on the Executive.

The motion in favour of accepting Tory funds for union ballots was withdrawn, no doubt because of the AUEW decision. The Executive won on nuclear power, the bomb, amalgamation, 'LP infiltrators', and defeated a motion mobilising members to kick out the Tories. No motion got on the order paper pinning them down on unemployment.

Hart from Visionhire and Frank Hammond from Bexleyheath, although moving resolutions on Poland and the Labour Party that the Executive could support, were able to attack them for double standards for their closure of London Central Branch after it refused to appoint an Executive nominee to Bermondsey Labour Party.

# ARGY-VERSY WORLD

Poems by Hugo Dewar

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# One in the eye for Clive

The ASTMS conference in Blackpool in May saw the continuing breakdown of the alliance between the Jenkins leadership and the union's Labour left, the alliance which shaped the union's politics for so long. Jenkins' steady move to the right in recent years has taken him out on his own on a number of issues.

The most obvious demonstration of this was the show down at the conference over how the union will vote in the Labour Party deputy leadership election. Prior to the conference, Jenkins had skilfully managed to commit the union to supporting Denis Healey, without the matter being discussed properly. As a result of this, so many emergency resolutions in support of Tony Benn poured into head office in the days leading up to the conference that the National Executive Council panicked and proposed their own emergency resolution to drop the Healey position and leave the matter open for further discussions in the union.

Many delegates saw this to be an attempt to give the Healeyites another chance to fix the vote, and this provoked a backlash that surprised everybody: the NEC motion was defeated and conference went on to vote to support Benn.

It was the Benn-Healey argument that dominated the conference. Because so many delegates saw this as such a desperately important issue, any intervention from the left that was regarded as critical of Bennite politics was regarded either as an irrelevance or as treachery—although the bulletins of the rank and file grouping *Red Collar* argued clearly in support of Benn as against Healey.

Amazingly, the growth in confidence of an identifiable Labour left represents, in terms of ASTMS conference, the real emergence of centre ground politics. It has not only isolated Jenkins and his supporters on the right, but it has also put the revolutionary socialist out in the cold on the left.

Perhaps this in turn illustrates the absurdity of regarding the annual conference as the most important political arena in the union. In ASTMS, fewer than one in five members pays the political levy, so these seaside talking shops cannot be seen as barometers of rank-and-file opinion.

For most of the weekend a grim mood hung over conference, with a number of delegates explaining from the rostrum that they had just lost their jobs in the last few weeks. But there were bright spots: the Benn vote lifted spirits noticeably; there was a vote for unilateral disarmament and withdrawal from NATO; and a flying visit by six of the people's marchers produced not only applause, but also a collection of over £600.

The *Red Collar* rank and file group worked hard at the conference, producing as usual a daily bulletin and arguing the case for organising at the base of the union instead of among bureaucrats. One major success was a *Red Collar* meeting called in support of the hunger strikers, demand for political status—this attracted over 60 delegates. The Irish issue is never discussed at ASTMS conferences: the NEC is reluctant

to air the problem, and when resolutions are submitted to conference, they are not prioritised by the membership. *Red Collar* supporters are going to do the groundwork over the coming year with the aim of breaking this silence.

The real danger of this conference was that a lot of activists went home feeling they had shifted the union to the left by defeating Jenkins. At Blackpool station while the delegates were lining up for the train home, one of the rail staff told Clive to get to the back of the queue and wait his turn. A cheer rose from the crowd, delighted that he had been put in his place again. That is what they wanted to see.

Meanwhile, back at the factory and the office, ASTMS members were losing their jobs, seeing their pay and public services cut, not turning up to union meetings, voting Tory ...

Colin Brown and Bob Lloyd

## Smoke but no fire

The Fire Brigades Union conference in Bridlington was the contradictory affair that trade union conferences too often turn out to be. On the one hand Benn and the People's Marchers were rapturously received. But on the other a candidate more noted for his assessment of racing form than politics beat a Communist Party member in a full time official's ballot.

This was rules revision year. There was no opposition to an executive proposal to give individual executive members the right to suspend from office officials thought to be acting against the union. But the executive were overturned on plans for deciding who the union would support in the election of the leader/deputy leader of the Labour Party. They wanted it to be done on the basis of branches mandating delegates. But the successful emergency resolution will amount to a sort of pit-head ballot among the political fund members in the fire stations.

Among the new rules rejected were a call for more full-time officials based in the regions and the right for senior lay officials to be exempted from a ballot if they cannot complete a full term of office before retirement. But an EC supported proposal from Merseyside guaranteeing the right of all members to attend conference as observers was also rejected after delegates were reminded of the noisy scenes at some past conferences, eg at the end of the strike in 1978. It was wrongly claimed that the proposal would have allowed demonstrators into the hall.

There was some false comfort drawn from Labour's widespread local government gains. It will mean that the fire service


employers will be a Labour dominated group. But it is realised that the Tory government's policy of starving the public sector of cash is the overriding factor. In moving the executive's plan for a series of one-day strikes if the employers will not agree to continue the fire service pay formula, Ken Cameron, the new general secretary, emphasised the need to fight on pay and jobs, whichever party was in government. The plan was carried unanimously. And while one-day strikes may not go far enough to crack another effort by Thatcher to impose a six per cent ceiling for pay, it contrasted sharply with the way pay debates usually go, when the mere mention of firemen striking reduces the executive and most of the delegates to a state of apoplexy.

Conference was overshadowed to some extent by news of the deaths of three more firemen at fires. The executive were fortunately able to report agreement on a new £30,000 insurance scheme to give cover in the event of serious injury at an incident. Negotiations have been going on for over a year, and the employers were only persuaded to agree by threat that without it firemen would fight fires from outside buildings, in the same way the army had to during the strike. That way there is no danger that the roof will fall in on you.

The one subject that did not come before conference, but was nevertheless fiercely debated in the bars and socials outside, was Northern Ireland. Merseyside had submitted a mild resolution which called for the setting up of a trade union based Labour Party. The Northern Ireland delegates lobbied intensively to get the resolution withdrawn, claiming that if the FBU were to support such a move, firemen would no longer be seen as impartial, thus increasing the dangers they faced. In the end it was withdrawn, using the excuse that some supporters of the resolution planned to raise the question of troops out and a united Ireland.

The resolution conference carried on unemployment calls for the retention of trade union rights for the unemployed, the establishment of unemployed centres and proper representation of the unemployed on trades councils. Unfortunately an amendment was also carried to delete the call for a trade union of the unemployed, demanding instead that the general unions recruit unemployed workers—something we know from experience is unlikely to happen.

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# A new kind of NAZI

Britain's Nazis are on the offensive again. Even the press has not been able totally to ignore daily reports of racist attacks—ranging from murders in Swindon and Coventry to the throwing of bricks through the windows of prominent anti-racists and the daubing of Jewish cemeteries and synagogues. Pete Alexander, organiser of the Anti Nazi League, writes on the state of the Nazi organisations and how opposition to them is developing.

In 1977 the Anti Nazi League's founding statement was prefaced by the following paragraph:

'The National Front are emerging as a growing force in British politics. In the local elections in London they received over 119,000 votes. In some recent by-elections they have pushed the Liberal Party into fourth place.'

The failure of the National Front in the recent GLC and county council elections provides a stark contrast with the situation four years ago. In London they lost over four-fifths of their vote with a poll of only 21,081. In 1977, the NF fielded candidates in all but one of the 92 GLC constituencies, and together with the National Party they averaged 5.7% of the votes in the seats they contested. This year, Nazis, including splinters from the National Front, could only manage to contest 65 seats, and in those constituencies they averaged only 2.1% of the votes cast.

The picture is similar outside the capital. Everywhere their portion of the poll was smaller than in local elections in the late 70s. In some areas, like Wolverhampton (11% of the poll in 1977) they could not even field a candidate. The electoral decline is even more dramatic further north. In Bradford, their one candidate obtained only 58 votes (0.7%) compared with an average of 5.1% and 12.3% in two previous local elections. In the major metropolitan areas of Greater Manchester, West Midlands and West Yorkshire the NF vote averaged around or below 2%.

The new fascist sects fared even more poorly than the National Front. The New National Front, led by John Tyndall, averaged only 315 votes in the London elections compared to the NF's 527. Tyndall's campaign to maintain a band of dedicated followers, with the hope of being recalled to the

NF leadership, has been singularly lacking in success. His antipathy towards skinheads and other youth cults is undoubtedly a factor in his inability to mount demonstrations of more than 100 participants.

The Constitutional Movement, a grouping of more conservative elements trying to distance themselves from their NF past, obtained an average of only 194 votes in London. They have recently suffered from an arson attack on their Excalibur House headquarters in Hackney, which may complicate their anticipated merger with the British Democratic Party. The Midlands based BDP were the only grouplet to obtain a reasonable looking vote, with up to 5% of the poll in Leicestershire (compared to double this figure for the NF four years previously).

These election results demonstrate, with great clarity, the fact that the Nazis have not yet begun to regain the support they lost in 1978/79. This is a lasting tribute to the activity of the Anti-Nazi League in that period. The 'Nazi' tag has stuck firm.

It is unlikely that the National Front will be unduly alarmed. They will even attempt to gain some comfort from the fact that although their overall performance was very similar to their rout in the 1979 General Election (also about 2% of the poll), there was a slight improvement in some East London constituencies.

More importantly, through force of circumstance, the NF have shifted away from a focus on elections. Their leadership now argue that a general 'collapse' of society is necessary before they can gain power, and that, therefore, aiming at respectability is a waste of time. Meanwhile, they must concentrate on extra-electoral activity, particularly recruiting. Part and parcel of this shift is the use of radical, populist slogans like 'jobs not dole: Kick out the Tories!' and attacks on 'Capitalism' (sic), designed to increase working class support.

In essence the politics of the National Front have moved much closer to those of the openly Hitlerite British Movement, who were seen to be achieving some success during the National Front's faction fights of 1979-80. Webster recently described the politics of the NF as 'Pure Fascism'. Increasingly, their analysis, like that of the BM, rests on a presentation of the Jewish conspiracy myth of history. Both organisations have concentrated on recruiting disaffected white youth and on maintaining their support by engaging in a high level of violent activity.

Violence is nothing new to fascists in Britain. The August 1977 edition of *Searchlight* (no 28), the anti-fascist magazine, led with the headline 'The growth of fascist violence'. Included in a long list of incidents was the gutting of the SWP's headquarters, and soon after there was a series of racist murders in East London. Then the violence was an

adjunct to the general growth of the Nazis; today it is central to their activity, and is rightly a cause of great concern.

A new feature of the violence is the increased attention given to synagogues, and Jewish schools, cemeteries, shops and individuals. Anti-racists have merited special attention, notably the arson attack on our Birmingham bookshop by an NF sympathiser, when a woman was burned to death. Even Roy Hattersley, who ironically was a major force in winning Labour Party support for immigration controls, has been attacked.

However, as always, Britain's black population have borne the brunt of the violence—most horrifically with the Deptford fire. In parts of London, and other major cities, racist attacks are now commonplace, with only the more serious incidents being reported. Many attacks, including probably the recent murders in Swindon and Coventry, have been carried out by 'freelancers' not in the NF or BM.

The context of increased violence is important. Rapidly soaring levels of unemployment have produced a degree of boredom, frustration and alienation among young people not known since before the last war.

In addition government policy has encouraged racialism as a means of further dividing and weakening working class resistance to Tory policies. This is the main aim of the Nationality Bill, and three major statements made by Thatcher recently have added to the process. She has attempted to turn reality on its head by arguing that rioting in Brixton had nothing to do with social conditions, and everything to do with the presence of large numbers of blacks/immigrants.

The main features of the new growth of the Nazis—generalised increase in the level of racism, violence, focus on Youth, shift in Nazi propaganda—have all had an affect on the development of opposition.

The rising tide of racism has provoked a reaction from black people. This can be seen in the proportionately greater involvement of blacks, particularly Asians, in anti-fascist activities. There have been three massive, anti-racist demonstrations in the last two months, each with 10,000-plus participants, led by blacks and composed predominantly of black people. However, it is worth noting in passing that the Deptford demonstration received only tiny support from Asians, and the Nationality Bill and Coventry demonstrations attracted minimal support from Afro-Caribbeans.

Unfortunately, the other side of the coin has been the very low level of involvement in anti-racist struggles by organised white workers. In Coventry the trades council, NUT and NALGO banners were the only union ones present on the march.

Local trade union leaders who have just woken up to the need to be appearing to do something about unemployment—a popular issue—have difficulty in taking seriously a problem which receives only minority support. Further, much of the white membership is undoubtedly caught up in the search for scapegoats to explain away unemployment which is still rising. A leading member of the Leamington anti-racist anti-fascist committee reports that sales of their monthly publications have slumped as former buyers adopt the racist arguments.

## The Afghan Tragedy

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Increasing violence has led to arguments about how best to organise defence, with some Asian leaders still retaining illusions in the ability and willingness of the police to defend black people. 'Self-defence is no offence' is a popular slogan, which contains an important statement about the role of the police and provides a justification for black youths carrying knives and clubs, but as a guide to action it is still extremely limited. Activities like sleeping-in at a house where the family have suffered from Nazi violence, patrolling an area, such as the precinct in Coventry, or escorting children home from school, may be necessary as a short term measure. But in practice, it has proved difficult to sustain self-defence activity when the immediate threat has passed, and indeed I am not aware of any successful, regular vigilante groups.

The answer is to go on the offensive, by isolating the Nazis.

There can be little doubt that organising demonstrations after racist murders is an extremely powerful means of restoring confidence. In addition they force the Nazis onto the defensive, with all but the meanest, most hardened racists trying to distance themselves from the violence. For instance, in West London, ANL members utilised the concern of their supporters following an attack on an Asian member, to leaflet an area regarded by the Nazis—and ourselves—as *their* territory. Or again, following continuous attacks on a particular family we leafleted the area, and then canvassed the street for support.

The main activity of the Anti Nazi League has been among young people. In the last six months, a quarter of a million leaflets directed at youth have been distributed outside schools and football grounds by the ANL. Following the Youth Against the Nazis Conference, at the end of February, most grounds in the first two divisions have been covered. Leeds has been leafleted four times, with an increasing level of support. Even West Ham, with its Nazi reputation, was leafleted, providing a boost in confidence for our supporters in East London.

In the major towns respondents to leafletting have been pulled together in small groups, and badge selling, discos, RAR clubs, paint-outs and support for demonstrations have been organised. Already, a slight improvement in the situation is discernible, and the morale of our supporters has improved.

Finally, there has been a shift in ANL propaganda to match the shift in NF strategy and the growth of the BM. It is no longer sufficient to explain that the NF or BM are Nazis, in part that is their attraction. Recent leaflets have concentrated on arguing that the Nazis do not and cannot fight in the interests of working class youth. The growth of CND and agitation on unemployment help fantastically by indicating that it is *us*, the left and trade union movement that do precisely that.

In conclusion, building the ANL is more difficult in the current period. Partly because much of the cadre has moved on to the CND, mostly because of the change in the nature of the beast. Despite this, the maintenance of a united front organisation against the Nazis is crucial if the beast is to be contained. This the ANL has achieved.

## No exception for coal or chairs

In Mike Griffin's statement rejecting the theory of the SWP on import controls as "... rather up in the air, theoretical and doctrinaire..." he appeals for an exception for coal, arguing:

"It (the question of import controls - RS) is to be looked at in terms of working class experience... You can give support to import controls in relation to the work experience (?) of the workers in the industry."

The first part of that statement is certainly correct. We must of course look at everything, not just import controls, in terms of working class experience. The second part is wholly wrong. We should not support import controls under any circumstances!

"Now we talk about international solidarity... I don't accept solidarity with non-unionists whatever they are, whether they're in Taiwan, America, or South Wales."

What of those workers who have no experience of trade unions? Of those where joining a trade union means jail and torture? Of those in this country who have not got a job and cannot join a trade union? Now I know that Mike does not mean it in this sense as he has been actively supporting the Right to Work campaign. But then, Mike should not make any such sweeping statement. The question of import controls is not synonymous with working with non-union labour.

Import controls in themselves cannot save jobs, except perhaps in the short term. An example, oft quoted, is the textile industry, where they have done nothing to stem the toll of redundancies. Investment in this industry, like other industries, has been in the most up to date technology, which has led to massive job losses.

A similar picture emerges when we look at the furniture industry. High Wycombe, the town where I live and work, is perhaps

best known for the production of chairs and accounts for 6% of all furniture made in this country. Currently the town enjoys the lowest unemployment rate in the country (5.1%), but many of the town's workforce are on short time. The response of the furniture workers union (FTAT) has been, in their words, "Put pressure on the government on imports."

Yet in reply to my question whether redundancies and short-time working (part-time unemployment) were linked to imports, the Furniture Industry Research Association wrote: "Imports and their relationship to redundancies is not necessarily of importance." And if we look at what has been happening over the last few years, it is easy to see why.

The first and most important reason for the drop in the number of workers employed in the industry has been the change away from small to large units of production (gone are the small craft shops employing several skilled workers) using machinery which does most of the work. Coupled with this is that the amount of assembled furniture appearing in the shops has fallen. People now walk into their local DIY store and buy a pack with all the parts, take it home in the car and put it together themselves.

Another reason is of course, the cuts in government expenditure. If you don't build schools, you don't need desks and you don't need the workers who produce them. Controls on imports will not reverse this trend. All they will do is worsen it.

What is true of textiles and furniture is also true of coal.

Here too there has been the shift to increased mechanisation. Productivity agreements have helped to persuade miners to step up production as individual miners rather than fight to employ more workers. Miners have accepted money for jobs and now turn and point the finger at imports.

Mike is critical of our insistence on theory. Yet Marx and Engels often repeated that their theory is not dogma, but a guide for action. If you accept the notion of import controls you suggest that unions, employers and government can get together to solve 'our' problems. This is not a

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socialist way to look at things and that is why we reject the arguments in favour of import controls. So, if we don't fight for import controls, what do we call for and how do we fight?

We must, where necessary, raise the demand for subsidies. We link this to demands for a shorter working week, a complete ban on overtime, five days work or five days pay. It means that every job loss must be fought by strike action, occupation and demands for solidarity action. We must learn to depend on the working class itself to fight for itself, rather than leaving things to the reformist (actually reactionary) union leaders and the government. To do that, Mike, I'm afraid you need the theory.

One final point. Mike's point on who will be first on the barricades is not only elitist, it's childish. It could be any section of workers who spark the revolution – at the moment, the women at Lee Jeans are light years ahead. They have taken over their factory to save jobs, but I haven't noticed them call for import controls.

Roy E Smith

## Glasgow's P2

One small criticism of Chris Bambery's useful article on Scottish loyalism. It would be a mistake to assume as Chris does that discrimination in employment no longer exists in Scotland. By concentrating on the Orange Order, he misses the real perpetrators of discrimination, the Masonic Lodges.

The domination of the skilled engineering trades by the Masons was, at least into the sixties, almost total. During my own apprenticeship years, the late '50s, there were only two Catholics allowed apprenticeships as marine fitters in the five years I was apprenticed at John Browns. This in one of the biggest engineering employers on the Clyde.

The same applies for the electricians. Catholics were given apprenticeships but in the so-called 'Black Squad' ie as welders, shipwrights etc.

The method of selection was quite simple. Nobody asked your religion – just what school you went to. And obviously if you went to Our Holy Redeemer's or St Patrick's you were certainly not a 'blue-nose'. There has been no change in this situation – or at least the only change has been that no-one gets apprenticeships now, Catholic or Protestant.

Finally, the role of the reactionary ideology of freemasonry and its effect on the Scottish working class is something much more insidious than the relatively open activities, no matter how repulsive, of the Orangemen. Remember, those who join the Orange Lodge in Scotland tend to be those who are too stupid to get through the Mason's decrees.

Jim Scott

## Bloody Ba'ath

In his article "Run down to a new civil war?" (*Socialist Review* 16 May - 14 June) Peter Clarke analysed the situation and made what I believe to be a number of fundamental mistakes. I should like to take him up on one point. He says:

"What of the left in Lebanon? Unfortunately it is in tatters. Amal is split by internal disputes regarding the Palestinians, while the Ba'athists of Syria and Iraq, the progressive front of Walid Jumblatt, the Nasserites, the Partii Populaire Syrien and the Palestinians spend most of their time fighting each other rather than the Phalangists and the Israelis"

Ba'athism is a National Socialist doctrine and by the standards of the Middle-east Syria passes for "progressive" in that it is against American imperialism and Zionism. Present-day Iraq, however, has a one-party dictatorship in the authoritarian mould. The president Saddam Hussein has closed down the offices of the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine and of the Popular Democratic Front for the Liberation of Palestine as a potential threat to his rule. Iraqi oil wealth sponsors the Arab Liberation front in Lebanon – a front for divisive Iraqi intrigues. In foreign affairs, Iraq is aligned with Saudi-Arabia, Oman and Jordan, the three most reactionary states in the area. Their aim is to subdue Iran so that Iraq can be the new US police force in the Gulf area.

In Iraq itself, the Communist Party was forced out of political activity and its members hunted down and killed, even those who had tried to flee the country. A similar fate befell trotskysts, left-wing Ba'athists and anyone who opposed the president's Takriti tribe. The intelligentsia has been silenced by bribery and torture. The regime holds the Kurdish nation to be

racially inferior and has deported tens of thousands to new "homes" in the desert, while systematically exterminating the few that oppose it.

I hope these few facts give an insight into this so-called left regime. It does not fight the Israelis or the Phalangists because the interests of the Iraqi ruling class are exactly the same as theirs.

In revolutionary politics it is essential to distinguish friend from enemy, and I feel that Peter Clarke's article will mislead and alienate overseas readers as to the SWP's true position vis-a-vis Iraq. A real analysis would be longer, more detailed, and with an historical perspective.

Archie Friedman

## Making too much of Militant

Despite understandable exasperation at the antics of *Militant* in the CPSA the comrade was wrong to criticise them in such a sectarian way in last month's *SR*.

I feel there's a tendency to get carried by the Millies so let's not forget certain facts. At best *Militant* has 1500-2000 supporters (take the term supporter how you like) and they could only manage to get 700 at their big annual fringe meeting at the LPYS conference. Their base in the industrial working class is virtually non-existent despite their workerist posing. Their intervention in disputes is tokenistic and almost voyeuristic (It was a month before their paper ever mentioned Lee Jeans. 'We've no members in the area', said one full-timer). Their reputation is based on their ability to frighten an establishment which that well-known Trot Harold Wilson nearly provoked into a military coup. And, on top of all that, they have no influence in a Labour left which despises them for their dogma, tedium and sectarianism.

The comrade's bitterness is based on a false premise—that any group that calls itself Trotskyist should at least try to live up to it. *Militant* are not Trotskyists—they are centrists. The way to treat them is exactly the way we treat other centrists and reformists. We propose joint activity and prove that we're the best fighters for those demands, whether on unemployment, racism, CND etc. If there's one thing centrists can't stand it's tailing people they see as ultra-left, but that's what they had to do in campaigns like the Anti-Nazi League and especially in the Right to Work Campaign. I've heard at least four reasons why they didn't support the RTW march, although some of them did.

Their real danger is taking kids we should have, merely because they reach them first and shield them from revolutionary arguments. All that means for us is that we have to be better and make sure we get there first. Our superior arguments and better activity (they can only manage about three regular street sales in Glasgow and only mobilise for big 'labour movement' demos) will in the long run pay off. The thing to avoid is responding to their sectarianism by some of our own. United front activity will win their periphery better.

Dermot MacWard

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# The two souls of CND

The last few weeks have seen some of the different strands within CND begin to emerge a little more clearly. While the public face of CND has been hit by police bans on marches in various parts of the country, there were a number of demonstrations over Easter, particularly the long marches in the Midlands and over the Pennines. And then, a month later the CND national conference took place.

Let's look first at the Pennine march. Its leadership was, by-and-large, provided by the respectable middle-class, middle-aged cadre of the movement. But these provided few of the marchers, who were rarely over 25 and often in their teens.

It soon became clear that there was a fundamental difference within the march as to how militant CND should be and as to the sorts of political demands it should be making.

## Complaints

Hardly had it left Bradford on the second day, than some of the 'leadership' were complaining about the shouting of anti-Tory slogans, and on the morning of the third day they held a march meeting to try to get a ban on slogan shouting. The brunt of their complaint by then was against the 30 or so SWP members (out of a march total of about 500) and they claimed their main objection was to the 'offensive', 'aggressive' chorus of a song about Reagan which ended 'Burn, burn, burn the bastard'. They miscalculated the mood entirely. The song had been most enthusiastically sung (if not made up) by young marchers who had probably never come across the SWP before in their lives. More significantly, everyone knew that the real objection was to chants against Thatcher and for the right to work. To shouts of 'march not waffle', the march moved off without the leadership daring to put the issue to a vote. If 'burn the bastard' was henceforth modified to 'gently poach him', the anti-Thatcher slogans were louder than ever.

The leadership's claim had been that such slogans would 'alienate' people from CND. But it was clear to many marchers that they were much much more appealing to ordinary working class people in an area of high unemployment than the brown-rice and heads image conveyed by a group of resurrected flower children who led the march or by the continual droning of 'Give Peace a Chance' from the march speaker van. By the time it entered Manchester, at least half the march was dominated by chants of 'We won't die for Thatcher' and 'Jobs not bombs'.

Behind the argument over slogans was a deeper argument - whether CND is going to be a gentle protest movement, even back-tracking on the demand for unilateral disarmament, in order to keep as many middle class people as possible happy and defeat the bomb by sheer moral pressure. Or whether it is going to be a militant movement prepared to struggle to disarm those who wield the bomb. It was

the latter perspective which began to win out among the rank and file of the march.

That was not because of any extraordinary energy or organising skills on the part of the SWP members present (a good number of whom had neither). It was because for many of the young people on the march the bomb is not an isolated issue - it is the sharp end of a system which can only offer them the choice between worthless illpaid jobs and long periods on the dole. So the socialist arguments of the SWP found a ready audience.

The CND campaign conference on the weekend of 9-10 May provided a different sort of insight into the movement. There were three or four hundred people there, which is not bad, but fewer than the organisers had hoped. One of the reasons for this was undoubtedly that the national leadership had not done anything like enough work to publicise and build for it. The description of activists who did attend will be familiar to regular readers of this journal: they were overwhelmingly white, middle-class and aged between twenty and forty.

## Rumblings

Contrary to what Chris Horrie of CND wrote in his letter to our last issue, there are problems with the national leadership of CND. Bruce Kent, in his opening remarks, pointed to the difficulty of local groups running out of things to do - what he called the need to 'get a second wind' - but the national leadership had no visible plans to overcome that problem. And John Cox, from the chair, seemed to be voicing subterranean rumblings within the leadership itself when he invited critical comments on *Sanity*.

Much more interesting, though, were the discussions which took place in the small workshop sessions which took up the bulk of the conference. Take the question of the Labour Party. Almost everybody is agreed that the election of a Labour government will be one of the decisive tests of CND. A large number of people, including Labour Party members, are very cynical about Foot's commitment to bomb-banning, and therefore argue for the need to step up the fight in the Labour Party. We disagree with that, since we believe that the only thing which will force the Labour Party to keep on the straight and narrow will be mass pressure in the streets and the factories, but nevertheless the fight inside the Labour Party has at least some importance. What is clear is that the leadership of CND, and of Labour CND in particular, are already tailoring their arguments to meet the right wing half-way.

Their draft resolution studiously avoids any mention of NATO, despite the fact that CND has long recognised that withdrawal from that particular den of thieves is a necessary component of unilateral nuclear disarmament. Their justification is that the time is not right to raise the issue. If the Labour right has even an ounce of sense, they will crucify the left on this position.

In any case the belief that you can win at Labour conference and get anything done about it once they are in office without utterly smashing the right wing machine is staggeringly naive. Above all, that means taking on the likes of Chapple and Duffy in their own unions. But Labour CND is not really interested in doing that. They think they can get round it by boxing clever. Meanwhile, lobbying newly elected Labour councillors is seen as the central task.

## Searching

On the question of an orientation towards the working class, the bulk of the delegates were ready to listen with politeness and even interest to how this might be carried out. Most of them seemed to accept that such an approach would be a good thing. But the arguments were really accepted on the grounds that there was this huge number of people who had not yet been converted to the true light and therefore it was necessary to go forth and spread the word to the heathen. The argument which the delegates in general were not yet ready to accept is the central one: that the working class is the only force in society that has the power to ban the bomb. Once again we come back to the central question of what sort of movement is CND to be. The choice between a moral approach and one that links the bomb to the everyday struggles of ordinary people is not one that can be avoided.

It is not that the delegates have closed minds on these questions. Quite the contrary: many people are searching quite seriously for answers to general questions. There was one session on alternative defence policies. The vast majority of people there came very quickly to the conclusion that the only viable one was the concept of an armed people: what we would call a workers' militia. That in itself might seem staggering until you recognise that the people who saw it as a good idea have not yet thought through just why we do not have such a force in crisis-ridden Britain and why the armed forces are structured the way they are. Still, it is a very interesting discussion to have, and there were many others just as interesting.

These two sorts of events illustrate the logic of the development of CND. It is slowly but surely developing a left-wing and a right-wing. There is nothing that anyone can do about that since it is the logic of the whole movement that it confronts the choices of what to do and how to win day in and day out. The last word belongs to an SWP member delegated to the conference: 'I have never had to argue for socialism so many times in two days before.'

**Colin Sparks**

## I saw a new world born

I first came across John Reed, not through his most famous work, *Ten Days That Shook The World*, a first hand account of the Russian Revolution, but through another almost unknown work, *Insurgent Mexico*.

At the age of 26, Reed had already won some fame as a journalist, particularly for his coverage of the 1913 strike of silk workers in Paterson, New York, led by Big Bill Heywood of the Wobblies.

He had approached the strike as a bit of a lark. But what he witnessed there shook him considerably.

"All the violence is the work of one side," he wrote, "the mill owners, their servants, the police, club unresisting men and women and ride down law abiding crowds on horseback. Their paid mercenaries, the armed detectives, shoot and kill people. Their newspapers publish incendiary and crime inciting appeals to mob violence against the strike leaders. They deal out heavy sentences to peaceful pickets that the police net gathers up."

Reed marvelled at the courage and inventiveness of these 25,000 striking workers and their children who picketed the schools whose teachers spoke against the strike. And when the mill owners covered Paterson with flags and banners saying "We live under the flag; we fight for the flag; and we will work under the flag", the pickets replied with their own banners: "We wove the flag; we dyed the flag; and we won't scab under the flag."

But, although Paterson had a profound influence on Reed, it did not bring about a lasting commitment from him to the labour movement. He was still groping his way on the fringes of the labour movement.

His big journalistic break came when he was asked to cover the revolt of the peons on Mexico for the magazine *Metropolitan*.

His articles from the frontline established him as among the top journalists of his day, and on his return he published his experiences in book form. *Insurgent Mexico* tells the story of his four months in the battlefields with the Mexican guerillas, destitute masses with popular leaders, ill armed, dressed in rags, but determined to fight for land and liberty. His descriptions of the risings, marches and battles, all of which he took part in, are magnificent. And the symbols of the revolution itself, the peons, robbed by ranchers and priests, are portrayed as courteous, gay, and poor, yet fiercely proud and revolutionary to boot!

We meet Pancho Villa, who says, "When the new Republic is established, there will never be any more army in Mexico. Armies are the greatest supporters of tyranny. We will put the army to work!" This Mexican Robin Hood, as he was called, fed whole districts by capturing granaries, herds of cattle and bullion, and distributing it to the poor. He raised an army of 20,000 in a few months and captured Northern Mexico! He confiscated 17,000,000 acres and gave every citizen 62½ acres each. He fixed the

price of essential foods and set up schools for adults and children throughout the state.

In April 1914, Reed left Mexico, but he was slowly beginning to realise that his responsibility must be a continuing one. On his return home he defended the uprising by speaking and writing against American intervention.

In the States he covered the miners' strike in Ludlow, Colorado, where 11,000 miners were on strike. The strike resulted in a massacre in which men, women and children were shot and their tents burned down by Rockefeller's agents, armed



John Reed

detectives, strike breakers and the militia.

Reed's ties with workers and their organisations were becoming much clearer in his writings. He was arriving at Marxism by the pitted route of experience. Almost everything he now wrote expressed his hatred of capitalism and aided the cause of revolution. He also began to argue that literature had to be freed from the stupidity and triviality of the bourgeoisie and from the commercialisation of the profit making magazines. Ideas alone though didn't mean much to Reed, he had to see to be there. "It didn't come to me from books that the workers produced all the wealth of the world, which went to those who did not earn it. It was all around me to see."

In the summer of 1914, Reed left for Europe, to cover the First World War, for *Metropolitan*. He became depressed and disgusted by this "traders' war" as he called it. His analysis of what he saw and thought could not be printed, for American capitalists were intent to enter the war, to expand their world position in their struggles for new markets and new raw materials. He was now a marked man. No longer sought after as a writer. For he was beginning to use his pen like a club.

Being isolated, doubts crept in, about whether the class he had put his faith in would reply to the war madness, and this was furthered by the growing support of

"Socialists" for the war, and by his having no outlets for his writing. This is revealed in *Almost Thirty* an autobiographical essay, which is an offshoot of his despair at the time. Reed however failed to take account the rising anti-war feelings, shown in the rise in labour struggles at home and abroad, and the left socialist conferences taking place in Europe, against the war. His doubts were those of a man who had allied himself with a class, but still had to grasp why social ferment was a complex process, uneven in results, and often contradictory to any individual's most complex wishes.

The news of the Russian Revolution, however, lifted him sky-high. He went off to Petrograd as a reporter for the *New York Call* and other socialist publications. The result was *Ten Days That Shook The World*. Lenin wrote the inscription, "Unreservedly do I recommend it to the workers of the world".

"The people had clambered out of the pit," Reed wrote, "and were showing what creative genius lay in them now they had the power to rule themselves". It was here, during the revolution, that Reed found the answers to his questions. It taught him that "In the last analysis, the property owning class is loyal only to its property. That the masses of workers are not only capable of great dreams, but have in them the power to make dreams come true".

Reed's development, into becoming a disciplined communist and writer, was hard but steady. The difference between most of his early writing and that on the revolution, was the difference between the close sympathiser and the participant. *Ten Days* was a measure of the great leap forward he had made. It was a force for working class power.

On his return to America, Reed was cursed and threatened by the right wing and the Establishment. One newspaper's headline was "One man who needs the rope". He was the spokesman for the Bolsheviks, for the socialist revolution. He wrote continuously and spoke at meetings across the states which were often broken up by police and soldiers.

Tragically, on his return to Russia, he died like thousands of others of typhus, deprived of drugs due to the country being blockaded. His plans to write two other books on Russia were doomed.

The road to socialism was not easy for Reed to discover. But struggle steeled him. His experiences as a journalist with Pancho Villa, with striking workers, on the frontline during World War One, and in Russia during the revolution all helped to shape and mould him into becoming a committed revolutionary activist and writer, as opposed to the romantic adventurer he started out as. It was not a sudden conversion to socialism, it was more of a simple ripening.

Unreservedly do I recommend his books...

### Owen Gallagher

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# The making of the female working class

## Women Workers and the Industrial Revolution 1759 — 1850

Ivy Pinchbeck,

Virago. £3.50 (reprint — originally written 1930)

The cover of this book describes how it 'examines a century of women's work in agriculture, trade and industry'. But it isn't just the examination of any century. Ivy Pinchbeck's classic study looks at the hundred years from 1750 to 1850, the years of the Industrial Revolution which transformed the sort of work women did, and shows how it affected their lives.

And a revolution it certainly was. England of 1850 would have been unrecognisable to someone living a century before. It went from being a society based primarily on land to one based overwhelmingly on manuf. The old way of life, based on agriculture and related production, mainly round the home, was destroyed, with often violent and miserable consequences for those whose means of livelihood disappeared. But by the end of the period, that livelihood had been replaced by another, rooted in the factories. Those agricultural workers, spinners, handloom weavers and others who were displaced by the early stages of the industrial revolution had become part of the industrial working class.

For the women whose lives were destroyed it seemed hard to imagine that things could get better. Yet as Ivy Pinchbeck shows, the industrial revolution created better working conditions and wages for women than anything which had gone before, and freed them from the

dependence on their husbands and fathers which had been part of the old system.

The old form of family centred as it was on production in or around the home changed out of all recognition.

'In the mid-eighteenth century the population of England was mainly rural, and women were largely engaged in productive work in their homes and in some form of domestic industry. In the towns the industrial woman wage earner was not unknown, and a large number of women were engaged in some form of trade; but here again, women more often shared the activities of their husbands and acted as partners in the industrial, as in the agricultural sphere. As the result of the changes which took place in the latter half of the eighteenth century, this state of affairs became no longer possible'.

Women's work covered wide areas apart from agriculture. The spinning of wool, cotton or flax, button making, lacemaking, straw plaiting, working in the mines. Yet it still tended to centre in or around the home, and to bear some relationship to the husband or other members of the family.

A revolution in agriculture changed all that. Farming went from being largely for subsistence in most areas to being geared to the needs of the growing population of the industrial cities. Most of the old common land was enclosed, and turned to arable farming for the

production of grain for the cities.

The social consequences were immense. For some farmers it meant an increase in wealth beyond their dreams. Their wives, traditionally responsible for dairy production, tended to hand over that role to servants, and to become economically inactive as they rose up the social scale. Dairy production, once an important source of women's work and of women's economic power within the home, became work which was managed by men,



as it became more geared to capitalist agricultural production.

At the other end of the social scale there were equally far-reaching implications for women. The enclosures caused many cottagers and labourers to lose their living, and terrible poverty was the result. The stories of vagrancy, dependence on poor relief and starvation date from this period. Women's productive work tended to decrease, until they were eventually drawn once again into agricultural work as casual day labourers.

The effect on the family was immense. For many there was a complete transformation of their traditional way of life. The home, once the centre of productive work for the whole family, ceased to serve that function. One graphic example can illustrate this: in the South of England, even baking of bread in the home ceased, and women were forced to use the village bakehouse. The reason was that the enclosures denied labourers any access to fuel.

'It was this more than anything else that in the South reduced the labourer's diet to the monotonous one of bread and tea. In the North where furze, heath and brushwood could still be obtained at an inconsiderable expense, the housewife was enabled not only to spend a smaller proportion of earnings on food, but also to provide a variety of dishes unknown in the South.'

Once the home ceased to have any function, other things followed:

'The decline in housecraft, origi-

nally the outcome of economic causes, was aggravated by the general degradation (of poverty —L.G.), until finally it became itself a factor in a more complete demoralisation. Unable to give warmth, comfort and any variety of food to her family, the housewife lost interest and the condition of her home went from bad to worse. In despair the labourer sought comfort at the ale house and his wife the solace of tea-drinking with her neighbours.'

A similar transformation of women's lives was taking place through the industrialisation of the other major area of their work in the home, the spinning of textiles. In the mid eighteenth century production of cloth was a domestic industry. Women and children would spin, and go through the other various processes leading up to weaving. Spinning of wool was carried out in nearly all parts of the country, especially in West Yorkshire, East Anglia and the South West.

Cotton spinning took place in the hinterlands of Liverpool, especially round Manchester, and in some areas linen was produced from flax. Production was partly for use, and partly to sell in order to buy other goods.

'The cotton worker's cottage was indeed a miniature factory, in which the father superintended the weaving, and the mother was responsible for all the preparatory processes and the training and setting to work of the children'

The inventions of the 1770s, especially the spinning mule, transformed the role of women and men within the family. Gradually the job of spinning, now done by heavy powered machinery in water powered factories, became taken over by men. Handloom weaving also became gradually replaced by the power loom, and here it was the women who tended to be employed, rather than the male handloom weavers, who resisted entering the factories.

Again economic distress was widespread. The new mule spinners had work, but for many engaged in preparatory work and hand spinning, the situation was grim.

New machinery was blamed

'Women spinners and those who until now had been engaged in the preparatory processes in the cottages, believed that the new machines were responsible for their distress and unemployment; consequently opposition, more widespread than in the early days of the inventions, broke out again. In September and October 1779, several thousand cotton workers and their sympathisers destroyed hundreds of carding, doubling and twisting engines, and as many large jennies as

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But although women had been displaced from their traditional role, the sheer force of industrialisation ensured their re-employment before long. The huge output of yarn being produced in the mills meant that women filled many of the vacancies for weavers. In the early nineteenth century women flooded onto the labour market. In

1818 there were 57,323 men and women employed in the cotton mills. By 1839 there were 146,331 women alone.

So a period which had started by destroying many of women's traditional jobs, now created whole new areas of work for women. The impact on the family was great.

They were able to compete for jobs on the same basis as men, and were able to maintain some degree of independence outside the family.

'In the case of the single working woman, the most striking effect of the industrial revolution was her distinct gain in social and economic independence. In industries in which a family wage prevailed (ie in which the family received money for producing something collectively —I.G) women scarcely knew the extent of, or had any opportunity of handling, their own earnings, and among women who earned an individual wage, few earned sufficient to give them any real sense of independence. Under the new regime every woman received her own earnings as a matter of course. The significance of this change was at once seen in the new sense of freedom which prompted so many young women to retain control of their wages, and even to leave home at an early age in order to 'become their own mistresses'.'

The population returns of 1841 show that:

'The great majority of women were working under five heads, as domestic servants, factory operatives, needlewomen, agricultural workers and those employed in domestic industries. Of all these, factory women were by far the best off, working the shortest hours and receiving the same rate of wages as men where they were employed in the same kinds of work.'

Despite the miseries of the factory system, there could be no doubt that it was an advance for women, allowing as it did the approach towards at least economic equality with men that had never before been possible.

It was this which caused Engels to write that the proletarian family could disappear under capitalism, since women had this financial independence and since the workers as a class had no property. This didn't happen. As the very reproduction of the working class came under threat from the factory system, so the new working class began to demand laws to protect women and children from working in certain industries.

Ivy Pinchbeck quotes one woman miner, who described conditions:

'A vast (number) of women have dead children and false births, which are worse...I have always been obliged to work below till forced to go up to bear the bairn, and so have all the other women. We return as soon as able, never longer than ten or twelve days'

At the end of the day women's responsibility for childbirth and childrearing meant that their entry into the workforce could not be on an equal basis with men, nor could their conditions be the same. It was that which led to attempts inside the working class movement to protect married women from the worst

excesses of the factory system. At a time when contraception was unheard of and when pregnancy was dangerous and often lethal, there seemed no alternative to married women staying in the home and the man receiving sufficient wages to keep the whole family.

Ivy Pinchbeck lays a number of myths in her book. She shows that women were already industrial workers before the industrial revolution, and that their work in the factories or mines was not necessarily completely new. At the same time, she shows that the social and economic conditions under which that work was done changed dramatically in the century she covers.

But most importantly, she destroys the view that the industrial revolution was a step backward for women. She shows that where women lost their jobs to men this was not as the result of a male conspiracy, but because the increased production of capitalist society introduced heavy machinery which could better be handled by men. She also shows that there were many areas of work where women were taken on in preference to men (usually, even then, because they were thought more manageable), and she always tries to find a material reason why these things happened.

The industrial working class was created by capitalism, and is the gravedigger of capitalism. What Ivy Pinchbeck shows us is that the working class was never a male class. Women workers existed at the very birth of the factories.

This book was written over 50 years ago. It is an indictment of socialists, and especially of the academic women's movement, that it has never been surpassed. Much has changed since Ivy Pinchbeck wrote; even more has changed since 1850. But the industrial working class is still the only class which can overthrow society and its female component is larger than ever. Our commitment to women's liberation and socialism has to begin with organising among those women workers who are in the traditions that Ivy Pinchbeck describes.

Lindsey German

## From Gulag to Gdansk

Samizdat Register No 2  
Ed Roy Medvedev Merlin Press  
The Road to Gdansk  
Daniel Singer  
Monthly review press, £8.00

I suppose it is inevitable that a book such as Medvedev's should be disappointing. Coming as it does so soon after the biggest working class general strike and upsurge since the Russian revolution, this collection of essays from the 'socialist opposition' in Russia has virtually nothing to say concerning the condition and mood of the Russian working class.

What it contains is a series of rather minor essays, some of which are of historical interest—for instance, the two impressions of Kamenev and Zinoviev by the former Menshevik, Yakinbovitch. The rest are mainly concerned with the ethics of socialism, although one article entitled 'Commodity no. 1' says something by implication about the state of mind of the Russian worker, its subject matter being the production of vodka and the state's secretiveness as to actual production figures.

The problem of this book is the editor's inability to include anything contemporary on what is happening in the factories or workshops. Remember only last year there were reports of mass strikes in Togliattigrad car factories. The attempts to form free trade unions and the persecution and murder of those doing so, seem to have left no mark on Medvedev. The simple publication of the hand written strike bulletins of Togliattigrad would have told us more about the potential for 'socialist opposition' than another 500 pages on the 'Role of Stalinism'

In total contrast, for Daniel Singer it is precisely the growth of the working class and its increasing sophistication which is the great hope for both Russia and the rest of the Eastern bloc. His new book contains three sections: a study of Solzhenitsyn; 'The Soviet Union: The Seeds of Change' and a third one on Poland.

His critique of Solzhenitsyn is both sympathetic and savage. He traces his descent into religious mysticism and reaction, while continuing to appreciate the importance of the truth contained in the *Gulag*. Singer writes an obituary for Solzhenitsyn from future genera-

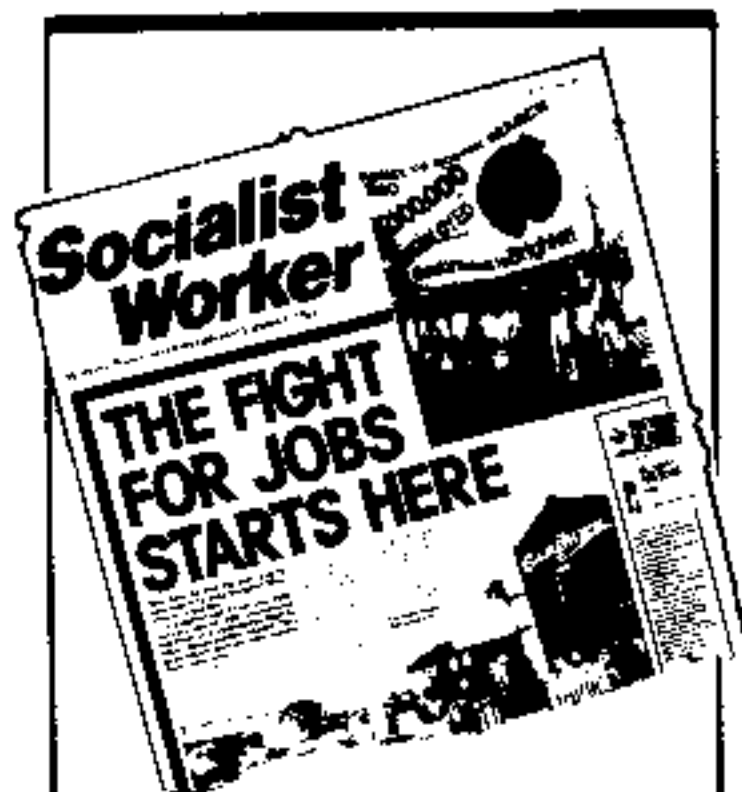


tions, 'who may cast aside the bastards of October in the name of some new councils of urban and rural, manual and intellectual workers—a modern version of the soviets which back in 1917 not only shook the world but offered it hope.'

'In order to move forward, this generation will have to re-assume its past if only to grasp how the dream was twisted into a nightmare, and in doing so it will pay tribute to the countless victims of this period. Alexander Solzhenitsyn will figure prominently in this metaphysical monument. He will figure there as an ex-zek who has somehow survived the horrors, as the heroic writer fighting passionately so that the crimes should neither be forgotten nor forgiven. 'But he will be there too, as the mental victim of both Stalin and his successors, who unable to reform Soviet society, have driven this man for all his courage and talent into an irrational dead-end.'

Similarly the essays on both Soviet and Russian society are a delight to read and remarkably relevant. To be honest, I can find nothing bad to say about Singer's book, and I only hope that people can beg, borrow, steal or—the ultimate accolade—buy a copy.

Jim Scott



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# A play that jarred the Junta

Don Nugent looks at a play from Chile that shows how cultural resistance is growing.

**TRES MARIAS Y UNA ROSA**  
PRESENTED BY TALLER DE INVESTIGACION TEATRAL.

"The adoption of moderate economic policies tends to lead to dictatorship whereas freedom is only secure under a system of pure capitalism." - Milton Friedman in *Capitalism and Freedom*.

"... Measures of indirect pressure should be taken against the organisations which co-operate directly or indirectly in the development, proliferation and expression of artistic groups such as the one that has prompted this document." - General Odlainer Mena Salinas, Head of Chilean Secret Police in a policy statement on the arts arising from the production of the above play.

*Taller De Investigacion Teatral* is a Chilean theatre company that first presented *Three Marias and One Rose* in July 1979 in Santiago. The play then went to other Chilean cities and in February this year began a world tour including Toronto, New York, Berlin, Stockholm and Paris, and ending at the Riverside Studios in Hammersmith last month. The popular success of *Three Marias* and extent of its touring schedule are a good indication of the cultural revival taking place in Chile at the moment.

Before 1970, there was already strong contact between leading artists - for example, folk singers, dancer and poets - and the workers and peasants.

When Allende and Popular Unity took power in 1970, cultural activity surged, and while workers occupied their factories, actors took plays to the shanty towns, or went to live within particular communities and helped them devise their own plays. Pinochet's coup three years later brought the death of 40,000 people, including cultural workers, the reversal of Allende's policies, and a cultural backlash. Milton Friedman, so popular with Thatcher, was given a free hand to implement a monetarist experiment without the hindrance of the democratic trappings we have here. The result was 28% unemployment, drastic cuts in wages and public expenditure, a fall in national product of 16.6%, and rocketing inflation in basic food-stuffs like bread, which now costs four hundred times what it did in 1973.



Miriam Palacios in *Tres Marias - Una Rosa*

The experiment demanded poverty and suffering and the suppression of all opposition parties and trade unions. Recently, a new constitution was introduced that gives unlimited power to the military and bans trade union rights and freedom of organisation. Political prisoners and their families have been victimised and specific repression against women intensified.

But, for every attack, an organised resistance springs up and hundreds of open and clandestine actions are taken against the Junta, including bank raids and a recent land take-over by 300 homeless families. The trade unions have resisted attempts to crush them, and eight parties of the left are meeting to co-ordinate their activity. Over nine tenths of the population now oppose the fascists.

The Junta complements its attacks on peoples' rights and organisation with attacks on popular culture in order to fulfil "a duty to change the mentality of Chileans" and to eradicate artistic expression of struggles and support for them. This has meant eradicating the artists and intellectuals who spread the threatening ideas prevailing during the Popular Unity period, and also controlling institutions, like universities and the media, through which ideas are transmitted.

As there has been a ruthless privatisation of the economy, so ideology emphasises individualist, competitive, and consumerist notions against the collective, and this is pushed strongly through the media. As a result, cultural resistance has intensified within the

wider resistance movement over the last two to three years.

Academic study groups and workshops have been set up to provide alternative teaching and courses to the universities. Theatre productions, gaining large audiences, have increased and often provide satirical and critical jabs at the Junta.

A record company started in 1976 publishes recordings by Victor Jara, Quilapayun, and Inti-Illimani, and stories by Chilean writers, and has been under great pressure from the authorities. Another music group provides musicians for meetings and trade union conferences.

Cultural community centres are being set up, for example, but the Pirale Theatre Group to provide facilities and training in theatre, music, art and printing. More writing and film-making, concerts and poetry readings are taking place.

A strike, earlier in the year, by workers in the PANAL textile factory won wide support from other workers, popular organisations, students, homeless, and the newly-formed Cultural Action League organised a programme, including poetry, plays, songs, ballet, sketches, films, folk music, on the PANAL premises and in timely opposition to a cultural event sponsored by the Junta.

All this activity is more or less open. A less visible development is the proliferation of "talleres", workshops, some organised by students or professional artists, or attached to trade unions, but most of which are in shanty towns. Three

hundred exist in poor areas of Santiago. They do theatre, music, poetry, handicrafts, and patchworks, and provide a means of expression for people where all others are denied and where poverty, hunger and unemployment are rife.

The *Taller De Investigacion Teatral* developed out of this situation and aims to "document the situations, tensions, conflicts, relations, life and vision of the world which belongs to certain social sectors of Chile today." *Three Marias and One Rose* is about four women who make traditional patchworks to support themselves. The company managed to get into such a workshop, and observe, study and participate in its work.

The play is a collaboration between playwright, David Benavente, director, Paul Osario, and the company: Luz Jimenez, Loreto Valenzuela, Miriam Palacios, and Soledad Alonso, who play the characters of the title.

For the first time since the coup apparently, this play shows ordinary working people on stage, struggling to survive, joking, arguing, expressing their artistic views, and attitudes towards love, work and the consumerism encouraged by the Junta.

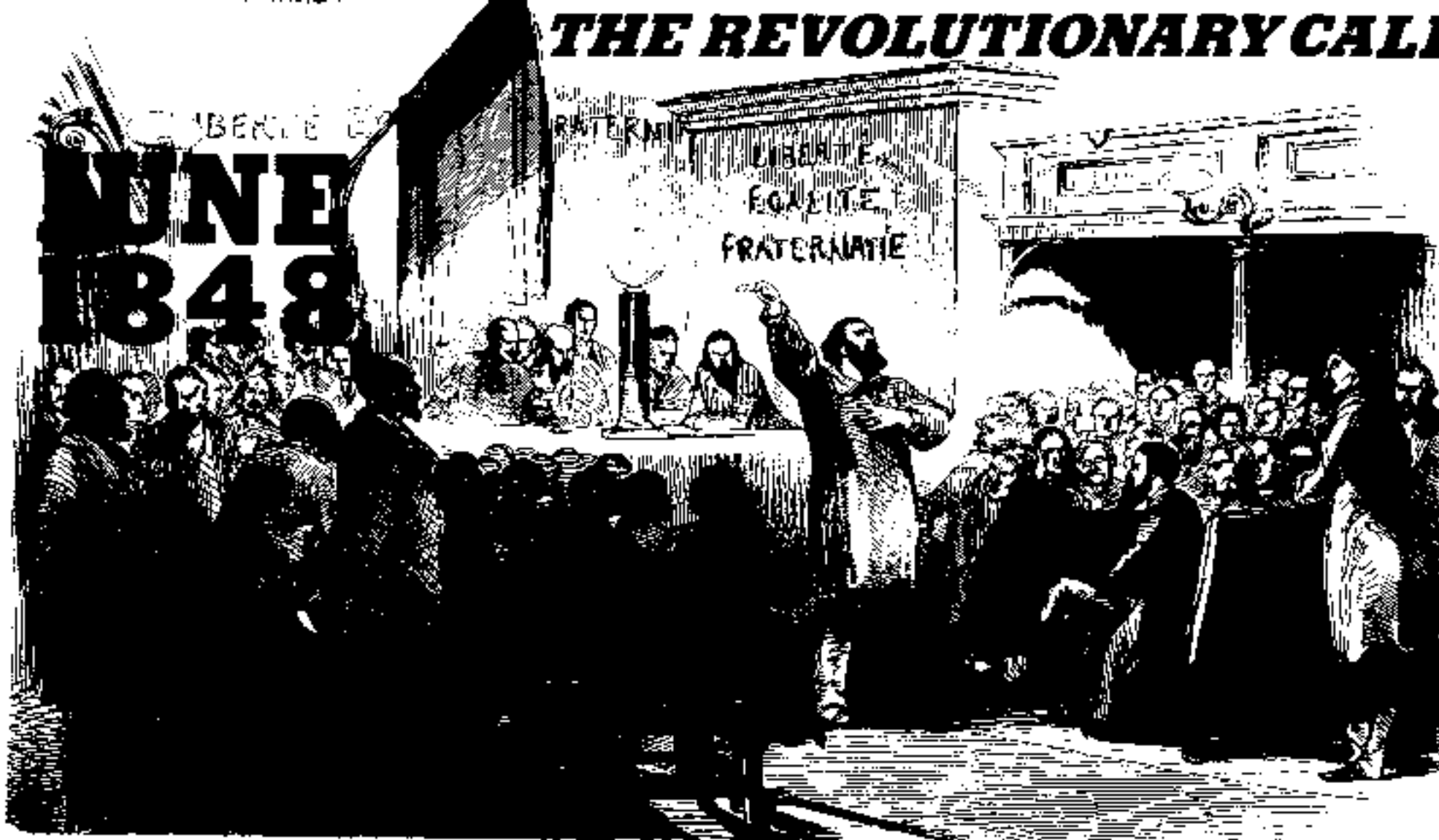
Financial problems for the workshop and the pull of newer, commercially oriented workshops producing for the upper classes, split the four women. However, changing fortunes for all of them bring a reunion through which they produce a giant, optimistic patchwork for a local church and discuss a future in Chile that has justice and freedom.

I speak no Spanish, but there was a clear freshness, energy and unity in the production, which was also very straight forward and simple in construction: the relations between the women, the social and economic pressures bearing down on them, and their renewed hope, are the whole play.

The reactions in Chile to such plays seem to have been varied. There is controversy amongst theatre workers and some audiences over the use of humour and satire in plays; over whether the experiences of working class are transformed when they are put in a play for presentation to a wealthier class; and over whether relevance to Chile and its struggles can be derived from the work of, say, the Pirale Theatre Group, known by the Junta for its radical work, which has decided to tour plays such as *Kaspar* by Handke, under the protective auspices of the Goethe Institute.

Controversy, problems and confusions are likely to occur in any cultural situation, but what is clear is that a positive and varied cultural revival is taking place within the resistance movement in Chile.

Financial support for cultural projects in Chile can be given by sending donations to Teatro Popular Chileno, who are based here but will be returning to Chile. Their deposit account number is 50202340 at the Co-operative Bank, 110 Leman St., London E1.



"The first great battle fought between the two classes that split modern society, a fight for the preservation or annihilation of the bourgeois order." That was Marx's description of 23 June 1848 in Paris when "the workers, with unexampled bravery and ingenuity, without leaders, without a common plan, without means and for the most part lacking weapons, held in check for five days the army, the Mobile Guard, the Paris National Guard and the National Guard that streamed in from the provinces..."

The great French revolution of 1789-94 had been a *bourgeois* revolution. The people of Paris had overthrown an absolutist monarchy and the remnants of feudalism that clustered around it, and had done so in the interests of those who made their money by trade and industry. The great figures of that revolution came from the bourgeoisie – Danton and Robespierre were both lawyers, and even Marat had been a physician to the upper classes. Their aim was a France based upon the needs of their class.

1848 began with what was in many ways the last act of that revolution. In 1814-15 the old monarchy had been restored to France, only to be replaced in 1830 after a brief revolutionary upsurge by the 'bourgeois King', Louis Phillippe. But Louis Phillippe ruled in the interest of one section of the bourgeoisie only, the great financiers, and by the mid-1840s there was growing resentment against his rule from industrial capital. There was also increasing bitterness among the workers and lower middle classes of Paris, as a great economic crisis took from them their means of livelihood.

In February 1848 all these resentments came to a head. Barricades were thrown up in the poorer areas of Paris. When the army went to smash the insurrection it found itself opposed by the middle class National Guard. The King fled, and, as the masses stormed through the Tuileries, the bourgeoisie formed a Provisional government. But it was a bourgeois government with a difference – it was under enormous pressure from the workers who had risen against the King. This pressure forced the bourgeois politicians to proclaim the republic and to include two workers' representatives in the government. But there was something the workers wanted more even than the republic – and that was a guaranteed livelihood. A demonstration

of 20,000 workers forced the government to set up a special commission in the Luxemburg place to 'find ways of improving the lot of the working classes'. When the commission called for government funded workshops to provide jobs for the unemployed, the government responded by giving 100,000 work in 'national workshops'. These were little better than the workhouses of the British poor law. However, even this was too much for the bourgeoisie, who immediately sought ways of taking away this concession. On 22 June they decreed that only married, Parisian born workers could remain in the work-

## 'Fraternity found it's true, unadulterated expression in civil war... the civil war of labour against capital'

shops. The unmarried were to have the choice between starving and enlisting in the army, while those born outside Paris would have to leave the city to work on military fortifications.

This decree brought home to workers the nature of the society that had been established by the February revolution. The next day they threw up barricades once more. Determined to seize power for themselves and to replace the bourgeois republic by the Red Republic, they proclaimed 'It is better to die of a bullet than of starvation'.

As Marx pointed out, the logic of the struggle for jobs was a struggle for power.

"The right to work", he wrote, was "the first clumsy formula wherein the revolutionary demands of the proletariat are summarised... Behind the right to work stands power over capital, behind power over capital the appropriation of

the means of production, their subjection to the associated working class and therefore, the abolition of wage labour, of capital and their mutual relations. Behind the right to work stood the June insurrection'.

The mood of the insurrection, Engels wrote at the time, was quite different to that of previous risings.

"The people are not standing on the barricades as in February singing, "Mourir pour la Patrie" (To die for the fatherland). The workers of 23 June are fighting for their existence and the fatherland has lost all meaning for them. The Marseillaise and all the memories of the great Revolution have disappeared.

"The June revolution is the revolution of despair and is fought with silent anger and the gloomy cold bloodedness of despair. The workers know they are involved in a fight to the death... The June revolution is the first which has actually divided all society into two large hostile armed camps which are represented by Eastern Paris and Western Paris..."

The insurrection was doomed. The working class was still only a small minority in the French society and the lower middle classes were persuaded by the government to throw in their lot against the workers. Although the workers came close to seizing the centre of the city and held out in their own districts for days, their forces numbered only 40-50,000 as against three times that number on the side of the government. As cannon destroyed their barricades, 3000 street fighters were shot out of hand and many thousands more imprisoned.

Yet the defeated insurrection was of world historical significance. It marked the point at which hollowness of the slogans of the Great French Revolution – 'liberty, equality, fraternity' – was exposed.

As Marx wrote, the day after the insurrection was finally crushed:

"Fraternity, the brotherhood of antagonistic classes, one of which exploits the other, this fraternity which in February was proclaimed and inscribed in large letters on the façades of Paris, on every prison and every barracks – this fraternity found its true, unadulterated and prosaic expression in *civil war*, civil war in its most terrible aspect, the civil war of labour against capital. This brotherhood blazed in front of all the windows of Paris on the evening of 25 June, when the Paris of the bourgeoisie held illuminations while the Paris of the proletariat was burning, bleeding, groaning in the throes of death..."

'Revolution after June meant: *Overthrow of bourgeois society* whereas before February it had meant *overthrow of the form of government*... Only after being dipped in the blood of the June insurgents did the tricolour become the flag of European revolution – the red flag!'

**Stuart Morgan**