

workers power

NEWSPAPER OF THE WORKERS POWER GROUP

**INSIDE: CRISIS
IN THE W.S.L.
PEOPLE'S
MARCH**

HANDS OFF CENTRAL AMERICA

THERE HAVE ONLY been nine special joint sessions of the US Congress since the Second World War. Reagan's speech to the ninth on April 27th therefore underlined the importance of his subject for US imperialism - Central America.

Reagan's aim was to break down resistance to his plan to increase military aid to El Salvador's reactionary government to \$136 million - five times the original budget. In this he was successful, as he has been in getting acceptance for US offensive on the second front in Central America - against Nicaragua.

Since last November the US has openly admitted it has over 50 CIA personnel in Honduras and Costa Rica supervising the training of 2,000 counter-revolutionaries ('contras') in 10 camps along the Honduras-Nicaragua border. Operating from the Northern mountains their task has been via some 600 attacks, to sabotage Nicaragua's main cash crop - coffee, to promote industrial de-capitalisation and break up communications. But even these two major battle zones are but part of a co-ordinated US offensive against anti-imperialist regimes or resistance groups in the whole region. Reagan ended a five-year ban on arms sales to Guatemala in January - the country generally acknowledged to have the worst human rights record in the world. On March 23rd Reagan took TV time to produce his since dis-

credited 'proof' of a 'Soviet-Cuban airfield' on Grenada to justify a further economic blockade and CIA operations against it. Finally, add to all of this the fierce hostility to Cuba, deceitfully portrayed as co-ordinator of a Soviet plot in the region.

Nevertheless it is El Salvador and Nicaragua which remain centre-stage. US imperialist aid to the reactionary government of D'Aubuisson is not new nor are the attacks on Nicaragua, but in the last months there has been a definite escalation. During April some of the 3,000 Honduran troops on the border as well as the 'contras', invaded Nicaragua. Already, more have invaded than were involved in the US inspired Bay of Pigs invasion against Cuba in 1961.

The reason for the increase in aid for El Salvador is the recent success achieved by the guerilla movement, the FMLN, and the appalling state of the El Salvadoran army. Since the July 1981-July 1982 government offensive against the FMLN fizzled out the guerrillas have grown in strength. Particularly, since January 1983 the 5,000 guerrillas have taken and held over 30 towns and at the height of the present offensive even captured the small city of Berlin for a while.

Ranged against them are about 33,000 army and security men. But their morale is rock bottom. They suffered 12% casualties in 1982. Only about 5,000 are combat hardened and the whole army is riddled with incompetence and corruption. Moreover, they have no air power either. Faced with this the 50 odd 'advisors' - one of

whom was shot in combat in April - are spitting in the wind. Hence Reagan is calling for a drastic escalation in arms and eventually in training personnel to stop the guerrilla advances.

Officially, the USA justify their operation against Nicaragua by spinning a yarn about stopping arms supplies to the El Salvadoran guerrillas. Yet of late, trenchant Reaganites like US Ambassador Jeanne Kirkpatrick has made it clear that what they really desire is the overthrow of the Sandinista government itself. They are out to restore total imperialist domination of the area again. To do this they are more than ready to spend millions for a bloody war against the peoples of Central America.

In a speech of 6th March Reagan admitted that, "with Nicaragua already there, (if) El Salvador should fall as a result of this armed violence on the part of the guerrillas, I think Costa Rica, Honduras, Panama, all of these would follow." For Reagan, Mexico is the last domino, on the USA's very borders. This could be an enormous economic blow to US imperialism. In the same speech Reagan warned that



Miners at May Day celebrations in Managua, 1981

Picture: Network

"50% of everything we import comes through the Caribbean and Panama Canal." But Reagan also fears that further victories for the petit-bourgeois nationalist movements so close to the US would put a question mark over its ability to defend its investments and its influence anywhere in the world. It would potentially allow the Kremlin to further extend its diplomatic influence in the region. Kirkpatrick admitted as much and gave a lie to the nonsense about the 'preservation of freedom' in Central America. The national security of US imperialism is paramount. She noted, "...I am concerned about the potential strategic threat to the US that a strong Soviet military presence in the Caribbean and Central America could institute and what it does to our ability to act elsewhere in the world." (Newsweek 14.3.83)

The greater overt military role the US has adopted in recent months has caused some opposition in Congress to Reagan. These people are mainly Democrats wanting to refurbish their party's electoral fortunes. They are cynically manipulating the genuine anxiety of millions of American workers about 'another Vietnam' to this end; they are certainly no friends of the Central American masses.

Despite the widespread anxiety about a major war, Reagan is determined. He had hoped that Argentina would provide the military ground personnel to train the El Salvadoran army and the Nicaraguan 'contras'. But the rift over the Malvinas war made that impossible in the short-term. So Reagan is willing to commit hundreds and even thousands of US 'advisors' to do the job. William Clark - National Security Advisor - said recently "We will do whatever is necessary."

The American and European labour movements must be warned. The 40,000 who have died in El Salvador at the hands of government death squads since 1980 must not be multiplied. Action can and must be taken within and outside Central America to resist Reagan's current offensive. Within Nicaragua the Sandinista government must be forced by the actions of the working class, who launched a big strike wave early this year, to expropriate the important private sector of the economy. So long as the FSLN allow the likes of the Pellas family to own 35% of the important sugar industry there will be a powerful base of counter-revolution inside the country itself. This in turn will aid the activities of the contras and Honduras troops.

Indeed it is to this base that former FSLN leaders turned contras, like Commandante Zero, are appealing. Unless the Sandinistas break with the bourgeoisie then their bourgeois allies all of Zero's ilk, will definitely break with them.

Within El Salvador there are two burning issues that need to be addressed. First, an effective, united military resistance needs to be forged. The separate military commands and missions of the FMLN forces have left themselves and the masses open to extensive and bloody reprisals by the government forces. Secondly, the offer of the leaders to "unconditionally" negotiate with the reactionary government must not be continued. The goal should be military victory over these butchers, not a compromise that leaves their power intact. Demands should be placed from every quarter on the Cubans and Russians to give an unlimited supply of military and medical aid to all the anti-imperialist forces of Central America with no political preconditions. The Stalinist rhetoric of 'socialist internationalism' must be exposed.

The only way to guarantee a lasting victory for the masses against imperialism and its agents is by spreading revolution throughout Central America under the leadership of the working class. The goal of a Socialist Federation of Central America must be raised and fought for now by the workers of the region.

Within the labour movements of the imperialist nations the call must be made for unconditional support for the FMLN and for Nicaragua in its war with the US backed contras and their allies. Support should be organised for any and all refugees of the struggle. In particular, the AFL-CIO in the USA must build a campaign to get the 'advisors' withdrawn and to block all further military aid to El Salvador, Honduras and Guatemala. In Britain, Thatcher's veto of EEC economic aid to Nicaragua must be highlighted and resisted by the labour movement. In the election period ahead, woolly talk of a 'socialist foreign policy' for the Labour Party must be rejected in favour of specific demands for re-establishing political ties with Managua, aid to the Sandinistas and the boycotting of links with the reactionary regimes of Central America. Let every socialist and militant do all they can to let the fires rage in Uncle Sam's backyard and on to the very lawns of the White House itself. ■

ORGANISE THE UNEMPLOYED!

THE 1983 People's March is on the road. The core march from Glasgow is being supplemented by feeder marches from all parts of the country. By the time it reaches London on June 3rd there will be 500 People's Marchers. On June 5th there is to be a mass demonstration, organised by the TUC, in London.

First signs indicate that unless urgent steps are taken to organise rank and file labour movement support for and action around the March, it is not likely to make much of an impact. It will certainly be a quite, passive affair if the organisers have their way.

They initially refused to support it at all. It is unlikely that they will do very much to make it a success while it is on the road.

Likewise the Labour Party. It too originally opposed the march, fearing that it would prove a dangerous focal point for extra-parliamentary activity in a possible election year. In his farewell address to the March as it set off, Foot called on it to "arouse the conscience of the whole nation". Obviously having been forced to support the March, he now hopes to turn it into a passive symbol. He made no mention of the need to build action against unemployment now around the March. Nor can he offer any hope in the foreseeable future for over a million of the unemployed. His plan is to reduce present unemployment figures by two-thirds over five years if Labour get elected, leaving a million on the dole.

Ablly assisting the national Labour and union leaderships are the local and regional officials and the Communist Party. These are the organisers of the

march on the ground. These people are in control of all the town reception committees. They are the marshalls on the march. They appoint the stewards. They are out to make the march a non-political, cross-class, "human" protest. They de-prioritise workers action and politics, in favour of wooing support from bishops, Liberals, SDPers and even Tories. Keith Joseph was invited to the Leeds rally on May Day! Naturally, he declined.

In Sheffield, the Stalinist dominated town committee - carefully watched over by a regional TUC full-timer - has banned political organisations from giving out propaganda on the march. In

CONTINUED ON PAGE 5

FEMINISM'S DOOMED SEARCH FOR PEACE

AT ONE TIME the peace movement was equated with the CND. It is not that simple anymore. That organisation is being upstaged by a loose but very real Women's Peace Movement. Greenham Common and the other camps, the women-only demos and "chains", the Women for Life on Earth Groups and the publication of women's peace handbooks all highlight the existence of this movement.

The peace issue has provided a badly needed focus for divided and disorientated feminists. By 1978 the Women's Liberation Movement was heading towards total collapse. The fragile unity around basic equality demands was being shattered.

Feminism was unable to provide either an analysis of women's oppression or a strategy to fight it that could genuinely unite women in struggle. Feminism was an incoherent body of ideas open to vastly different interpretations, all of which avoided recognising the fundamental divide in society as being social classes rather than gender types.

At the 1978 conference sisterhood was not up to fending off the fragmentation that this incoherence was bound to cause. The conference was disrupted by Radical Feminists who declared their intention to combat the liberal takeover of the WLM. Their statement unequivocally announced, "There are no people, only women and men...We want Women's Liberation not 'People's Liberation', since if men do not lose we gain nothing...Yes we do hate men."

The Socialist Feminist response was shortlived. It could not embrace Marxism, since that would elevate class over sex. It waged a hopeless battle to try and reconcile Marxism with feminism. By 1979 like the WLM proper, it was dead as a national current. Neither movement has held a national conference in the 1980s. In the face of Thatcher's initial onslaught on working women's jobs, living standards and rights, feminism all but went silent.

The pre-dominantly petit-bourgeois/white collar core of activists from the WLM retreated into a combination of "life style" politics and single issue campaigns. The issue of violence against women was particularly important for those who remained active. This formed the link in the chain between the feminist movement and the new women's peace movement.

The issue of rape and assaults on women became the main pre-occupation of women activists in the late 1970s and early 1980s. The 'Reclaim the Night' demos were the high point of this activity. This issue united many feminists once again. As all women were potential 'victims', common ground between the divided sections of the feminist movement was found. This common ground, however, exposed the weakness of those who did not embrace Radical Feminism. They had no answer to the Radical Feminist analysis that as all women are potential victims, the obverse must also be true: all men are potential rapists. While most activists drew the line here and refused to go on to say that all men were the enemy, they had accepted Radical Feminism's first premise in that they accepted that violence against women, indeed violence generally, was an expression of male power and male values.

From here it was an easy leap from 'Reclaiming the Night' from men to saving civilisation from them. Nuclear weapons became the ultimate symbol of male power.

This view was stated in 1980 by a Women Against Nuclear Power group. "Male power and male control are in all directions...Nuclear power is less directly felt, but the sting in its mushroom tail is the deadliest MENace imaginable." (emphasis and capitals in original). The stepping up of the cold war since 1980 has ensured that this view has become widespread amongst feminists. Having despaired at changing the world after their movement shattered, they have now translated their despair into a campaign to 'save' the world, from Cruise, Trident, MX and all of the other weapons that are being stockpiled. In this sense while the Women's Peace Movement is a new form through which feminism can unite around a common cause, its content, its ideas and analysis are not new at all.

Two recently published collections of essays, demonstrate this point. *Over Our Dead Bodies - Women Against the Bomb* (OODB) edited by Dorothy Thompson and published by Virago is a series of articles about nuclear weapons and their effects, and explanations of various theories the contributors have about the best ways of stopping the holocaust. It includes such varied writers as Bel Mooney (Times journalist) Hilary Wainwright (author of 'Beyond the Fragments' and now GLC activist). The other book - *Keeping the Peace* (KTP) edited by Lynne Jones and published by the Women's Press, is a more practical guide, with historical accounts of various peace groups from the Women's Party for Survival (USA) to Babies Against the Bomb. It aims to show other women how best to organise and explain the details of telephone trees, peace camps and taking decisions without voting.

The thread that runs through both works is the analysis that nuclear weapons are forms of male violence. A Nottingham group called Women Oppose the Nuclear Threat (WONT) are amongst the most explicit of the contributors on this question, "We identify the primary source of violence as gender structure in the individual, in families, in societies, and believe that while society remains deeply sexist, no peace movement can win long term substantial victories...We see nuclear

weapons and nuclear power as particularly horrendous results of male domination." (WONT in KTP ch.3)

Other contributors also highlight the connection "The threat of nuclear war is the ultimate oppression, the terrifying expression of the struggle for power of male-dominated institutions." (Jeanette Buirski, OODB Ch.2) Connie Mansueto in Chapter 9 of OODB "Take the Toys from the Boys" - goes so far as to argue that it is the individual competition between the "white educated men" in science and military establishments that has led to the development and escalation of weapons. Rooting it in the individual psychology of men, not even the patriarchal structures as many feminists would argue, she states "it seems that men don't feel at all guilty about their violence. Rather they seem to revel in it." (OODB p118)

These views flow directly from the idea that all violence is the result of male domination and is an exclusively male activity. It gives succour to the Radical Feminist view of all men as the enemy. For the most part the contributors do no go as far as the Radicals. They do draw back from the logic of their own analysis. In its place many of them put forward the ridiculous idea that Reagan (and Thatcher) are like competitive little boys. An ex-



tract by Alison Assiter dignifies this nonsense with verse: 'A few men seem possessed by the devil But many more...have remained as boys, just boys

Heedlessly playing. But the spring of the toys they are winding is death." (OODB Ch 18) Within this framework the struggle against the nuclear threat becomes a struggle for power with men - be they naughty boys (the moderate view) or devils incarnate (the radical view).

This analysis, which is dominant in both collections, is muddled and flawed. Just as the incoherence of feminism led to the break up of the WLM, so the false understanding of violence in the Womens Peace Movement will lead it into fragmentation. It will be rendered powerless against the real enemy - imperialism.

For a start, violence is not specifically male at all. The women who marched on Versailles in 1789, the women of the Paris Commune, the women of Petrograd in March 1917, the women of El Salvador and Nicaragua today, have all used violence. They have used it against their oppressors and exploiters, because that was, and is, the only way of defeating oppression and exploitation. Would the theorists of the Womens Peace Movement have the women cadres of the Sandinistas lie down limply in front of the invading contras? The nature of violence is dependent on the purpose and goals of its perpetrators. Yes male violence against women is repugnant, No the struggle to defeat reaction, arms in hand, is not a male evil.

The idea that nuclear weapons and Cruise specifically, are symbols of male violence is even more laughable. In her essay Connie Mansueto is forced to concede that competition was involved in the US and Britain's attempts to develop nuclear bombs. This competition, however, arose because both countries were ruled by men. Competition, as well as violence, becomes an inherent male (twisted) value. But competition was between a declining British Empire desperately trying to maintain its economic interests and a buoyant US imperialism in the process of establishing its own economic and military supremacy. Crudely it was doing this for money. The profit motive, arising from the very nature of capitalism itself, forced it to compete with, and subordinate, rival imperialisms. Without its military prowess US imperialism's investments would be at risk.

Countries are not plunged into war to save the male pride and virile reputations of politicians. Such values are used as a propaganda adjunct in war - look at the Malvinas war - but they have never caused war. Today it is the crisis ridden nature of US imperialism that is making it ever more desperate. Hence its bid for nuclear superiority over the USSR. And hence its drive to defeat all threats to its interests from anti-imperialist fighters. At root its motives are financial not psychological.

Looked at from this aspect, Thatcher and Reagan are not mad individuals, but the leading representatives of the interests of a class which needs to use violence to suppress internal resistance and to compete for new areas of exploitation abroad. In Reagan's recent attempts to increase military aid to El Salvador by \$110 million he argued, "We have always taken for granted friendly, independent neighbours". By this he meant those who will accept the pillage of their economies by US corporations, and will accept US military aid to murder and repress any internal opposition.

By rejecting this analysis the feminist pacifists ponder to end and encourage reactionary views of women. Once the WLM did at least campaign vigorously for social equality with men. This involved a fight to break the domestic isolation that enslaved millions of women. It involved campaigns to win equal pay, the right to work and free abortion on demand. All of these issues are now being forced into the background, along with all the other immediate miseries that capitalism's crisis brings. Instead feminists are now actually praising aspects of the women's oppression that they once fought in order to save 'life on earth'.

The family's praises are sung. The ideas of women as the 'caring' sex, as child bearers and rearers, as 'naturally pacifist', are cited not as examples of oppression, but as purely positive concepts. Alison Assiter puts it well when she urges: "Women must continue, as they have done in the past, to draw on their creativity and their pacifism, qualities they already possess". (OODB Ch.18) A leading Greenham Common camper, Helen John, is even more forthright. "I think a lot of women will automatically always wish to care for children," (our emphasis).

This reactionary return to expressing the values of the bourgeois family was graphically demonstrated last December when 12,000 women "embraced the base" at Greenham and adorned the fence with their symbols - childrens toys, nappies and photographs.

While many of the more radical elements may dissent from this, ironically it is their analysis of violence that encourages this purely emotional and even conservative response.

The feminist analysis of nuclear weapons and violence is most damaging in its conclusions concerning the working class. Overwhelmingly petit-bourgeois in its composition and ideas the Womens Peace Movement has contempt for the working class. Unhindered by many of the everyday concerns that plague working class women and men these comfortable, well educated doctors, teachers and so on, have 'chosen' to devote themselves to opposing the bomb. Filled with self-righteousness (and always with the option of returning to their former professions) they spit venom at those who have to earn their livelihood within the arms industry. A poem by a Greenham Camper for construction workers ran,

'I see lorries filled not with gravel but the corpses of my friends,.... wages you earn from the graves you dig.' (KTP Ch.8)

This anti-working class sentiment is of a piece with the tactics that the Womens Peace Movement advance to defeat the nuclear menace. They believe that their symbolic protests and non-violent direct action is a match for the calculated and ruthless determination of world imperialism. Their tactics are 'imaginative', chaotic, they leave women who participate 'feeling stronger'. All of this may be true - but none of it will stop Cruise!

Embracing the base, singing in circles, lying in roads and dressing up as daisies to form human chains, will do nothing to prevent the arms build up. Mind you a Greenham Common activist, Lynne Jones, does not seem to mind this. One of the main aims of the protests, she thought, was to change the attitudes of the police. She wrote: "What mattered was the effect that symbol had on ourselves and the people we were confronting. A policeman trying to pull two arms apart in a firmly linked human chain has to directly confront his own feelings about human contact, handling women not as sexual objects, but as powerful beings." (KTP Ch.8)

The result of this approach is that a few individual petit-bourgeois women are able to participate, give up their jobs and homes to live in a peace

camp. They feel much better about life and there it ends. Even the 'active' resistance they organise such as picketing the bases is aimed at individual self-sacrifice, lying down passively while the police wade in and arrest the protesters. For most working class women these pointless shows of martyrdom are neither an option nor a desire.

Rejecting the involvement of men in stopping Cruise the peace camp women are turning their backs on the organisations of workers who alone have the interest and the social power to wage an effective fight against Cruise.

The hostility of many male, and female, workers to the Greenham women may be partly due to their sexism, but it also reflects the useless substitutionism exemplified by the Greenham women.

They explicitly reject vigorous demonstrations, all-out strikes and other labour movement methods of struggle as "macho". They prefer to spin webs of wool around the gates of Greenham. Even their call for a one-day women's strike on May 24th is a divisive and arrogant petit-bourgeois exhortation. They have rejected men and women striking together, thereby increasing sexist divisions amongst workers; they have opposed demonstrations in major cities, arguing instead for women to "do their own thing" by setting up local one-day peace camps and other ineffectual pass-times.

We have stressed that the feminist analysis of violence cannot answer the problems posed by today's war drive. We believe that this will shatter the unity of this peace movement. The signs are already there. In "Over Our Dead Bodies", a whole section is devoted to "Alternative Defence". This is not surprising since all of the contributors accept that there is a threat of some sort. Some feminists draw the conclusion that this threat needs to be answered, others do not. But what sort of united movement is it that disagrees over such cardinal issues?

For example, in "Over Our Dead Bodies", Lisa Foley argues the need "to develop a less escalatory yet more effective defence strategy which would not so appallingly harm the people, the way of life and the territory it was seeking to protect". (Emphasis added). She argues that "we" (Britain) need to be defended against invaders, most likely Russian, and that a widespread, better organised, conventional army would serve that purpose more effectively: "Long-range bombers capable of striking at the heart of Russia would be ruled out, while relatively cheap and effective missiles like Exocet...would be recommended because they can destroy armaments such as battleships and tanks that are far bigger and costlier" (OODB p 124). Perhaps her chapter of the books should be entitled "Over Their Dead Bodies - Women Against the Russians". At the first test of war, if not before, this "new" peace movement will break into a thousand fragments - again.

The two books we have analysed do deal with other themes. We have concentrated on their feminist analysis because this underpins the activities of the movement that spawned these books. Women who follow the lead given in these texts will be paraded from one base to the next in a round of ineffectual publicity stunts which neither threaten the government, nor win support from the labour movement.

The only way that the government will be deprived of their nuclear arsenal and their conventional one, is by force. The capitalist state has never willingly given up its arms and will not do so at the threat of webs woven around air bases. Working class industrial action, in a direct challenge to those who control the state, will be necessary. The workers will need arms if they are to succeed, Pacifism for them is to assure certain defeat.

Women do have a central part to play in this struggle. They have a central role to play in a class based anti-war movement. Their social situation as enforced domestic carers has made them more susceptible to the call for peace. For women in this situation, wars mean an increased burden in the home, absence of their loved-ones, and mourning the loss of husbands and sons. However, the concern that women feel for peace is not at all the result of inherent traits of caring and passivity. It simply reflects their social position as a group. This "caring" can and must be turned into an active factor. Women must be mobilised against the imperialist robber states who send thousands to their deaths in war.

Women are best drawn into the struggle against Cruise and Trident by activity in their workplaces and unions, building anti-war support, committed to strike action to prevent the siting of the missiles. May 24th could have been the first political strike against nuclear weapons if it had not been led by the separatists of Greenham.

Working women must be given another direction than that of passive resistance. Their interest in peace must be used to build active, working class action to forcibly disarm the imperialists, within which women can play a central role in all aspects of the struggle, including the inevitable violence that the bosses' resistance will oblige us to use. ■

by Helen Ward

No new hope for workers

WHATEVER DATE THAT Thatcher decides on, the opening salvoes of the election campaign have been fired. "Labour's Plan: the new hope for Britain" is Labour's first official shot.

It represents the midway stage of the party's process of policy making. The 280 odd pages of Labour's Programme 1982 have been reduced to 31 pages. The final stage will be the Manifesto - that constitutional fiction on which parties are supposed to have been elected. In practice this document is much argued over in the parties' inner cabals, little read by the electorate and rarely acted upon by a Labour government.

The Labour left's response to the 'New Hope' has been unexpectedly favourable. The carping Labour Herald ("Policies fudged!") was the most critical. Socialist Organiser was more cautious ("Watch these Policies"). While London Labour Briefing positively threw its hat in the air ("With these Policies We can Win!")

Millions of workers - four million or more of whom are suffering the humiliation and misery of unemployment will look to see what answer and what hope they can expect from the Labour Party. The answer to that question, contained in this document is *None*.

Given the massive task involved in restoring the real wage levels, the full employment and the quality of social service that existed in the 1960s this programme is a joke and it's a very stale joke at that.

The stalest element is the 1970s standard version of the "socialist aim" of the party: "To bring about a fundamental and irreversible shift in the balance of power and wealth in favour of working people and their families" (page 9) This promise is far inferior in precision to Sidney Webb's "common ownership of the means of production, distribution and exchange," which itself got no further than the Labour Party membership card. It is attaining the venerable status of Clause IV.

Ironically it is included in the section entitled 'Working Together' which deals with the National Economic Assessment. The ordinary person might have assumed that to "shift wealth and power" involved shifting it from the wealthy and powerful to the propertyless. But no! It will be done in partnership with the rich and powerful!

Britain's bosses and bankers know a thing or two about "partnerships". They know that you don't fundamentally shift, or "redistribute income and wealth" through partnership but by struggle. Thatcher has just done this over a period of 4 years. Yet Labour's programme dare not commit it to a struggle *against* the wealthy and powerful. That would be 'divisive' of Britain; to do so would be imitative of nasty 'divisive' Tories.

How then is this wonderful plan to work? At the heart of it lies a reflationary programme involving "a major increase in public investment....a huge programme of construction....a crash programme of employment and training." This increase in public spending is to be initially financed by IMF loans. But as the last Labour Government found, loans bear interest and have to be repaid. The IMF visit to the last Labour Government resulted in a wage freeze, cuts and a million and a half unemployed. This time round Labour says there will be a "breathing space" granted by the loans. And as a result of priming the pumps of investment there will be "a large and substantial increase in the nation's output and income" - productivity will increase and "we" will reconquer "our" foreign markets. "Britain" will be prosperous again.

On the basis of this, Labour promise "to reduce unemployment to below a million within five years of taking office." Yet even this promise is carefully conditioned upon "five years of economic growth."

How do they propose to achieve this growth? Through the "National economic assessment." This will "cover the allocation of resources, and the distribution of income between profits, earnings from employment, rents, social benefits and other incomes."

What will all this mean in practice? Tony Benn has said that "The National economic assessment can be read any way you like..." Indeed it can. Aided by the likes of Tony Benn the Labour voter may well read it to mean "a fundamental and irreversible shift in wealth and power".

But how does Eric Varley, the man most likely to implement it, "read" the NEA? Here a recently published series of Shadow Cabinet essays entitled 'Renewal' (sic) comes in handy. Here the Shadow Minister for Employment comes quite clean, "How do you earn and create the national wealth to pay for the nation's social wage? ...the best way to reduce unit cost is to increase demand and particularly increase productivity by increasing output per head. Unfortunately, this can only be advanced on the shop floor of the individual firm" (pages 71-73). According to Varley this problem can be resolved by new investment in machinery and by "finding ways of preventing labour costs from rising so much faster than most of the other countries that compete with us." (p 73). Varley ruefully acknowledges that "the hard left are ready to dub (this)...

as unadulterated income restraint at best and wage cuts at worst" (p 74)

History is certainly on the side of the 'hard left'. The 'Incomes policies', 'national plans', 'social contracts' that Labour launched throughout the 60s and 70s all turned out for the worst. And Labour's own predictions speak for "the worst" interpretation. Peter Shore's economic perspective for reducing unemployment below 1 million within five years is based on a Treasury computer model involving a projected inflation of 4-5% and a wage rise rate of 1-2%. Such year on year rates over five years could result up to a 20% reduction in real wages! You don't have to be that hard hearted to see that the NEA is yet another way of making working people pay for the solution to the capitalist crisis. Indeed you would have to be very soft to believe that this would bring a fundamental and irreversible shift to the benefit of working people. It would seem then that despite repeated TUC and Labour Conference decisions condemning incomes policy and wage restraint the union leaders and the shadow cabinet have, Houdini-like, escaped from the chains. Perhaps, after all, they were only paper chains!

The Labour Left campaigned in 1980-81 around slogans like "Never Again", referring to the Callaghan/Healey policies. They are now consoling themselves that the NEA could mean anything. Indeed they try eagerly to turn everyone's attention away from the NEA and towards the Labour Left's traditional goals of withdrawal from the EEC and unilateral nuclear disarmament. Even though the right wing may have won out on economic policy is it not the case that the left has managed to turn the tables on the great defeats they suffered in the early 1960s and 1970s? Can't the left claim that Gaitskell and Wilson have got at last their comeuppance?

Certainly, the Campaign document is plain in its refusal to site Cruise missiles, and promises to cancel the exorbitantly expensive Trident.

However dear these policies may be to the Thatcher-Reagan Cold Warriors, they do not mark the dividing line between working class and ruling class policies. They do not go anywhere near confronting the real threat of World War III or nuclear annihilation. These policies represent the "Liberal" wing of the ruling class. The British Liberals and the American liberal Democrats agree with them. They fall far short of Labour's Conference policy for "an unequivocal, unambiguous commitment to unilateral nuclear disarmament".

The Campaign document promises that Labour will try to achieve a "non-nuclear defence policy" in the course of the next parliament. But by its commitment to NATO (a military alliance with the world's major nuclear super-powers), it makes a mockery of "nuclear disarmament" as the CND activist understands it.

In the House of Commons, Labour has repeatedly tried to present itself as the "Big Navy" and "Conventional Weapons" party. The document talks about "maintaining adequate conventional forces at present threatened by the extravagant expenditure on Trident" (p29). Its showing over the Falklands war, when it did not dare obstruct one of Thatcher's plans by so much as a single contrary vote, proved the hollowness of the document's claim that the pursuit of peace is central to its policy.

The commitment to withdraw from the EEC is far more firmly phrased but it is a reactionary nationalist policy. Its pretext is that "the rules of the Treaty of Rome are bound to conflict with our strategy for economic growth" (p 27). And what about the rules of the IMF? And what about the provisions of all the myriad treaties and agreements that govern international trade? Are they adapted to facilitating "socialist policies"?

Any future Labour government would doubtless discover either that the Common Market did not



Peter Shore pointing the way out of the EEC

intervene and did not need to interfere with its timid economic policies, or that cosmetic changes would enable Britain to stay after all, or that the commitment "to withdraw in an amicable and orderly way so that we do not prejudice employment" (p27) was a contradiction in terms and therefore necessitated a longer term perspective.

In any case, the entire project is a reactionary nationalist utopia unworthy of working class support.

All talk of planning is a farce without serious anti-capitalist measures such as the uncompensated nationalisations of all the major industries and banks. The creation of a democratically planned economy would require a state monopoly of foreign trade. It could not be developed within the existing economic ties and links. But as long as Britain's economy remains a capitalist one, then the economic nationalist measures beloved of the Labour (and CP) Left constitute no alternative whatsoever to the policies common to the Labour Right, the Alliance, and the Tories.

They would achieve nothing beyond provoking a trade war, economic reprisals and boycotts. At best this would transfer unemployment within Britain from one set of workers (those put out of a job by foreign competition) to another (those put out of a job by foreign reprisals). In fact it would accelerate a collapse of the world market. It would serve to fuel virulent chauvinism as the workers of each nation tried to export unemployment to one another. We would see Labour government sponsored versions of the Japanese-car-smashing sessions which were recently sponsored by the US trade unions.

It is no accident that the import controls/ anti-EEC project is shared with the far right of the Tory Party and the National Front ("British Jobs for British Workers"). It is a policy which belongs to them. For Labour it is a cynical mockery of an anti-capitalist policy.

The Campaign document pledges to abolish the House of Lords and, as a first step, to remove its legislative functions. This is presented as part of a campaign to "enhance democratic rights and ensure greater openness and accountability in the institutions of government" (p24). Certainly, the existence of this bizarre feudal relic is a mockery of five periods of Labour government. But, of course, there is no mention of the enormous and real powers that the Monarch possesses, let alone any plan to destroy that power. The British monarchy possesses the power to dismiss governments, command the loyalty of the Armed Forces, and to veto legislation. Whilst these powers have not been used in Britain for over a hundred years, does anyone seriously think that a real attempt to "shift wealth and power" irreversibly, let alone to achieve the "common ownership of the means of production, distribution and exchange" would receive the Royal Assent of Elizabeth, Phillip and their brood? More importantly, anybody who seriously imagines that Falklands Commander-in-Chief Jeremy Moore, Lord Denning or James Anderton and the entire army, police and judiciary would idly sit back and accept such a thing, must be living in a world far removed from unemployment marches and picket lines. They must be living not in the world of serious struggles against the bosses and their system, but in the parliamentary Punch and Judy show.

Tony Benn, the hero of the Labour Left for the past four years, has a short way with all these criticisms: "At this moment in the electoral cycle when you have an absolute duty to beat Thatcher, if you spend all your time niggling away at the difficulties, then you are actually assisting her project of victory" (Socialist Action 22/4/83).

In his time-honoured fashion, Benn goes on to condemn anyone who dares throw any doubt on the efficacy of the reformist programme or Labour's willingness to carry it out, as defeatists, and assistants to Thatcher. This is the language of a typical "left" charlatan. Revolutionaries in the Labour Party and those outside it who support a Labour victory in the election must hurl it back in his face.

When Benn says that "there are people in the Labour Party who were in the 1974-79 Labour gov-

ernment who don't agree with the policy. I agree. But they are 10% of the Party. And the changes that 90% of the Party and the TUC agree with will go through" (Socialist Action 22/4/83), our reply must be only 10% indeed! But what a 10%. The overwhelming majority of the Labour Cabinet, two-thirds or more of the PLP, a clear majority of the party NEC and of the General Council of the TUC. And the leader of the 90% says "don't nigger don't rock the boat, get Labour elected, and then we'll see. With Left leaders like this, no wonder that Healey and Duffy and Golding have nothing to worry about. Benn - the tiger of the left - has proved that come election time and come a Labour government, he is, and will be, the tame tabby he was in 1974-79.

The reasons for voting Labour and the way to defeat the Tories are radically different from those advanced by the Bennites or the "hard lefts" of the Socialist Organiser, Socialist Action or the various Briefings. As a programme for fighting unemployment, reversing the cuts, rooting out the threat of imperialist war and defending women and blacks, Labour's Campaign document is worse than useless. It is now painfully clear that the Bennite movement has not de-stabilised the Labour Party as an instrument of pro-boss policies or transformed it into an adequate tool for working class or "socialist policies". The rank and file of the unions and the active members of the Party should not be voting for Labour based on any illusions in the programme. Labour will present or in the leaders who may take office to carry them out. Even less should they - as Benn and Co. request - sacrifice their criticism, their vigilance and their democratic rights to a Labour victory. A defeat for Thatcher would be a blow to the ruling class - as it was to Heath in 1974. But that blow was inflicted first and foremost by the direct action of the miners. Then an increasing series of attacks were inflicted upon the working class by the Labour government and the TUC. This pro-boss record of repeated Labour governments is made possible by the fact that the great majority of the working class still gives these leaders its confidence. A militant minority sees these repeated acts of treachery, but cannot defeat the traitors. This is largely because they repeatedly put their trust in the likes of Benn to change it all next time. Without the clarity that revolutionary politics and a revolutionary programme and tactics can bring, the militant minority will never oust the likes of Healey, Foot and Shore.

Right now we are in favour of fighting to put Labour into office. We do not do so because we have any confidence in its programme, but in order to put it to the test of the worst economic crisis since the Thirties. In order to put Labour to the test we must mobilise the Labour movement now to fight unemployment, the cuts, imperialist war in order to defeat Thatcher. We must fight to win the unions and the Labour Party to real anti-capitalist and anti-imperialist demands.

When we urge a vote for Labour we do so without spreading any illusions in Labour's programme or its leaders. When we organise to fight the Tories we do so on our own demands and in opposition to the economic policies of Varley and Shore.

There are still a majority of active trade unionist and members of the Labour Party who believe that an accumulation of reforms through parliament can solve the crisis and open the road to socialism. To them we say that only a militant fighting organisation will achieve either the reforms you want or, as we believe, show you that capitalist power can only be overthrown not "redistributed" or "shifted"

- *Defend and demand the implementation of every pro-working class measure Labour is committed to.
- *Defend Labour Party democracy against the witch-hunt.
- *No electoral holding back in the struggles against Thatcher.
- *Vote Labour - with no illusions - and carry on the fight.■



International IRELAND: A MILITANT REPLY TO COALITION AUSTERITY

APRIL 13TH SAW over 100,000 workers take to the streets of Dublin in a half-day general strike against growing taxation and social welfare cuts in unemployment benefits. In 20 other towns throughout the South, another 50,000 workers brought industry to a halt on the same day.

The immediate spark was the savage Feb. 10th budget of the Fine Gael/Labour Coalition government. It introduced new deductions from wages on 1st April - no compensation in tax bands for inflation, a second 1% levy on gross pay supposedly for a jobs fund and extended social welfare pay deductions. It raised the principal VAT rate to 25%. It cut pay related unemployment benefit from 40% to 25% of earnings ceiling. In addition the Budget had already been preceded by a series of cuts in education and health spending and a tighter embargo on public sector recruitment.

The decisive character of this austerity package testifies to the re-stabilisation of bourgeois government after a period of serious political instability.

Until the recent election victory of the Fine Gael and Labour Coalition partners in the November 24th general elections no government has had an overall majority in the Dail. The present government is the third since June 1981. While the fundamental strategy of all three governments has been identical, the political logistics of holding onto governmental power has partially disrupted the implementation of the kind of offensive that imperialist capital in Ireland needs.

While the H-block Hunger Strike campaign contributed to the initial crisis of government for the Southern Tories, the key issue in all three elections has been the economic crisis, the crisis of state finances and the burden of public sector borrowing. The current budget deficit rose from 8½% (£988m.) of GNP in 1982 to 16½% (£1,945m.) of the estimated GNP for the current year. The opening government borrowing requirement for 1983 amounted to 18% of GNP.

Throughout this period the continued profound crisis of imperialist capitalism forced up the level of unemployment in the South to 190,000. This is more than twice the level in January 1980, and represents a rate of 17%.

Significant sectional concessions were made by minority governments as the price of maintaining the parliamentary support of "left" deputies from the "Workers Party" and independent "socialists" Jim Kemmy and Tony Gregory. Workers made redundant at the Talbot factory forced the Haughey government to concede to their demands for work through the public sector while workers at Clondalkin Paper Mills forced both Haughey and Fitzgerald to buy and nationalise the plant. Haughey's Fianna Fail was able to form a government in February 1982 only on the basis of conceding a modest inner-city spending package to the Dublin deputy, Gregory.

Workers made no major gains on the wages front despite these concessions. In fact the trade union bureaucracy, demonstrating its "responsibility" to the bourgeoisie, allowed the established form of centralised wage bargaining to disintegrate. This was replaced by the setting of government "norms" in the public sector which implicitly served as the upper limit for the private sector as well. While the official leadership have been crowing about sections of workers who have settled for "increases" above such norms, they have also been careful to avoid any general struggle to raise wages. In fact they were only too willing to include an explicit clause in the Paper Mills salvage deal saying that this was in no sense a precedent for other workers.

Now that the opportunity for "left" parliamentary wheeler-dealing has passed, the new Fine Gael/Labour coalition has wasted no time in showing its cards. Thrown back on their own resources, sections of workers have organised themselves for militant struggle against redundancies and against the burdensome tax bill. Even the new relatively stable government had to make a partial backdown in March when workers from the Ranks flour mill were goaled for occupying the Dublin factory. The occupation continues since the release of the workers and further occupations have followed. The ICTU leadership felt impelled to sponsor a national stoppage and demonstration on the tax issue in order to avert the development of militant rank and file tactics. It was doubly urgent that they should make a show of force as the next round of pay bargaining is now overdue and key sections of workers in the public sector have made it clear that they intend to overcome the tax clawback with bigger wage claims.

The spectre of general confrontation over wages taxes and jobs has posed the question of the crisis of working class leadership in the sharpest way for many workers themselves. Opportunities to address this key issue were squandered by the "Left" Dail deputies in their fruitless parliamentary calculations. Now the issue is being posed in struggle.

New sections of workers are daily entering into struggle on wages, against closures and for tax equity. Stewards in Dublin and Waterford have called for weekly one-day stoppages leading to a General Strike. But there have been no attempts to mobilise any sections of the class to take advantage of the exceptional parliamentary stalemate which has lasted for over three months because of attempts to tighten constitutional prohibitions on abortion.

The extreme Catholic clericalist character of Fianna Fail's Anti-Abortion Constitutional Amendment was an intolerable challenge to Fine Gael's attempts at rapprochement with Unionism. Fine Gael, no less prostrate before the anti-abortion lobby in essence, responded to Protestant pressures and tried to change the Bill with a vague and evasive formula.

On April 27th the stalemate was resolved in favour of Fianna Fail. In the vote Fine Gael was deserted by 8 of its Catholic right wing and 5 Labour deputies supported Fianna Fail. This opens a national referendum campaign which is virtually certain



Thousands march in Dublin

to amend the constitution to make the life of the mother equal to the right to life of the foetus. This will entail enormous legal and social threats to women travelling for abortions in Britain, using contraceptives designated as abortifacients or having operations that put the foetus at risk. It represents a severe blow to women's rights in Ireland and internationally. Pilate-like, Fitzgerald has issued a token call for a popular vote against it on the grounds of its offensiveness to other Christian churches. Nevertheless the Referendum will add to the instability of the government, especially by further eroding Labour's base - the weakest link in the present Coalition.

At the Dublin tax demonstration trade union "left", Matt Merrigan was loudly cheered by a crowd of 50,000 when he called for disaffiliation from the Labour Party. The cheers were even more tumultuous when he called for the building of a new mass party of the trade unions. Although Merrigan is holding a conference of his own union, the ATGWU, on disaffiliation from Labour, it is not clear that he will see through his project for a "new party". At any rate he has recently argued that such a party would have to fight around a programme based on the "Alternative Economic Strategy", a left reformist utopia. The colour of his politics was revealed in the 1977 split from Labour - the Socialist Labour Party - which was formally pronounced defunct last year. The "Workers Party" are unlikely to get themselves embroiled in the risky business of an open democratic debate about the kind of party to be built. They have been considerably quieter on the tax issue this year than they were in 1979 when the first major demonstrations erupted, and prefer to wait, vulture-like, for the pickings from Labour's wormy corpse.

Talk of a party is also emerging on the "far left" in various forms, but mainly by implication and always without any commitment to principled debate on matters of programme, strategy and tactics. People's Democracy calls for the building of an "Anti-imperialist Alternative" as a governmental alternative to be open to forces outside Labour and the Workers Party. Meanwhile Grafton magazine, edited by former Socialist Workers Movement leaders, is poring carefully over the SLP experience of the late 1970s, and floating the idea of a half-way house party without discussing the key tasks to which a new party would immediately have to address itself.

Without in any way ignoring the strivings of workers for a new party and remaining ever willing to relate to this question as it is posed in practice, the IWG has put to the forefront the key programmatic basis for a revolutionary workers' party based on the marxist tradition of Lenin and Trotsky. The present period is such that only a concrete action programme, rooted in this revolutionary tradition, can address the tasks and opportunities facing Irish workers. Beginning with every key front of struggle, on economic and political fronts, answering the class offensive of the bosses with the united class action of workers, revolutionaries must fight to prepare a conscious vanguard of revolutionary workers to lead all workers and oppressed against the deepening offensive of decaying capitalism, North and South. For too long Irish workers have been offered only a second class ticket. If that is all that is on offer to workers who disaffiliate from Labour, then the present resistance will go down to defeat. ■

by a member of the Irish Workers Group

POLAND: STALINISTS AND CHURCH ATTACK WORKERS' PROTESTS

ON MAY 1st, thousands of Polish workers celebrated May Day in defiance of the Jaruzelski regime. They did so despite attempts by Glomp and the Catholic hierarchy to prevent confrontation with the Stalinist authorities.

The response of the Polish working class to the Solidarnosc underground's appeal for demonstrations shows that the martial law regime has failed in its attempts to silence workers' resistance. Still less than two million are formally enrolled in the regime's phoney stooze unions. Thousands left the official Gdansk May Day demonstrations to join the Solidarnosc demonstration. Only 20,000 joined the official celebration in Warsaw.

Up to 40,000 marched in Gdansk despite water cannon and tear gas. Over 30,000 routed riot police in the proletarian steel town of Nova Huta. In Warsaw demonstrators clashed with police and the Zomo militia, chanting "May Day is our day". The Polish authorities have admitted that major demonstrations took place in at least 20 cities.

As usual, the Stalinists, who have politically expropriated the workers of Poland and the other degenerate workers' states, attempted to appropriate May Day as their day. Dragooned demonstrators

paraded the streets beneath pictures of Jaruzelski and "patriotic" banners and emblems. In Moscow, Andropov presided over the ritual orchestrated May Day parades. Jaruzelski used the podium of the Warsaw May Day rally to declare: "If in the coming days and months there are no disturbances and peace is consolidated, there will be a real possibility of lifting martial law and adopting follow up actions and moves". Meanwhile his police were wading in to crack the skulls of thousands of workers!

While the resistance of the Polish workers has not been quelled, the workers' movement itself has suffered a series of setbacks under martial law. And there is no shortage of false friends counselling the working class to retreat.

Throughout the last months, the Catholic church has been lending all of its weight to damping down protest. It has stitched up a deal with the Stalinists which will allow the Pope to continue his reactionary mission to Poland this year. He will be allowed to lend his particular influence to the campaign for order and tranquility as long as the church steps in to head off confrontation between the working class and the regime. Lech Walesa, historically the Solidarnosc leader most directly tied to Glomp, deliberately absented himself from the Gdansk May Day demonstrations so as to avoid a conflict that would have enraged the entire Polish working class. Doubtless he did so on Glomp's counsel.

The Catholic hierarchy continue to want to use the resistance of the working class as a means of increasing their pressure to wring reactionary legislation on education, on rural property rights and on family life from the Stalinists. And the parasitic bureaucracy of martial law Poland infinitely prefers order with the church to the disorder of an independent and organised working class.

The Solidarnosc underground leadership has remained intact. But they have been deeply divided on tactical questions since the failure of last year's general strike call. They protest the passivity of the church, but are not prepared or able to organise independently of the will of its Cardinals and their representatives in Solidarnosc's councils. The coming visit of the Pope will further serve as a vehicle to isolate the militants in the name of the Vatican and Jaruzelski.

As long as the leaders play with token acts of defiance, so the regime will feel more confident to carry through its show trials against the KOR and Edmund Baluka, and gradually dismantle martial law hand-in-hand with the church.

The May Day demonstrations underline once again that the only way to prevent the Stalinists finally resolving Poland's continuing crisis to their own advantage is to build a leadership that will attempt to mobilise the working class to seize political power, and has as its central aim: FOR POLITICAL REVOLUTION IN POLAND!

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THE WAR LABOUR PREFERS TO FORGET

CELEBRATING HER VICTORY over Argentina on July 3rd last year, Thatcher crowed that the Falklands war had disproved those who believed that "Britain was no longer the nation that built an Empire and ruled a quarter of the world".

Progressively shorn of its colonial empire since the Second World War and reduced to a subaltern status and role by the United States, the war in the South Atlantic provided British imperialism with a chance to relive old glories and to represent all imperialisms in a conflict which had global repercussions. As The Economist stated at the outset, any other response would have served to "encourage bigger losses in future than the Falklands today... The relationships of the US to Alaska... West Germany to West Berlin are not seriously challenged because there is no doubting their protectors' willingness to go to war over these territories." (10/4/82).

If Thatcher had not sent the Task Force it would have encouraged more semi-colonial nations to take advantage of imperialism's chronic crises. An Argentine victory would have emboldened others. At stake immediately was Britain's £84 billion worth of capital outside its shores, all of it that more vulnerable in the wake of defeat. For these reasons some 1,800 Argentinians were killed or wounded - one casualty for each Kelper.

These 200 small islands 8,000 miles away in the South Atlantic had always retained a military significance. They are well-placed to govern traffic in the Cape Horn region, doubly important in case of conflict over the Panama Canal. They also hold out the vague promise of mineral wealth in the next century. Nevertheless it was for primarily political reasons that Thatcher went to war over "this minor piece of strategic real estate" as The Economist contemptuously called it.

It is now clearer that there was a degree of hesitancy and scepticism among sections of the British ruling class over the venture. There were faint-hearts to be found amongst Thatcher's banking backers. They glumly noted the disparity "between the minute economic weight of the islands and the substantial British investments and commercial prospects put at risk by the dispute." (Journal of the Institute of Bankers, June 82).

Specifically the war over the Malvinas "posed two quite distinct threats to the London banking community. First, is the effect of freezing Argentine assets in the UK on London's position as an international finance centre. Second, is the risk of Argentina defaulting on its 32 billion dollars of loans, about a fifth of which has been extended from London..."

During April and May knees wobbled in the City as the pound fell. Yet it all held together and the City was to show its immense gratitude to Thatcher for exercising leadership on their behalf and despite their waverings. On October 16th 1982 they feted her with a big parade and banquet in the City as they celebrated their joint victory.

Right and Left in Parliament united in telling the British people that the aim of the war was to defend freedom and the right of self-determination and it was presented as a struggle against fascism. It mattered not that until the eve of the war Britain lauded Argentina's generals, supplied her with weapons and condoned the junta's war against its own people. It mattered even less that the Tories had resisted giving the "brave Kelpers" British citizenship under the Nationality Act.

All references to these unpleasant facts were drowned underneath the drumbeats of war. Britain had, in fact, long recognised the unviability of maintaining the Falkland Islands. Ever since Lord Shackleton's 1977 report both Labour and Tory governments had tried to reach a deal with Argentina. The

last proposal was for a "leaseback arrangement", Hong-Kong style, which would have given Argentina the freehold and the Kelpers a leasehold. This eventually foundered at the hands of a well-placed lobby organised by the islands' owners - the Falklands Islands Company.

Thatcher used one refrain incessantly throughout the war "The islanders' wishes are paramount". This was just one lie among many. It was not their wishes that the Tories heeded but a well-oiled cross-party machine that fought for the interests of the company that owned 43% of the land.

Shackleton's report showed that the islanders themselves "lived in deplorable conditions". They had little social contact or cultural life at all, let alone a distinctive one. In their isolation and deprivation they were, and remain, particularly easy to mobilise around "loyalist" sympathies. They consider themselves British and nothing else. However the British government hardly considers them at all.

Once the war was won the Tories quickly reverted to type and threw aside the rhetoric about "self-determination". They do not intend to develop the islands' economic infrastructure or to change the conditions of the islanders. The policy for the next three years will be "Fortress Falklands", a £1,800 million extravaganza designed to turn the islands into a military stronghold for NATO in the South Atlantic. Even the Economist was recently forced to admit that this policy was "making miserable the life of the islanders."

Whatever the wishes of the islanders may be, most of the ruling class commentators insist that the economic cost of maintaining sovereignty cannot be accepted for long. A deal with Argentina will have to be struck or Argentina will be forced to accept a multinational solution - a sort of South Atlantic Treaty Organisation - overseen by NATO in which Argentina is given a leading regional role.

There is no denying that the impact of the war itself on the domestic political scene was enormous. Ever since the war Thatcher has been riding high in the opinion polls. But this is not because the war triggered any overwhelming wave of patriotic fervour. There were no great pro-war demonstrations. The handful of anti-war demonstrations were not violently attacked. Particularly at the start of the campaign, millions were uncertain as to the value of going to war over 4,700 sq. miles of rock, 8,000 miles away.

For this reason the patriotism had to be kept on the boil. In this Thatcher was ably assisted by the press. The Ministry of Defence was deeply suspicious of their value on the Task Force, but Thatcher knew well that as long as they were suitably censored, they would be loyal lap-dogs. The editor of the Daily Star pleaded with Thatcher: "Please help us be there when Britain's pride is restored by the armed might which you promised the nation." But it was the Sun, naturally, that plumbed the depths. Before the war it had cornered the market on hack-journalism, pandering to the basest and meanest of human emotions. During the war it surpassed itself with its "Gotcha" headline to greet the sinking of the General Belgrano, its "Stick it up Your Junta!" T-shirts and its orchestrated

witch-hunt of "traitors" in the media and Labour Party who dared question anything but "cold steel for Johnny Gaucho."

Yet despite the Sun's blood-lust its circulation fell during the war by 40,000. That of the Daily Mirror - following a "negotiated settlement" line - rose by 95,000, indicating that the reservoirs of frenzied chauvinism were not that deep in the working class.

On top of Fleet Street's self censorship, Thatcher also relied on overt censorship and on her orchestrated lie machine. Perhaps most important and revealing was the desire to have as few TV pictures as possible because they always serve to bring home the consequences of war more sharply, and could thus serve to undermine popular backing for the war.

It should also be remembered that nationalist sentiment didn't run so deep as to lead to a suspension of class war against the Tories at home. Of course, some workers worked overtime for the war effort - mainly out of self-interest. But the health dispute continued to escalate and harden as most health workers contrasted the huge sums spent on the Task Force with their paltry wage offer. The rail strike took place as well amidst a barrage of Falkland rhetoric.

It is in this context of muted patriotism and transparent hypocrisy on the part of the Tories that the treachery of the leadership of the labour movement must be judged. The trade union leaders, of course, kept their heads below trench level pleading that politics was not their domain. This did not stop those, like Sam McCluskie of the National Union of Seamen, who could not be silent, from declaring their solid support for Thatcher's war. "A few pennies more", for the merchant seamen crews was his only refrain.

The greatest treachery was that of the Labour Party. Argentina's just invasion of the Malvinas on April 2nd precipitated a crisis in the ranks of the Tory government. Carrington, Atkins and Luce all resigned from the Foreign Office. Ruling class opinion was split and unsure. There was no popular pressure for war.

When the House of Commons met in emergency session on Saturday, April 3rd, the balance of forces could hardly have been more favourable for a decisive bid to stop Tory plans for dispatching a Task Force. Yet Michael Foot found reserves of vigour and outrage, and threw the whole weight of the Parliamentary Labour Party behind the war machine. As ever the Labour Party merely served to give democratic credentials to imperialism's predatory aims when he urged the use of force, if necessary, to: "uphold the rights of our country to be the defender of people's freedom throughout the world."

Foot painted the squalid war aims of Thatcher's raid in the colours of freedom. In its name he urged the labour movement to support the war. Like all Labour leaders before him he equated imperialism's freedom to exploit and tyrannise the world with the struggle for freedom from this exploitation.

Not that Healey or Foot were completely uncritical of Thatcher. They tried to direct their fire

against war monger Thatcher's supposed lack of vigilance against the Argentinian junta's aggression! No wonder that Labour's quibbles were derided as carping and inconsequential. In fact it was Foot who gave Thatcher a political franchise and so "united the nation" behind her. He did what the wretched gutter journalists and the drum beaters in Tory Central Office could never do. Immediately Tory Party and ruling class confidence was restored. Immediately figures of the Tory right, such as Du Cann, praised Foot's April 3rd speech.

The role of the labour "lefts", such as Benn, was equally despicable. They deliberately failed to speak out in Parliament that day. While they later emerged as pacifist critics of the Task Force they shared Thatcher's concern for the "self-determination of the Falklanders". Benn even motivated the inclusion of this principle for the Kelpers in Labour's programme in 1980 at an NEC. The "lefts" criticism of Thatcher was even more inconsequential than the official Labour policy. Benn and Co. foolishly believed that Argentina would give way to the Kelpers' "rights" without the prior use of force. The task of genuine socialists was to tear away the democratic mask covering British imperialism's war policy. Instead, the Labour Party left and right attempted to prettify it still further.

In one important sense, however, none of this should surprise those familiar with the Labour Party's history. Its foreign policy is as subservient as its domestic one. The Communist Party's policy, predictably merely echoed the line of the Labour Left. They organised demonstrations on the latter's behalf.

The greatest crimes were committed by those "revolutionary" groups whose opportunist adaptation to the Labour Party over the years has eroded their attachment to the Communist programme in time of war. Workers Power, alone of the "Trotskyist" organisations stood by this programme in principle and practice throughout these months. Our position was, and remains, clear. Argentina's stunted development since the Second World War did not allow it to escape the crippling state of semi-colonial dependence upon imperialism. Every day the hands and feet of the Argentinian masses are bound ever tighter by the chains of international debt. Britain is one of its chief jailors. A victory for Britain was the worst possible outcome for all those seeking to bring an end to the misery and oppression imperialism brings. A victory for Argentina would have given succour to the semi-colonial masses everywhere in their struggles against imperialism. For that reason, it was the duty of all socialists, but especially those in Britain, to work for an Argentine victory, for a British defeat.

One year on, the lessons of the Falklands adventure must be remembered. There is plenty of evidence to suggest that the Kelpers feel betrayed by events subsequent to the war, now prisoners of "Fortress Falklands". Neither are all the relatives of the 243 dead British servicemen sure the sacrifice was worth it. Thatcher and the City of London are sure it was, however.

A year on and the silence of the Labour ranks on the war is deafening. They have not raised a word about Britain's bellicose statements on the planned Argentine visit to the islands. Apart from the questions of Tam Dalyell, the Labour MPs prefer silence. They know that thanks to their support for the war at the decisive moment, only Thatcher will benefit - electorally - from recollections of the fighting. For our part, we place the historic interests of the international working class above that which is electorally convenient for Labour. We will not let the working class forget the treachery of the Labour right and left. We will campaign inside the Labour movement to bring the leadership to account. We will campaign to force the British government to relinquish sovereignty and join with our Argentine brothers and sisters in a loud chorus - "Falklands/Malvinas: They are Argentina's." ■

by Keith Hassell

Unemployment

CONTINUED FROM FRONT PAGE

Halifax the march was welcomed and addressed by a Liberal mayor. The Communist Party's paper, "Morning Star" was bitter that the local Tories had attacked the march as "political". The Morning Star proudly announced that this charge was easily "disproved" (28/4/83).

Town reception committees are all being confined to organising food, drink, entertainment and accommodation for the marchers. They are not mobilising for demos, amongst employed and unemployed local workers, to greet the March.

On the march itself, the marshalls and appointed stewards (some stewards are being elected, but they are relatively powerless), the story is the same. The March is being kept away from workers' struggles, delegations to factories, to striking workers and so on, are not being organised. Instead, the marchers are being made to listen to endless sermons from worthies such as the Moderator of the Church of Scotland and Father Rosser of Halifax. It is unlikely that the CP are expecting the prayers of the clergy to get rid of unemployment (though we can't vouch for this).

What the CP are mainly after is respectability. This way they can hold onto their bureaucratic sponsors, and

take a step to their goal of a broad democratic alliance - to include, the CP hope, the anti-working class rabble of the SDP and the Liberal Party.

Despite the efforts of the bureaucracy and the Stalinists, this year's People's March can still be turned into an effective, active march of unemployed workers. On the march itself this means organising the militants - individuals, members of left groups, marchers fed up with the bureaucratic running of the march. A strong united caucus of left militants could begin to struggle against the pattern of the march. They would argue for delegations to be sent to factories and workers in struggle. They would campaign to democratise the march and politicise it. To do this a fight must be launched to demand the election of all stewards by the marchers sovereign democratic assemblies of the marchers to take all policy decisions; a democratic daily bulletin of the march; the right of all political tendencies in the labour movement to put out propaganda to the march and to organise meetings on it. Through these steps, militants can win the power to turn the march into a workers march for jobs.

Off the march, trade unionists in the localities must set about mobilising action to welcome the march in their

area. The town committees are proving a dead weight. Through trade union branches, stewards committees, trades councils and Labour Parties, initiatives must be taken to leaflet the dole queues, organise demonstrations, strikes and factory gate meetings to welcome the march. Labour movement meetings and rallies must take the place of sermons from bishops and bureaucrats alike. Above all pressure must be mounted on the TUC to call a one-day general strike on the day the march reaches London - ALL OUT ON JUNE 3rd. At the same time all the stops must be pulled out to make sure that the June 5th national TUC demonstration is the biggest against unemployment ever. Leaflets must go into every plant and workplace. Trains must be booked and filled from every part of the country.

By these measures militants can ensure that the People's March makes the unemployed a visible, fighting force. At the end of the march the windy rhetoric of the union and Labour leaders must not be allowed to draw down the curtain on the unemployed. Above all the People's March must become the starting point for organising the unemployed. In every town and nationally, unemployed activists and

the official trade unions must devote energy and resources to building an Unemployed Workers Union with full representation and rights at every level of the Labour movement. In addition the trades unions themselves must be open to the unemployed. Unemployed workers should have the right to join the union of their choice, at reduced subscriptions and with full rights.

A united working class - unemployed and employed organised together - can begin to turn the tide on Thatcher. And, instead of waiting for five years for unemployment to be reduced to one million by Labour, the struggle must be started now for:

- * Work or full pay for all.
- * For the immediate introduction of a 35 hour week. For worksharing with no loss of pay, under trade union control. Cut the hours, not the jobs!
- * For a woman's right to work - no "women out first" "solutions".
- * For a massive programme of public works.
- * For the immediate occupation of all firms threatening redundancies.
- * For the nationalisation without compensation of all firms threatening closures. For workers' control of such enterprises. ■

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Thatcher's victory-workers' defeat

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THE 1983 PEOPLE'S March for jobs is being organised by the same gang of Regional TUC bureaucrats who tried to make sure the 1981 march was a harmless protest. Marchers this year will need to take on the Jack Dromeys and Colin Barnettts of the world right from the start. These characters want a march that is a moving forced labour camp, where they take all the decisions and their faithful appointed marshalls bully marchers into carrying them out without question. The marshalls and appointed stewards want a passive showpiece to impress the clergy and local dignitaries in every town. That is the type of support they relish. It always takes priority over the active support of workers.

The organisers delude themselves that plenty of vicars, Liberals and even Tory dignitaries will pressurise Thatcher into changing her policies. What a joke! It didn't work in 1981. It won't work this time round either. The total out of work has risen since then. For the 1983 People's March to become a real starting point for fighting unemployment and organising the unemployed, it must become a workers' march. It must be turned into a springboard to launch a workers' fightback against unemployment

that is rooted in action at the factories and dole queues. A march of the militant unemployed must turn outwards to link up with workers in struggle. To achieve this a struggle for democracy on the march has to be waged from the outset.

The Eastern Leg of the 1981 march showed that allowing stewards to quickly impose their iron-fisted rule completely demoralises marchers and wrecks any potential for militancy. In a bulletin we issued to the march at Chesterfield we were able to list a whole series of grievances raised by marchers:

- 1) Stewards acting like dictators.
- 2) Marchers threatened with being thrown off.
- 3) You can't sell papers.
- 4) You can't wear badges or stickers that the stewards think are "sectarian."
- 5) Marchers have no say over what happens next.
- 6) There are no democratic meetings.

Can anything be done? Yes - but only if the marchers stick it out and organise to confront the bureaucrats running this Eastern Leg."

Despite our efforts this challenge never came on the Eastern Leg. The result was that by the time the march reached Leicester, 40 marchers had left as a result of demoralisation.

The story of the Western Leg where Workers Power had a stronger presence, showed that there was an alternative to a tightly policed apolitical march.

What today's must remember

From Liverpool WP supporters challenged the appointed stewards and began the battle to gain some control over the march. We talked to as many people as possible about why democratising the march was necessary. Instead of just joining in the inevitable (and justified) moaning of other marchers we tried to show the political connection between grievances and the nature of the march. We proposed actions that could turn moans into effective challenges to the TUC marshalls and appointed stewards. When we were attacked by youths in Halewood Liverpool, for example, we argued for organised defence of the march, elected stewards and regular democratic meetings to decide policy.

At Warrington, only 3 days into the March, the first democratic assembly took place. The marshalls, headed by "Colonel" Barry Williams, President of Liverpool Trades Council (who suffered delusions that he was Napoleon and the march was his army) agreed to elected stewards alongside appointed ones. While this enabled marchers on the Western Leg to gain a degree of freedom for most of the march, it did not prevent the re-assertion of bureaucratic control as we neared London. Jack Dromeys, of SERTUC, used "confusion" over stewarding to unilaterally dissolve the elected stewards at Bedford. The official march bulletin stated: 'Because of increasing problems with security (never specified - WP) as we near London we have appointed a group of stewards who will be solely in charge of security.' These new stewards - nearly all hand-picked Communist Party heavies or willing WRP hangers on - established the norms of the Eastern Leg over the whole march. By May 26th the organisers felt confident enough to issue edicts denying marchers the right to identify themselves with political groups even while not on the march: "In addition it is March policy (by whose decree? -WP) that the marchers are just that - marchers - and should not leave the march whatsoever, including the selling of newspapers, without permission." (Official Bulletin 26/5/81).

Prior to this militants on the Western Leg had repeatedly upset the plans of the organisers. The case of "Colonel" Barry Williams was typical. A democratic assembly agreed no-one could be kicked off the march unless they were voted off by an

assembly. In theory the marshalls agreed but in practice when Williams decided he wanted two people at Congleton he kicked them off without consulting anyone. We organised an unofficial meeting and refused to march. In reply we were promised an assembly to deal with the problem. When it happened the marchers voted for the two to stay on. The one's pride was so wounded that he resigned and went back to Liverpool!

Democratising the march meant challenging the marshalls' view of it as "non-political". For WP and other marchers it was political - not a plea to march but a fight against her. That is why we insisted on shouting the slogans we wanted, wearing the clothes we wanted, hearing the speakers we wanted. A Tory mayor spoke to the march. A democratic assembly agreed this should never happen again. We wanted to hear workers on strike and marchers themselves. We had to fight every inch of the way to ensure this was carried out.

Not only was the march political, WP insisted the marchers had to have the right to discuss political issues too. This became urgently necessary when Bobby Sands died on May 5th, SWP members wanted to wear black armbands but were physically threatened by appointed stewards and shouted at by their own "Chief Marshal" - John Deason. WP aimed at getting the march to issue a press release on the following lines: "The People's Marchers condemn the Thatcher government for allowing Bobby Sands to die. We believe that all Republican prisoners should be given political status." We were trying to politicise the marchers and the march.

For this reason we agitated first amongst the marchers. We discussed the statement in our groups (the march was divided into 11 groups). After it had been passed there we took it to the democratic assembly in Manchester. Before a proper discussion could take place a WRP member - supported by the CP - moved that the meeting be closed. When it looked like losing the Marshalls stepped forward and announced that food was ready! A vote on the statement was never taken.

This was no isolated case. It was typical of Stalinists methods in stifling political debate.

THE DEAD HAND OF MILITANT

THIS YEAR'S LPYS conference took place against a background of massive attacks on working class youth. But if you're under 21 and want to fight back against unemployment and low pay, or if you want to defend yourself against police harassment and the threat of nuclear war...don't worry. According to chairman Kevin Ramage the 1983 LPYS conference was (like last year's and the year before) "the best ever."

Many of the other 2,000 delegates and visitors who gathered at Bridlington probably found it hard to be so enthusiastic. Despite its much publicised "Marxist" leadership, the YS has failed to rally youth into action against the ruling class onslaught. Nor has it challenged the indifference and bare-faced sabotage which youth have encountered from the TUC and Labour leaders.

There is only one reason Militant supporters like Ramage could have for self-congratulation. By keeping their heads down, by turning the YS away from youth who want action instead of words they have temporarily saved their skins from Labour's witch-hunt machine. But even this won't save them. The YS budget has already been slashed, and at the conference an army of Walworth Road heavies were on hand to stop any non-registered tendencies and individual YS branches setting up bookstalls.

The current witch-hunt is only the latest of many in the turbulent history of Labour's youth sections. Every attempt to set up a "safe" Labour Party youth organisation has ended with shut-downs and purges. That the present YS has lasted so long under the leadership of Militant (they took control in 1970) is due to the state of moribund inactivity they have fostered. Few of the 493 YS branches have more than a handful of members. Only 257 people at the conference were delegates from branches. The other fifteen hundred present there represented a more realistic figure for the YS active membership than the claimed 10,000. The YS leadership won't even release the actual sales figures of "Socialist Youth", only, Pravda-style, ever increasing targets. Paradoxically it has only been under Militant's "Marxist" leadership that the Labour leaders managed to fulfil their goal of turning the YS into a tame army of footsoldiers for election campaigns.

In recent years Militant has faced a small but vocal opposition in several YS branches and at the con-

ference from supporters of Class Fighter (an independent youth group dominated by the WSL) and Revolution (youth supporters of Socialist Action). But if the conference showed the bankruptcy of the Militant leadership, it also revealed the inability of Revo and the majority of Class Fighter to grapple with Militant's illusion-mongering in Labour's peaceful road to socialism.

The first debate of the conference centred on Militant resolutions on "Economic Policy" and "Election Strategy". Here in spite of the desperate plight of working class youth, it was business as usual for the YS. The South Herts resolution called for the elimination of the capitalist system in one sentence, and in the next argued: "The next Labour Government must bring this about by implementing the following policies:

1. 35 hr. week with no loss of pay
2. £90 minimum wage
3. A massive programme of public works
4. Reversal of public expenditure cuts
5. Nationalise the top 200 monopolies which control 80% of the economy under workers' control and management."

This approach although it is couched in the language of Trotskyism contains two fatal reformist flaws.

First, all Militant's abstract propaganda for socialism is reduced in practice to calling for a "Labour government with socialist policies." Unfortunately for youth, Labour is not committed to socialist policies. Even if it wins the next general election the Labour Party will not launch such an attack on the property of the employers. In fact the next Labour government is pledged to policies which will attack workers' rights and living standards e.g. wage control and "non-racist" immigration laws. Because of this, revolutionaries must fight to win youth to an action programme and organise them in a struggle that will defend their rights and living standards now. But Militant offers no other mode of combat than that of their headline of 25/3/83: "FIGHT FOR YOUR FUTURE WITH LABOUR. Start now, come to the LPYS conference!!!". In Militant's hands the Trotskyist programme is reduced to a programme of requests to the entrenched Labour bureaucracy that it pledges itself to a set of abstract socialist goals.

But Militant's "socialist programme" is also inadequate because it doesn't answer the question: What would happen if Labour did adopt these policies? It is ABC for Marxists that even the most left wing of Labour governments in parliament cannot bring about socialism. The state - the police, army,

judges etc. - is not neutral. In any struggle it is there to defend the interests of the capitalist class. It cannot be taken hold of and used to "legislate" for socialism. It has to be smashed and replaced by organs of direct working class power - democratic workers' councils and a workers' militia.

Against raising demands focussed towards these goals Militant argue that "sectarians" (i.e. revolutionaries) are "mistaking the first month of pregnancy for the ninth." What they forget when they use this analogy is that even in the first month of pregnancy an embryo exists. To struggle for a revolution, even in a period of retreat, means that in every struggle of youth we fight to build the embryonic forms of working class power: picket line defence squads, delegate strike committees, the defence of black youth against racist attacks. Militant will run a mile from being associated with these demands in front of young workers.

The Class Fighter amendment to this key resolution hardly deserved the ritual brand of "sectarianism" it received. It called on the Labour Party and the TUC to organise a General Strike to kick out the Tories and replace them with a "workers' government." "The workers' government must be a government based on and accountable to the organisations of the working class and carrying out policies in the interests of the working class". But what policies? Which organisations? Do they mean a revolutionary government based on Soviets and the arming of the workers? Or a "Labour government committed to socialist policies"?

The answer is clear when we look at the numerous interventions at the conference made by CF/Revo in support of Socialists for a Labour Victory (SLV). In its own words the SLV is: "Pledged to organise support for a Labour victory in the forthcoming General Election on the basis of the socialist policies carried at successive Labour Party conferences." Its supporters add: "We will campaign ourselves on the basis of these policies."

Sounds familiar? It should. It is the same recipe for a "socialist" Labour government that has been served up time and time again as Trotskyism by groups as disparate as Militant and the WRP. The most palatable parts of Labour's reformist programme are dressed up as "socialism" and the rest quietly ignored. Revo and CF might call for mass action against the Tories, up to a General Strike, but nowhere do these policies which they "campaign on the basis of" prepare working class youth for action independent of and against a job-cutting, wage-cutting Labour



government. Socialist Youth editor Willy Griffin was even to point out that whilst the SLV platform calls for 25 monopolies to be nationalised, Militant's platform calls for 200! No wonder most of the arguments between these rivals for pole-position as Labour's most loyal "socialists" take the form of mutual accusations of "sectarianism".

Class Fighter and Revo do not owe their reputation as a "left opposition" to their challenge to Militant's central strategy. In a different form they have this strategy. They owe it to their consistent clinging of Militant's economism on questions like land, Women and Gay rights. CF/Revo support mounted a vigorous protest throughout the conference at Militant's refusal to put Gay Rights on the agenda for the 8th year running. They organised a massive fringe meeting at which Peter Tatchell

However Revo and CF's bid for a bloc with "hard left" MPs like Clive Solely and Reg Racer the SLV means that their alternatives to Militant are becoming more and more diluted. On women, for example, CF was reduced to hypocritical nitpicking

Marchers

r

rigged agendas so that contentious questions always came up at the end of meetings, at which point the marshalls would announce - "Money's being paid out now" (Stoke) or "Food's ready" (Manchester) or "The European Cup Final's starting" (Watford). The reason for this was that if the marchers became politicised, they might challenge the dominant left-reformist, Stalinist politics of the main organisers.

These lessons need to be learnt for this march. Lectures from marshalls should come *after* issues marchers want discussed. Marchers should chair meetings. Democratic Assemblies should be announced in advance and take place after every short march and on every rest day. The marshalls should be accountable to them. Stewards meetings should take place every day. Whenever possible the march should stay together overnight to enable these meetings to happen. Information about the route, local factories, speakers and so on is not the private property of the officials. On the 1981 Western Leg, the marchers only heard rumours about these things - it became a hopeless joke with Punks on the march calling them the "Bureau of Mis-information". A bulletin for marchers is essential. It must be free to print criticisms, views and suggestions of the marchers. A marcher must speak in every town. Vicars and bigwigs should march *behind* the unemployed.

All of these small measures are vitally important because *as a whole* they open up the possibility of a fighting, militant march of the unemployed. WP supporters knew that securing such measures transformed the potential of the march. Marchers became more militant and outgoing and this is the key to linking up with workers in struggle, the aim of any serious militant unemployment march. We began this process alongside the democracy struggle. The first day out from Liverpool we walked right past Ford Halewood and didn't meet a single worker! It was obvious that this would be the story all along the way to London unless something was done. The next day WP supporters on the march went to a local factory in dispute. Workers at United Glass in St. Helens were on strike against redundancies. We brought some workers from the picket line to speak at the social in Widnes. They spoke despite the obstruction



East meets west on the 1981 march

and threats of the marshalls, who were complaining it was "unofficial". Their shop steward got a standing ovation.

From there we argued for factory visits. Delegations of marchers went to visit factories in the areas as we passed through. Visits went ahead to Holman Mitchell's occupation, United Glass, Laurence Scott's, Royal Pride furniture and others. We asked workers to attend the demo in London at the end of the march. WP supporters argued, in particular, for strike action - as part of a one-day General Strike on Friday 29th May as the March reached London. In return we took collection sheets, leaflets and stickers to use the march as a publicity vehicle for disputes that probably wouldn't have been heard of outside the local area.

Inevitably, pitching into supporting strikes set us against many a trade union official. This was one of the reasons Dromey organised his clampdown. He wanted no more clashes with his pals in the bureaucracy. Events in the Midlands had set his alarm bells ringing. As the 1981 march neared West Bromwich TGWU Regional full-timer Brian Mathers, headed the march. He was directly responsible for selling 1,000 jobs down the river at Ansel's Brewery. WP supporters in Birmingham encouraged Ansel's strikers to join the march in West Brom and protest at Mathers' involvement. On the march itself we prepared the ground beforehand, explaining who Mathers was, what he had done and why he should be opposed. Then, at a rally in West Brom Mathers was booed off-stage. When an Ansel's steward spoke the marshalls moved quickly to turn off the mike. They didn't want to upset their trade union bureaucrat pals. Nevertheless, Mathers was booed off stage in Birmingham too, and never appeared again! The Ansel's strikers, on

the other hand, won the right to speak in Birmingham and received a warm response from the marchers.

Improvements could have been made on links with employed workers. WP supporters argued for delegations to go *ahead* of the march to plants - to secure strike action as the march arrived. The marshalls answered this demand that there was only enough money for one minibus! These are the sort of ridiculous obstacles militant marchers face. In fact money was pouring in from collections and trade union branches. The bureaucrats operate on lies and distortions so *pressure has to be kept up* otherwise democratic decisions are quietly forgotten.

Crucially, the organisers never intended marchers to make links with militant workers or strikers active in their area. The importance of this hit home to us when we began to think about *after* the march. The organisers never had any plans for a militant campaign against unemployment in the localities. Even the feeble, cross-class, People's Campaign for Jobs was only reluctantly declared *after* the march was finished. On the march the message from the officials was "go home and wait for a Labour government."

Against this we raised the need to build Unemployed Workers' Unions (U.W.U.s) in every town and for them to be linked nationally into a national union. We tried to organise discussions amongst the West Midlands marchers to organise for action immediately after the march.

We argued for an U.W.U. that decided its own policies and tactics in the areas. But we also demanded recognition, and representation for such a union at every level of the trade unions, and for these unions to financially help establish such unemployed unions.

The TUC, the CP and the Labour Party had no real interest in building such a permanent body. For

them the march had served its purpose. The protest was registered. Now everybody could go home. In the localities individual militants made efforts to keep up the links, to build local unions and to organise some national co-ordination. Thanks to the obstructiveness of the Stalinists to such a perspective, these efforts did not lead to the establishment of an Unemployed Workers' Union.

This year's march must be turned into a focus for re-launching this work. Militants on it must take heed of the past lessons and, from the start they must organise for the future, for after the march. We must demand of the organisers the names and addresses of all those marchers from the same town, and lists of sponsoring bodies, trade union branches that gave money. Militant marchers must organise meetings for their areas, developing a plan of action. A democratic assembly should discuss fighting unemployment *before* the march reaches London (when everyone's exhausted and drifting off).

If this year's march can be turned from a passive protest into a focus for supporting and linking up workers' struggles it will be worth the effort of militants mobilising for it. It must also ensure that the unemployed do not become invisible after the march. A conference should be called after the march, by the labour movement bodies which sponsored it. This should be open to all the marchers and to unemployed workers from every locality. Such a conference would give a focus and morale boost to unemployed workers everywhere. Whilst the limelight is on the march there is the potential of drawing in unemployed workers. This potential must be realised, with the support of the official organisers if possible, against them if necessary. ■

by Sue Dye (Peoples Marcher, 1981)



with Militant. But they offered no more than existing LP policy on these issues as their alternative.

To a large extent the debate on Ireland was a different matter. In the name of workers' unity Militant have not only stood aside from the national struggle in Ireland, but joined the British press in condemning the IRA/INLA as sectarian psychopathic murderers. When Class Fighter supporters Neil James and Richard Emmet called for the YS's unconditional support for the national struggle in Ireland, not just Fleet Street but most of the Militant supporters went berserk.

The Sun announced "Neil James is a monster". The Mail carried the story alongside a report of an accidental IRA assassination. "Militant" on 8/4/83 referred to CF's "hysterical rantings". For a few minutes at least CF had succeeded in raising the banner of working class internationalism and turned the conference into a cauldron of argument. But how did CF and Revo's "parent" papers report this high point of the conference?

Martin Thomas in Socialist Organiser failed to mention the offending speeches, instead emphasising that

the CF resolution called for "legitimate minority rights for protestants." Piers Mostyn in Socialist Action 15/4/83 was less coy: "It was unfortunate that delegates supporting the paper Class Fighter could only offer equally abstract denunciations of British Imperialism and calls for support for the IRA."

The one time that Class Fighter mounted a serious opposition to Militant it was disowned and criticised by its political mentors. Meanwhile Revo "the paper that supports the Sandinistas", thinks that supporting the "Sandinistas" on Britain's doorstep is too abstract!

The bosses' offensive has hit youth hard. Unemployment, dead-end training schemes and low incomes all take a terrible toll on working class youth. Yet it is amongst the youth that the most energetic fighters against the bosses are to be found. That is why the Labour leaders like Foot - who supported the police against desperate youth who rioted in 1981 - want to keep a tame LPYS. They fear the power of a youth movement that embraces thousands who really believe that they can bring about change now.

The working class has nothing to fear from its own youth, so long as it enlists them in its class war. If it does not then Thatcher will, for sure, enlist them in her imperialist army. Or else the fascists will recruit them into their anti-working class gangs.

Youth need a working class alternative to this. They need an alternative as well to the indifference and hostility shown to them by the official leaders of the Labour Party and to the do-nothing policies of the Militant leaders of the LPYS. Youth must be organised into an *independent revolutionary youth movement*, clear about its aim - the revolutionary overthrow of capitalism - and clear about its methods - militant class struggle around a revolutionary action programme that meets the needs of youth today. This must centre on:

- Trade Union rates and rights on YOPs and YTSs. Full TU rights for young workers.
- A massive programme of public works to provide real jobs for all.
- Unite the unemployed and those in work. For an unemployed workers' union and the right of the unemployed to join a TUC union. Work or full pay.
- Fight redundancies and closures with strikes and occupations.

- Labour movement support for black youth defending themselves against police and racist attacks.
- Draw young women into the unions. Free abortion and contraception on demand. Abolish the age of consent laws. Down with discrimination against gay youth.

A revolutionary youth movement would not stand aside from the mass of youth who think voting Labour can solve their problems. It would campaign for a Labour victory. But it would not tailor its policies to Labour's programme. It would fight for its *own* programme. It would demand that Labour implements all of the above and more. It would prepare youth at all times to resist the attacks that will inevitably come from a government of Healey and Kinnoch.

A revolutionary youth movement would not leave the LPYS to the mercy of Militant. It would consti-

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LURCHING TO THE RIGHT AGAIN

THE WORKERS SOCIALIST League is a divided and crisis wracked organisation. It was born of a thoroughly unprincipled fusion between the Alan Thornett led "old" WSL and the Sean Matgamna's International-Communist League. Differences of the first order were brushed aside as both organisations manoeuvred to offset their decline in membership and the collapse of their perspectives.

The old WSL was tottering. Its perspective of building a "mini-mass party" in anticipation of an imminent "1968 style" upsurge in the class struggle, was shattered by the defeats inflicted on the working class under the Tories. Instead of correcting this perspective the WSL simply transferred it to the Labour Party. Lo and behold, there was Sean Matgamna waiting with open arms. The WSL, particularly its right wing, which had already embraced Matgamna's positions on the Labour Party and the Bennite left, were a welcome acquisition for the I-CL. Their former allies, the Chartists, had abandoned them and were busy building a rival to Socialist Organiser - the London Labour Briefing.

The new WSL was founded on a central orientation to the Labour Party. This orientation was liquidationist in the sense that the goal of the new WSL set itself was to "organise the left", particularly the Bennite left. A party paper fell by the wayside - Socialist Organiser, the open house paper replaced it. The Workers Socialist Review (three issues in almost two years) provided neither a regular focussed party voice nor a vehicle for programmatic development in the WSL.

There was to be no question of building a revolutionary tendency in the Labour Party. The goal of an organised alliance with the (reformist) left necessitated diplomacy. Revolutionary positions were trampled on in the interests of this perspective from day one of the fusion back in the summer of 1981.

The tactic of the workers' government was transformed into a strategic necessity in the shape of a left-Labour government accountable to the party through the democratic reforms achieved since 1979. During the "Benn for Deputy" campaign SO declared they were "Bennites". Any criticism of Benn in the pages of SO was forbidden.

Following Michael Foot's attack on Tatchell for his mild comments on extra-parliamentary action, SO leader-writer John O'Mahoney replied with a convoluted centrist attempt to reconcile workers' democracy and bourgeois democracy.

New depths were plumbed by the WSL during the Malvinas war. Socialist Organiser became overtly social pacifist. It refused to defend semi-colonial Argentina against imperialist Britain. It dragged the banner of revolutionary internationalism through the Labourite mire. It has not repudiated this position once since the war ended.

All of these opportunist revisions of the central tenets of marxism were intended to serve the goal of liquidating the WSL politically into the amorphous reformist left within the Labour party. Any remaining marxist barriers to political reformist allies had to be removed.

Throughout this process the leaders of the old WSL complied with the Matgamnaites. They initially supported Matgamna on the Malvinas and only shifted to their centrist position of supporting Argentina after the British fleet left port. They did not support Argentina's right to reclaim part of their national territory from British imperialism. They have not questioned the essence of Matgamna's liquidationist

Labour Party project.

All the indications suggest that this liquidationist course will lead to the collapse of the WSL. At the most recent WSL conference the organisation, which claimed 300 members at fusion, could muster at most only 155 members. Its liquidation has had obvious practical consequences for over half of the members.

At the conference the Matgamnaites won a comfortable majority for their documents and a majority of 20 on the new NC of 30. Most vitally, conference adopted the major Matgamnaite document on the Labour Party. It was a codification of existing practice and the clearest statement to date of Matgamna's strategic position. It declared: "The LP is for now and the foreseeable future the pivot of mass working class politics in Britain." For the WSL the course is now firmly set on "renovating, reorientating and transforming the existing labour movement, trade union and political wings alike.... The LP is the vehicle for developing the militancy into mass working class politics in the next stage ahead, and for transitional demands, and developing the, presently, reformist working class movement on the basis of experience of political and industrial, and other struggles towards a fully formed solution." Behind the awkward prose lies a very clear message.

In place of building a revolutionary party that seeks to win workers to a revolutionary programme the Labour Party is now presented as a "vehicle" for moving "towards a fully formed solution".

The idea that the Labour Party is the central vehicle for transforming union militancy into mass action is contradicted by the entire history of the twentieth century labour movement.

As a vehicle for securing the return of a Labour Government, the Labour Party has persistently proved to be a vehicle for dissipating militancy. Look at the experience of 1974-9. Of course the Matgamnaites may think that the Labour Party is different now, and that its left is harder. Nonsense! In the Health strike, the Steel strike and the Leyland strikes, the Labour Party and its left have provided

neither the organisational nor political focus for generalising the struggles. Yet this absurd position is now the majority position of the WSL.

Stung into opposition by an oppositional faction on their left and by Matgamna's appetite for liquidationism, the leaders of the old WSL - Thornett, Richardson and Lister - did mount an opposition to Matgamna. But it amounted to little more than an argument over resources - how much? where? and a call for a return to the old style WSL's method of raising of Transitional Demands. What this means in practice was shown in SO on 22nd April where Thornett's article on BL raised the call to "Open the Books" but failed to mention the need to strike against the Blue Book, Slave's Charter, the very issue posed by the strike!

The hopelessness of this position was reflected in the vote it got. Only 66 people were left in the Thornett camp and 20 odd of those were members of the non-Thornettite faction. Their votes were obviously a trade off for Thornett's votes for their Youth document (which also lost). The truth is that having accepted Matgamna's politics for so long, the leaders of the old WSL can now offer nothing serious in the way of analysis of them or opposition to them. They argued about resources - not about Matgamna's opportunist method.

The Internationalist Tendency (which later declared itself a faction), put forward a position on the Labour Party counterposed to Matgamna's. The Tendency originated from a group of comrades inside the WSL who recoiled from SO's position on the Malvinas. Since then they have attempted to organise opposition to the Matgamna leadership on a range of questions. However, at the WSL conference, they were not prepared to follow through the logic of their charges that Matgamna was a revisionist. Even though he won, the Internationalists decided, by a majority vote, to stay in the WSL.

In the course of the Tendency struggle, a number of comrades came close to the positions of Workers' Power. We reprint two of their documents and articles submitted to our paper by them. Within the Tendency and Faction they fought for the

positions outlined in the document "The Politics of the WSL Leadership - A Case History of Centristism". We agree 100% with it. The strength of this document was reflected in the fact that around 80% of the platform eventually produced by the Internationalist Faction was taken from this document.

There were differences over the TILC becoming democratic centralist, the call for a Democratic Secular State of Palestine, the characterisation of Matgamna's line on Ireland as pro-imperialist and the interpretation of the TILC's document "The Transitional Programme in Today's Class Struggle" being a "historic gain". On these questions the comrades sympathetic to WP publicly dissented from the platform. As most of the rest of the document either came from, or was in accord with, their own positions they signed and fought for the faction platform. Bureaucratic manoeuvres by the Matgamnaites prevented the document as a whole from being debated.

The comrades argued for a split once the Matgamnaites had won on the key issue of the LP. The choice was either to split and to try to rally the healthy elements in the WSL, or to become prisoners within the WSL or to carry out a delayed split which would risk waging the decisive battles behind the backs of the members. The Internationalist Faction decided not to split.

We hope that they will soon reconsider their position but under the circumstances the comrades sympathetic to WP had no choice but to break from the Faction, put out their own document and resign from the WSL. They did this at the conference in full view of the membership. They are confident that the long-term effects of their open, principled split in the WSL will have repercussions beyond the conference.

Workers' Power has consistently and openly criticised the politics and practices of the WSL and of its co-thinkers in the Labour Party. We have not done this because we are sectarians. This is the myth peddled by the Matgamna and Thornett wings of the leadership. They apply the label sectarian to those who criticise them. Significantly they do not apply it to themselves when they attack the SWP, or the SL. They do not consider it sectarian to waste newspaper space in their ever more frenzied and bizarre campaign against the WRP and Labour Lefts like Livingstone and Knight who spurned Matgamna's political advances and have spoken at WRP rallies. We have no time for the WRP's politics or their legal action against SO, but it is obvious that SO is, in crazed sect-like fashion, prolonging the statement/counter-statement weird vendetta that exists between it and the Newline of the WRP. The polemics we have launched against the WSL have nothing in common with this sort of sectarian lunacy.

The fact that a faction was formed shows that elements exist who are prepared to fight with Matgamna. The fact that these comrades left the WSL to enter discussions with us shows that our polemics, as well as our entire range of positive positions, have had an impact inside the WSL.

The fact that the Faction and other healthy elements have stayed inside the WSL shows that our job is far from over. This supplement is a continuation of work we began months ago. It is designed to show how a principled alternative to Matgamna and Thornett can be built. It is designed to remind all healthy elements within the WSL that there is an alternative to the centrist swamp they are currently trapped in.

We will fight to win others from the WSL. We continue this fight with an appeal to those who opposed Matgamna on a principled basis at the conference - leave the WSL and join in discussions with us with a view to fusing with us and thereby strengthening the forces of Trotskyism. ■

Why I resigned from the WSL

THE WSL conference showed that the old I-CL leadership was totally dominant within the new fused WSL. All the documents of the old I-CL leaders were passed. They got their way on the Labour Party, on Women and on Youth. The WSL is set on course to repeat the very political mistakes that have dogged the Trotskyist left in Britain since the end of World War 2. More than likely they will go down the road of Ted Grant and the Militant, becoming part of the left wing of British Labourism.

The WSL leadership bureaucratically prevented the politics of the Internationalist Faction being put to the conference. A document on the Labour Party, by comrade Morrow, a member of the faction, was overwhelmingly defeated. Although I found its politics weak on the way that revolutionaries should work in the Labour Party, the comrade did point out to conference that he supported the Internationalist Faction's platform on Labour Party work. That is why I voted for the document at conference. I was a member of the old I-CL. I have disagreed for many years with the leadership of both the old I-CL and the new WSL, on major political points.

They have been far too soft on the Lefts in the Labour Party. They were totally uncritical of Tatchell's election campaign and of his politics even though many of his positions made him no different from those Liberals who fight on local issues.

Yet Socialist Organiser gave him support uncritically and is still doing so. They have not tackled Benn for his total failure to lead any sort of fight

against the Register and the witch-hunt. Socialist Organiser has not criticised his role at Bishop Stortford.

Many Socialist Organiser supporters - particularly in London - have been elected to local councils. They did not stand on a revolutionary programme at all. Some have gone clean over to the reformist left and voted for rate rises and against wage increases for local government workers.

The layer of workers that the old I-CL leaders said they would win when they came rushing into the Labour Party through the "open valve" has never arrived. Instead many of the comrades they have recruited would seem, having talked to them, to think that their job is to make the Labour lefts fight on reformist politics.

They are not set on building a vanguard party which will be tested in the mass struggle of the working class. They have turned their backs on non-Labour party workers. It became increasingly clear to me that most of the WSL was taking Trade Union work less and less seriously.

They were looking only to building new "Broad Lefts" with the Bennite Labour left. The majority leadership now talks of the Leyland Action Committee as the way to build a Broad Left in the Motor Industry. No longer does it talk of building a fighting rank and file movement.

The Health workers' dispute showed up the real character of the WSL's union work. The "Health Workers' for the Full Claim" was a complete flop that tailed the "Broad Left" officials in NUPE. It was a first reluctant to organise for the Sheffield Health Workers' Conference because it was scared of breaking with the officials and because the "sectarian" Workers' Power was pushing for it. But this conference, however limited, represented an important step in organising the rank and file militants.

The degeneration of the WSL also became increasingly apparent during Thatcher's South Atlantic war.

The Malvinas war took the WSL by surprise. When it first came into the news most comrades treated it as a joke. The WSL did not pass the test of this war. It condemned both sides and supported as series of articles calling for "self-determination" for the Kelpers. Since when do so-called communists not take sides against their own imperialist state and support the right of an oppressed state to carry out what I would call an anti-imperialist action?

For many months the WSL was in crisis over a basic thing like supporting the fight against their own imperialist state. When a special conference was arranged after the war had finished it took a position by a small majority, of supporting Argentina. But it still condemned the Argentinian invasion. Since the British Forces re-took the Malvinas not one article has appeared calling for British Troops Out of the Malvinas. This wretched record shows that the WSL leaders don't want to say anything that would offend their soft "Hard Left" friends in the Labour Party. Reg Race wrote a number of articles for Socialist Organiser during the war. This "friend" was a man who called for economic sanctions against Argentina.

The logic of this line has also led the WSL to hold back from supporting the struggle against British imperialism in Ireland. This has been a thorn in my side ever since the fusion. The organisation has simply backed whatever John O'Mahony has chosen to write in Socialist Organiser. The statement on last year's London bombings came over more like a Daily Mirror front page than the statement of an organisation that claims to support the struggle of the Nationalists when they are fighting imperialism. O'Mahoney's articles on the Loyalists didn't sound all that different to the views of supporters of the

"Two Nations" theory. He calls for autonomy for four counties within a 32 county democratic Republic, imagining the Protestant workers will join with the Catholic working class to secure this democratic solution. So taken is O'Mahoney with his new found "democratic" friends in the Labour Party that he has "forgotten" that the fears of the Loyalist working class will only disappear when they are won to the fight for a 32 county workers' republic which will guarantee the fullest possible rights to the entire working class. These articles convinced me that the WSL was going down the road of the Militant and writing off the National struggle altogether. I stand by the position that communists should give unconditional but critical support to all anti-imperialist struggles.

I recently re-read the documents of the 1975 fusion between Workers Fight and Workers' Power which created the I-CL. It was based on principled position on the Labour Party, Ireland and the Transitional Programme. Now this has all been changed. The Transitional Programme is being replaced with a Labourite democratic one.

Serious WSL comrades who want to build a Revolutionary Communist Organisation should leave the WSL. It is becoming a small Right-Centrist group. On the present course it will end up looking like the Chartists group in London. They ended up as the core of London Labour Briefing! Unless there is a successful fight to remove the WSL's misleaders then next year's conference will be even smaller than the recent one.

Comrades, if you are serious revolutionaries, you should split from the WSL and start to discuss with Workers' Power. To my mind they are the only group that offers an alternative to the mistakes of the rest of the "Trotskyist" left. ■

by P. Reagan

ON APRIL 17th we left the WSL after its conference voted by a comfortable majority to further liquidate itself into the Labour Left. After leaving we applied to join Workers' Power. We did this because during our struggle in the WSL, WP were the only organisation who offered a correct political analysis of what was happening inside the WSL. They were also the only coherent alternative to the WSL on the British Left.

It was the Malvinas war that initially brought the politics of WP to our attention. Before that we had only heard of WP from Sean Matgamna and Alan Thornett's denunciations of them. They claimed that Workers' Power were a bunch of "sectarians" and had little interest in the class struggle. Yet, for the duration of the Malvinas war the WSL held the same position and slogans as all of the arch "sectarians" the SWP, the Spartacists and the Militant Workers' Power alone on the Trotskyist left, stood out for the basic Trotskyist principle of defending an oppressed nation against an imperialist aggressor. The IMG formally held a good position but they readily boycotted it in every Labour movement forum for the sake of building a broad peace movement.

War has always been a make or break issue inside the Labour movement. It has always been the acid test for those organisations claiming to stand for revolutionary internationalism. The Malvinas war broke us from the politics of the WSL leadership and made us take WP a lot more seriously. The eventual fudged position passed by the WSL conference by a tiny minority showed us that there were no real forces capable of a thoroughgoing fight against opportunism existing inside the WSL leadership. We decided that it was necessary to fight that leadership. In the context of waging that fight we began to look at the positions of WP more closely, rather than take the opinions of Matgamna and Thornett as good coin.

A question that WP repeatedly stressed was, how did the WSL come to have the wrong position on the Malvinas? Did it just fall from the sky or was it part of a continuous political process that was taking place within the WSL under the Matgamna leadership? As can be seen from our documents, we came to agree with WP that the position came about because of Matgamna's project of liquidation into left labour reformism. If the overriding project was to build an organised alliance with the Bennites on their politics, then Trotskyism amounted to no-

Why we are joining Workers Power

thing more than a collection of outdated principles. By abandoning Lenin's theory of imperialism and Trotsky's theory and strategy of Permanent Revolution, as they apply to Argentina today, Matgamna was clearly signalling to his hoped-for "left" allies that the differences between him and them were marginal. This goes for his positions on Benn, the witch-hunt, the workers' government slogan, workers' democracy and Ireland.

In their paper, particularly in the Open Letter to the WSL in WP July 1982, WP urged a fight against Matgamna not just on the Malvinas, but on this whole range of issues all directed at attacking his fundamental perspectives with regard to the Labour Party. While we committed ourselves to such a fight on the basis of agreed criticisms of Matgamna, however, the question that remained was, what were we fighting for? Here again it was necessary to look at the positive content of WP's politics, and practice. WP always argued that it was a fighting propaganda group. We were initially suspicious that a fighting propaganda group equalled a passive attitude to the class struggle. Did it mean that WP

simply produced theory and waited until its work was finished in this field before becoming active in the class struggle? Did it mean that WP oriented exclusively to attacking left groups? In the event we became convinced that neither of these distorted versions of the fighting propaganda group (portrayed as the only versions inside the WSL by John Lister in his pamphlet "Spartacist Truth Kit") applied to WP. They convinced us by their propaganda and their "fighting" that their perspective was not only correct but absolutely necessary for Trotskyists in the present period.

The positions that WP developed on Stalinism and the Fourth International showed up the chronic programmatic disarray of what we had previously termed "The World Trotskyist Movement". They raised and answered the fundamental questions that had caused splits and chaos amongst Trotskyists, questions that this "movement" had either answered wrongly or avoided altogether. They showed the political roots of this chaos. WP's stress on the need for a re-elaborated programme that embodies the method, doctrine and all of the key elements of

Trotsky's Transitional Programme while developing it, re-focussing it and answering new problems, pointed to the way to overcome the political disarray that exists. Furthermore, WP's propaganda on more immediate issues of the class struggle - the Malvinas, Ireland, the Labour Party, strikes over the last period etc. - showed that they were not abstract propagandists. Their material was focussed on burning issues and aimed to give communist answers.

The doubt about WP's ability (or even willingness, given what we had been told about them) to intervene in the class struggle, was dispelled by their work around the health strike. While the WSL set off on the old course of building a "front" rank and file body - Health Workers for the Full Claim - WP supporters inside and outside the NHS threw themselves into a struggle to unite the emerging stewards movement in a genuine rank and file organisation. They were responsible for calling, organising, and mobilising for the October Sheffield Stewards' Conference, which brought together 150 militants and provided the only real focus of opposition in the strike to the TUC sell-out merchants. WP did not devote so much energy to visiting hospitals, making contacts, supporting picket lines and mobilising support for the conference so that they could score points against the left, and the WSL in particular. That is both laughable and a gross slur on them. They did it because they wanted to win the strike and had a clear strategy for doing so. They showed that even a small group of communist militants can take steps to organise the rank and file. It showed us that WP were serious about an active intervention in the class struggle and on politics that were 100 times clearer and more correct than those of the WSL.

Over the years the WSL has deluded itself more and more. From its simplistic view of workers' militancy through to its pretensions to be a mass force in British politics, the WSL has followed a wrong path. The result is not something that we are pleased about. The WSL has consistently lost members despite a fusion that supposedly "doubled" its size. Its turnover of members has been high. It has not trained its cadres and as a result it has demoralised them. It has ended up with a small conference voting for the politics of the old I-CL lock stock and barrel. We think that this merely heralds new crises and splits in its ranks. That is why we say to all of those left in the WSL who do want to build a revolutionary Trotskyist party in Britain and internationally - do not believe Matgamna's lies that there is no alternative; examine the politics and practice of WP; put aside prejudices and let politics decide. You will find that there is a revolutionary alternative to the WSL's centrism. ■

by S. Layton and P. Philby

NOTHING NEW FROM THORNETT

THE LEADERS OF the 'old WSL' are in complete disarray. They fought hard to sell the fusion with Matgamna to their members. They went along with Matgamna's strategic orientation to the Labour Party with all that this entailed - calling a 'democratically accountable' Labour Government a 'workers government', dropping all criticism of Benn and the project of the WSL sponsored Socialist Organiser. They themselves went along with the WSL's initial response to the Malvinas war. One of their number, John Lister, co-authored the "self-determination for the Kelpers line". They only fought for a partial change of line after the war was over. And they have been complicit in ensuring that this change of line never saw the light of day.

In essence they conceded to every major element of Matgamnaism. This is hardly surprising. The old WSL viewed itself as a mini-mass party waiting in the wings for a predicted imminent '1968 type' explosion of class struggle. With the failure of this perspective, to materialise the WSL stagnated and became divided. Spartacist raiders carried off its sectarian 'left' elements. A distinct right wing crystallised that held positions very similar to those of Matgamna's. In what was no more than an episode the WSL leaders proposed a fusion with Workers Power but balked at a serious programmatic and tactical exploration of the basis of such a fusion. Eventually the organisation, with its perspectives and expectations in tatters, collapsed into the fusion with Matgamna.

For over a year they put up no resistance to Matgamna stamping the new WSL with all the fundamentals of his politics. Thornett, Richardson and Lister sat like the three wise monkeys - they saw and heard no 'revisionism' and let Matgamna do all the 'revisionist' talking. No wonder that large numbers of ex-WSL members expressed their hostility to Matgamna and their disillusionment with Thornett either by leaving the organisation altogether or by joining the Internationalist Tendency. The 1983 conference voting showed that Thornett could only guarantee around 40 cast iron loyalty votes.

With Matgamna moving to consign the old Oxford trio to the function of a harmless "orthodox" gargoyle on his 'Bennite' broad church, with at least a third of their erstwhile followers in revolt

and with all the TILC sections save one pleading with them to fight, they belatedly and ineffectually moved into action.

So thoroughly compromised were they, so utterly unused to self-criticism or re-assessment were they that their room for manoeuvre was virtually nil. Their documents for conference and their polemical contribution to Socialist Organiser show that their 'orthodoxy' allows them to forget nothing; neither does it allow them to learn anything. Not only are they trying to revive the old perspective and method that cost them so dear last time. They also have no real alternative to the trail of liquidationism that the new WSL has been blazing.

Repeatedly these old-timers show that they are blind to the defeats and losses that the workers movement - at every level - has suffered under Thatcher. In an editorial that smacked of their line, one of the rare issues of the WSL journal (No.2 Sept 1982) declared, "Support for the health workers...has reached levels of solidarity not seen since 1972 or 1926...The union conferences have generally shown a shift to the left...A new generation of broad lefts in the unions continues to multiply...more left wing, more activist, less bureaucratic... The voltage (of class struggle WP) is very high, but the existing leadership is maintaining crucial breaks in the circuit through which the current of class struggle could flow."

The defeats suffered by the working class - in Leyland, in the Health and in the mines - are put down simply to the treachery of Trade Union leaders in pulling the plug on a massive charge of militancy amongst rank and file workers. But this begs the question of why the traitors get away with it in some circumstances and not in others. In 1972 the leaders were no less inclined to treachery, to put it mildly. Yet again and again the rank and file forced them to fight and pushed more militant leaders to the fore. The 'revolutionary left' grew in numbers. Now events such as the two ballots in the mines or the sacking of Alan Thornett last year, reflect a profound crisis of direction and confidence at every level of the workers movement. The rank and file is not ever-ready and raring to bite Thatcher's head off the moment the right leadership is assembled and in position to issue the call.

But this is precisely what Thornett and those who think like him continue to argue. For example, WSR No 3 contains the statement that "Throughout the period of this government, the combativity and militancy of the working class has been sufficient to defeat the government, had leadership been given." On the March miners' ballot Thornett has stuck to his guns in placing the entire responsibility for the result on Scargill's action in calling a ballot, a position backed by Tony Richards in his reply to

John McIlroy in Socialist Organiser, "The move was catastrophic. By killing the strike wave stone dead, and conceding everything to the right wing, it ended any chance of winning the vote." (24.3.83) If Scargill had called the miners out, Richards and Thornett argue, then the road would have been open for the defeat of the Tory government as it would have been in a whole series of previous disputes under the Tories. "As with the steelworkers the BL workers, train drivers, and hospital workers... This was a struggle that could have been won out but for the serious unresolved crisis of leadership which drags the working class at every stage." (SO 10.3.83)

How does this view square with the fact that Thornett himself successfully resisted victimisation in 1974 but was sacked in 1982? Doesn't this hint at a changed situation at rank and file level? Not at all, according to Richards and Thornett. It can all be explained by the fact that management refused to recognise Alan Thornett's credentials that the union leaders betrayed this struggle and as a result he became isolated and unknown in the plant. "When the second victimisation of Thornett took place, a particularly weakened workforce was called upon to engage in an indefinite strike to defend someone they knew only by slanted media coverage." (Tony Richards SO 24.3.83)

The reality of the impact of a severe slump and the pugnacity of their employers and the government on the rank and file is far more complex than this revamped perspective of the old WSL. Of course the leaders have betrayed and stabbed all the major struggles in the back. But the impact of the legacy of defeats, the threat of unemployment and the spinelessness of the leaders has led to a very real decline in confidence amongst organised workers and militants. The Cowley strike and the health dispute show the enormous reservoirs of working class anger that have been building up against the Tories. That anger and a whole series of struggles show that the Tories have not yet succeeded in inflicting a qualitative defeat on the organised working class. But the old WSLers remain as blind as ever to the fact that the "crisis of leadership" manifests itself as a crisis of direction on the shop floor and amongst the layer of militants and stewards who have neither the political nor organisational weight to prevent sell-outs and retreats.

Unlike the Matgamnaites we don't take this fact as a license to wallow in the wards and Conferences of the Labour Party for the foreseeable future. The crisis is both a political and an organisational one. Politically it lies in an inability of the militant shop stewards of the 1970s to transcend the traditional combination of highly sectional economic militancy inside the workplace and the passive politics of left Labourism or Stalinism. Organisationally it was

expressed in trade union routinism and complacency about the state of shop floor organisation.

From the mid-seventies when it was a Labour government that set out to weaken and incorporate work place organisation, resistance necessitated both a political and an organisational advance in the part of militants. It meant recovering and re-using many of the methods of revolutionary communist trade union work neglected since the 1920s. It meant the development of the existing stewards organisations into more democratic and accountable bodies. It meant shop meetings, mass meetings, democratic shop and factory bulletins or newspapers to counter the lying propaganda of the media. It meant that we fight to assemble a rank and file movement of the minority of militants who want to fight the bosses and the Trade Union leaders while bringing the bulk of workers behind them. And it meant independent communist work through bulletins and interventions at branches and mass meetings to produce communist propaganda to win workers to our case.

The price of not doing this and of not advancing was to retreat. There was no question of standing still. Now militants have to revive much that already existed in the early 70s. The SWP idea that it can simply be created as it was, piecemeal and over 'little things' is nonsense - but so is the old WSL view that denunciatory propaganda against the 'leaders' betrayals will open workers' eyes to the 'Alternative leadership'.

The old WSL never agreed with this perspective. At Cowley they fought shy of producing their own communist bulletins or holding mass meetings that they thought they would not win. Instead the logic of their entire method has been to attempt to take those positions in the workers' organisations from which the new leadership could be proclaimed and demonstrated to the workers. As Tony Richards put it in his reply to McIlroy, "We cannot hope to reach the mass of workers individually with propaganda that will raise their consciousness. We can only hope to raise a fight through the organised labour movement for the construction of a new, revolutionary leadership, and, by involving ourselves in the process of the struggles that emerge, to make workers aware of the role of leadership. That is why we need to build a revolutionary party." (SO 7.4.83)

Another refrain of the old WSL leaders is that the Matgamnaites have given up the struggle for transitional demands. This is largely true. Matgamna sees transitional demands as "class-wide" solutions to be advocated as the programme of a Labour government - though at the moment he seems to prefer 'conference policies'. But what Thornett sees as 'the fight for transitional demands' is the adoption

CONTINUED ON BACK PAGE

WHAT FOLLOWS IS a critique of and alternative to, the current leadership's entire political strategy. We present it as a factional platform. We no longer accept that any section of the present leaders (either from the old WSL or from the I-CL) are capable of regenerating and re-directing the WSL in a revolutionary way. We therefore present our document as the basis of an alternative orientation for the WSL. We will fight to get conference to adopt this document, purge the current misleaders, and elect a new leadership committed to implementing the proposals we are making.

At the time of fusion many of us entertained the hope that the unity of the WSL and the I-CL would strengthen the revolutionary left in this country. This has not happened. In fact we have lost members and are failing to build the WSL as a strong, independent revolutionary organisation.

These failures cannot be put down to a lack of effort. Our criticisms are not directed at the enthusiastic efforts that comrades made to build our influence. It is the politics we are building on that is crippling us numerically and politically. They are the liquidationist politics developed by the old I-CL leaders against which the old WSL leaders have had no alternative. They deliberately blur the lines of demarcation between ourselves and left reformism. We now recognise that the fusion of the WSL and I-CL was based on these wrong politics. Because these aspects of the fusion were never debated out and were obscured by other (in fact less important and still unresolved) differences, we can now see that the fusion was an unprincipled one. It paved the way for the present situation.

The organisation was founded on a programme marked by an adaptationist orientation to the Labour Party and the Labour lefts in particular. This was not immediately clear to us. It took the Malvinas war and the leadership's line on it - especially the positions put forward by the key ideologue of the WSL's right wing drift, Matgamna - to reveal to us the extent of the organisation's errors on that question.

THE MALVINAS

The Matgamna leadership's attitude to the Malvinas issue was a consistent social pacifist one. It was in no sense a Leninist, International one. The most refined version of their position in IB No.18 states that the war was reactionary on both sides and that for Marxists the key issue is a "democratic" one - namely, defending the Falkland Islanders' right to self determination. Point 5 of their resolution states: "support for the right of the Falkland Islanders - a distinct historical, ethnic, linguistic, economic and geographic community 400 miles from Argentina - to determine their own future is axiomatic for Leninists....The Falklanders' right to self determination cannot be invalidated by a desire by them to adhere to the now imperialist state that spawned the Falklands community." (p.2)

Despite this stalwart defence of the community, however, they conclude, somewhat contradictorily: "support for the Falklanders' rights plainly does not necessarily mean any support for military action to enforce these rights. In the actual situation, with Britain an imperialist power, we rejected and opposed the British military action." (p.2)

No doubt Matgamna would have preferred an economic blockade like Bann, Militant and, unfortunately the Class Fighter comrades who voted for one at last year's LPYS conference.

Matgamna's position recognises the right to self-determination for a tiny settler population and migrant labour force that is neither politically nor (despite Matgamna's false assertion) economically distant or independent. In case Matgamna did not know, the islands are owned by a British firm. Their adherence to British imperialism has enabled Britain to build a fortress Falklands to police Argentina's waters and the South Atlantic. Why will Matgamna not support military action to enforce the right he purports to defend? If that right is threatened by military force, then only military force can defend it. The comrades have an untenable position. If it were logically pursued then it would lead them to Militant's view that a Labour government (with socialist policies, mind) is needed to pursue a working class war against Argentina. Of course the comrades draw back from this and retreat into the social pacifism displayed by Bann, Race and Co. Their position, like SO's, was untenable. No matter, they held it and therefore so must SO and the WSL. If the price for maintaining this rotten bloc is the abandonment of a few old principles then it is worth paying. Out went Trotsky's position of defence of semi-colonies against imperialism (Mexico/Brazil). Indeed the whole notion of semi-colonies, Lenin's theory of imperialism and ultimately Trotsky's theory of Permanent Revolution were reduced to historical curiosities by Matgamna.

If these theories are outdated, as some of Matgamna's less sophisticated followers claim in their bid to prove their opponents are mere dogmatists, then please show us the proof. Produce the documents to refute these theories. This does not mean producing statistics to prove that Argentina is a comparatively rich semi-colony. Prove that it is not a semi-colony.

The Malvinas debate also showed up the real character of the internal regime of the new WSL. So desperate was the leadership to conceal the eventual change of line from its Bennite allies, that it suppre-

ssed debate on the subject. It criticised the very idea of holding a conference to resolve the issue. Open debate is anathema to those who have set course on a liquidationist project. It gets in their way.

Not only was the discussion abruptly and bureaucratically stopped, but the change of line barely saw the light of day. SO never mentioned it. A supplement to WSR No.2 (8 pages hardly attracting a mass readership at a price of 40p.) was produced but many members, let alone the public, never saw it. It was hardly sold at all. Matgamna obviously did not want to upset any of his hoped for left reformist allies. After all, Reg Race had already vowed never to grace an IMG platform again after Brian Grogan was forced to reveal that the IMG was Argentine defencist. Heaven forbid that fearless Reg should take the same oath in relation to us!

Unfortunately, through the whole Malvinas episode, the old WSL leadership did not provide the necessary challenge to Matgamna's social pacifism. They moved to a position of defence of Argentina far too late, their final position - which does not recognise Argentina's right to the Malvinas - is still short of revolutionary internationalism, and since the defeat of Matgamna's position they have failed to wage an unremitting struggle for SO to carry the new line.

Internationally, the leadership obstructed a proper discussion of the issue taking place within the TILC. This reached a disgraceful climax at the summer school. The school was announced as a WSL, not a TILC, school. Therefore the international delegates who had travelled hundreds or thousands of miles to take part in a vital discussion, were offered five minutes apiece to make a statement. At precisely the time we needed international help to counter the nationalist pressures being exerted on us, Matgamna, Lister and Thornett all united to prevent open debate. In our view this confirms the nationalist outlook and orientation of the leadership. Matgamna's attitude towards the TILC (and the RWL in particular) in his "withdrawn" document in IB 35 is a graphic illustration of this national centredness. He begins by announcing that everything is up in the TILC: "TILC is, barring some unlikely miracle, already effectively split." The "sectarian" wing (the RWL and LOR) cannot be reconciled with the non-sectarians - ie. Matgamna. This split document then goes on, using all the methods of innuendo, factional sleight of hand and downright falsehoods that Matgamna is past master of, to accuse the Internationalist Tendency (IT) of being an RWL controlled tendency. Matgamna comes clean as the defender of the WSL against the "interference" of a "foreign power" and its supposed agents. The document shows him as a narrow nationalist and it reveals the bankruptcy of those who still tolerate him in the leadership of the WSL. Its conclusions - IT is in fact RWL, RWL is not in WSL, therefore, expel the IT - reveal him as a bureaucratic factionalist intent on destroying TILC, which he has never forgiven since it proved a thorn in his side during the Malvinas war.

PERMANENT REVOLUTION AND THE DEMOCRATIC PROGRAMME

The Malvinas war also exposed Matgamna's appetite for revising fundamental aspects of the Marxist programme. He is doing so in order to render the Marxist programme harmless and no longer a barrier to much sought after left reformist allies. This is clear in relation to Ireland and the Middle East. Matgamna has only hinted at his position on the Zionist State and Palestine. His attempt to prevent the SO delegate meeting last Autumn from recognising self-determination for the Palestinians was an ominous sign. Self determination it seems, is alright for 1,800 Kelpers on some rocks in the South Atlantic, but not for million of Palestinians kicked out of their homeland by the imperialists and kept out by the Zionist state.

On Ireland, the Matgamnaites have been more explicit. In SO articles on the protestant working class have codified their abandonment of Permanent Revolution.

The programme of Permanent Revolution for Ireland neither means ignoring the protestant working class, nor seeing the national struggle as separate and distinct stage which must be completed before working class unity can be achieved. It means recognising the existence of a national question in Ireland as a cardinal question that requires a class answer, as against a nationalist answer. Permanent Revolution in Ireland would mean a struggle to drive out the British troops and smash the sectarian state by mobilising the working class on both sides of the border. It would mean fighting for the working class to lead the national struggle in a socialist direction. In this struggle the Orange State will inevitably mobilise the Protestant working class to its advantage. Our strategy must be to show that the protestants have nothing to fear from a working class united Ireland. However, we cannot compromise with them on our goal of smashing the Orange State and establishing a socialist united Ireland. In the course of this struggle, revolutionaries would defend all of the partial interests of the whole working class (wages, jobs, rights etc.). Along this road of probably quite bitter struggle, there is the hope that the protestant workers can be broken from the protestant state. This history of the twentieth century shows that such a dramatic rupture, a dialectical leap, will be the only way the protestant workers will be won to the cause of revolution and a socialist united Ireland.

Against this perspective, Matgamna, despairing of the Republican-led solution he once thought possible and unable to provide a proletarian answer,

The Proposed Internationalist in the WSL

reshapes his programme with plunder from the programme of left reformism and the camp of the two nationalists. He now advances a democratic solution in the vain hope that the protestant workers can be wooed away, rather than broken from, the state they identify with and its imperialist overlord. Thus, in place of the call for a socialist united Ireland, it has been argued in SO that: "Now, when the Tories propose new, foredoomed and very dangerous tinkering with the artificial and undemocratic Six County State, is the time to raise the whole question of an independent and united federal Ireland. This is the only fundamental solution to the tragic mess that successive British governments, Labour and Tory alike have made and continue to make in Northern Ireland." (SO 15/5/82).

No mention of a "workers' republic" or of socialism as the only fundamental solution. This position has since been made even more explicit by the comrade. In the recent series on the protestants, the comrade advanced the above strategy with the following justification: "If we do not have a democratic programme, then we rise no higher than the miserable partitionist Southern Irish bourgeoisie...We must instead be consistent democrats." (SO 3/2/83).

Lenin's enforced "legal" euphemism for the illegal Bolsheviks before the First World War is, indeed rendered more profound. It is given a pure and simple democratic meaning. This position on Ireland is not wrong because it expresses a concern for the protestant working class. We share that concern. It is wrong because it purports to win them by advancing a purely democratic programme. Matgamna can do this with good conscience having de facto junked Lenin's theory of Imperialism and Trotsky's theory of Permanent Revolution during the Malvinas war. We will not give up these theoretical gains so lightly. We reassert that only the struggle for a socialist united Ireland will resolve the national question in the North and break forever the Orange sectarianism of the Protestant question in the North.

THE W.S.L.'s LIQUIDATION INTO SOCIAL DEMOCRACY

At the root of all the current leadership's errors is a liquidationist approach to social democracy. The foremost exponent of this orientation is undoubtedly Matgamna, however he is not alone. The comrades of the old WSL leadership accepted his positions on social democracy at the time of the fusion. The organisation was - we would now recognise - specifically founded on this liquidationist basis.

THE WORKERS' GOVERNMENT

The new WSL was founded on a revisionist and centrist distortion of the Workers' Government slogan. The position contained in the fusion document was based on the articles produced in Workers' Action on the slogan. These articles were themselves a rightist revision of the old I-CL's use of the slogan in its manifesto "The Struggle for Workers' Power." The fusion document showed that the old WSL leaders had abandoned the position on the Workers' Government outlined in the Socialist Press polemics against the Workers' Action articles. It declared: "The Brighton/Blackpool/Wembley decisions to control MPs and to give the majority of votes on who shall be Prime Minister if Labour has a majority to the CLPs and trade unions could open the way to a new kind of Labour Government - a workers' government, instead of the government of the trade union party which merely administers capitalism according to capitalism's own laws, a Labour government potentially accountable to sections of the organised working class. The extent of that accountability would depend on the extent of independent class mobilisation and organisation." (Fusion Paper p.19).

This formulation on the Workers' Government - the old I-CL's formulation, accepted lock, stock and barrel by the old WSL leaders - sums up the organisation's wrong attitude to social democracy. Social democracy mildly democratised becomes the form of workers' government that we have been reduced to preparing for. The electoral college and the reselection process are put forward as the means of making a government potentially accountable. And the out-

come we fight for is to be a left Labour government accountable to the CLPs who, hopefully, will be crowded out with workers. Gone are the clear guidelines of the revolutionary Comintern for the workers' governments that communists fight for. Gone are the key organs of struggle that we call for a workers' government to be responsible to - workers' councils/soviets and workers' militia. These organs are called for separately from our call for a workers' government. The tasks allotted to this government by SO are vague and general. It will be "anti-capitalist". It will, to an extent, dismantle the power of the bourgeoisie etc. Compare this vagueness with the Comintern's prescription for what the immediate tasks of a workers' government would be: "The most elementary tasks of a workers' government must be to arm the proletariat, disarm the bourgeois counter-revolutionary organisations, bring in control over production, shift the main burden of taxation onto the propertied classes and break the resistance of the counter revolutionary bourgeoisie."

Such a workers' government is possible only if it is born out of the struggle of the masses and is supported by combative workers' organisations formed by the most oppressed sections of workers at grass roots level."

In posing the workers' government (read, left Labour government accountable to the Labour Party) as an inevitable stage, we have robbed it of its tactical value as a slogan and built it as a strategic goal into our own programme. This error has paved the way for further liquidation. Given the recent victories of the right, a Labour government elected in the immediate future would not be the workers' government hoped for and called for by SO. This change of perspective has not led us to question our use of the slogan, but to drop even that slogan in favour, simply of a call for a Labour government pledged to Labour conference policies. This is precisely what we have argued for in the Socialists for a Labour Victory (SLV) campaign. We have not addressed demands to a future government on the basis of workers' needs, but on the basis of what the LP conference has decided!

SO's liquidationism is now complete, as it now vies with the SL to limit this campaign to Labour's policies and assures the fake "lefts" that their reformist programme is "socialist" and the adequate basis of a campaign against the Tories. Little wonder that this position leads to the sort of electoralism displayed on the front page of SO No. 122. In an article signed by three people(!) the type of electoral campaign advanced was limited to pursuing CND, producing leaflets and the launch of an "anti-Tory crusade" modelled on the ANL. But what action such a crusade is to take to fight the Tories is far from clear. Certainly there was no mention of the need to fight the Tories and the Labour right through the mobilisation of the working class in direct action against the bosses and the Tories, the organisation of councils of action, the spreading of strikes etc.

SOCIALIST ORGANISER

The paper was launched as a monthly campaigning paper of the broad electoral campaign, the SCLV. Despite its pretence at being broad, it is now the only regularly appearing publication supported by the WSL - while retaining the diluted politics of the broad front period. When it went fortnightly, Matgamna described it as a non-sectarian paper with a roughly adequate, but not scientific, programme. In fact the paper, the voice of the WSL supporters in the labour movement, is opportunist in relation to the left labourites, the women's movement, the peace movement etc.

The paper declared that we were all "Bennites" during the Benn campaign. It was uncritical of Benn's deputy leadership bid - the politics it was conducted on and the way in which the campaign was fought. Our support was as uncritical as it was unconditional. We were silent following Benn's demobilisation of the democracy movement after the Bishop's Stortford deal; silent even when the Labour Herald criticised Benn and Co. He committed a major act of sabotage at this meeting. He paved the way to the right's victories and the present witch-hunt. Yet we have not uttered a word of criticism of him for this. Indeed, in a sense we could not because our conception of the democracy movement and our

Platform for the Tendency

strategy for it, were not independent of Benn. We favoured not a united front and the raising of a clear revolutionary voice, but a "broad based" movement of the left on the same model as the RFMC. To criticise Benn and advance an independent socialist programme would have upset this project. These are not "non-sectarian" politics in relation to Benn and the lefts. They are the opportunist politics of an irrelevant ginger group.

To maintain a fig-leaf for its opportunism, SO regularly opens its pages to an assortment of non-revolutionary elements. No bad thing in and of itself, but for SO these elements actually become spokespeople, for they are not criticised, added to, corrected. Their views are simply presented.

In the week following the Labour conference and the launch of the witch-hunt, the response of SO was given in a front page article by the left-reformist Tatchell. Why no comment from the WSL or one of the leading writers of the paper? The regular opening up of the paper in this way gives it a protective cover - protection, that is, from those like ourselves, who demand that it be an open revolutionary paper.

Of course there is, in reality, one distinctive body of opinion in the pages of SO. It is contained in the voluminous outpourings of one John O'Mahoney. His series on Ireland, Socialism and Democracy etc., are the means by which the paper's liquidationism and opportunism are rationalised and ideologically justified. The series on democracy - an elaborate attempt to prove that bourgeois and workers' democracy are compatible - was a classic in this respect. His front page lead on the Chelsea bombings presented as the paper's editorial proved both that the paper is O'Mahoney's property and that the WSL itself has no public and accountable voice.

All in all the features of the paper that we have delineated, reveal it to be a centrist paper. It is neither a Marxist paper adapted to Labour Party conditions, nor a genuine left-reformist paper with a combined reformist and revolutionary following.

MUNICIPAL CRETINISM

In tandem with the liquidation of our organisation into left-social democracy, we have now a gaggle of Labour councillors. By installing ourselves in the democracy caucuses and committees and befriending the local grass roots lefts, we have been able to rise to councillordom.

In these caucuses, in particular in the shrivelled wards and GMC's of London, we have been able to oust the right and secure their council seats (eg. Islington.)

However we have not done this on a revolutionary programme, but on the election manifesto of the local Labour Party. We have not presented ourselves as revolutionary opponents of capitalism, but as good lefts who can manage local affairs better than the right wing of the SDP.

In the light of this the criticisms we level at Livingstone et al over rate rises are formal, shallow, and dishonest. Given that we did not do anything in Islington to mobilise direct working class action until we wanted to Town Hall unions to support rate rises (!) we were in no position to oppose rate rises when faced with a central government attack. Our emphasis like Tatchell's and other reformists' was on caring for the community not on mobilising the base. No wonder then that when it came down to it one of our leading councillors in Islington ended up managing capitalism in the same way that he had criticised Livingstone for doing. He voted against an already negotiated pay rise for nursery workers in the Labour policy group, has since voted for rate rises and accepted his responsibility as whip to force this anti-working class discipline on fellow Labour councillors.

Against this local government policy we counterpose devoting nine-tenths of our efforts to mobilising the base against cuts, rent rises and rate rises. Mobilise the unions, the workplace, the LP members, council tenants etc., in action councils to stop all cuts, rate and rent rises through direct action. We must demand that a Labour Council carry out such a policy and would support lefts who implemented it, while fighting to oust right wingers who won't support such policies.

Revolutionaries would only stand as councillors on a clear action programme to fight the Tories to

the end, up to and including a clash with the law. Our councillors can claim no such mandate.

SO's record is one of dishonest and disloyal criticism of the reformists and a failure to raise our own programme and mobilise the working class independently of the reformists.

THE WITCH HUNT

Our response to the witch-hunt was wrong all along. We failed to fight uncompromisingly for a united front on: No Registration - No Expulsions - No Withdrawal of Democratically Selected Candidates. These policies were not optional. They answered every line of attack from the right. It was necessary to fight to defeat the weapons of the right as well as the use of these weapons. We should have called on every force, paper and figure, including Benn, on the left, to unite and fight.

Instead we accepted that Benn was not going to wage a serious fight and did not criticise him at all. We refused to criticise the Militant's bureaucratic, big rally style of campaign (though we criticised their use of the courts). In the more manageable arena of the LAW, we blocked with the IMG to oppose committing the campaign to defiance of the register. This was despite the fact that we fought against registration in the CLPD. In that forum we could safely pose as the outside left. Not so in the LAW.

The rationale for these positions was given by Matgamna in IB 21. After a few ritualistic phrases against the witch-hunt and register, he declared: "The alternative is to fight this register until it is established (if eventually it is) and Militant's hard core is purged and then go with groups like CLPD, LCC etc., if they register. We should oppose the registration of the CLPD at its December conference but in general it is unlikely that the Marxists can shape what happens. As a rough rule of thumb I suggest that we use the CLPD as a weather vane, and advise cothinkers in the LP to register (or attempt to register) at the point that it does, or is automatically registered whether it applies or not." Matgamna explains that this cynical blowing with the wind is permissible because the register is not a principle. But comrade Matgamna is it not an *unprincipled tactic* to refuse to fight the register to the very end and thus, hopefully weaken the right's offensive, irrespective of which way our fair weather friends in the CLPD are moving? As with our position on rate rises, our position on the register is no more than left-posturing. It betrays an unhealthy fear of an all-out struggle with the Labour traitors.

ENTRYISM - FROM TACTIC TO STRATEGY

Some years ago in "Workers Action" Matgamna argued: "One of the major reasons for the divisions in the revolutionary marxist left in Britain has been different attitudes on what to do about the Labour Party. This is the major strategic question for militants trying to restructure and remould the British labour movement."

In saying this he was downplaying the central importance of the class's primary fighting organisations (the unions and workplace organisations). In its stead he elevated the struggle in the working class's electoral alternative to the Tories.

We do not reject work in the Labour Party. But we do say that it should be subordinate to an orientation to the militants in the unions and workplaces, currently a minority, who are confused and disarmed after years of Labour misrule and Tory iron rule. We do not accept that the unions which embrace millions can be equated with a reformist political party consciously joined only by thousands (despite official figures). We do not regard them as *equal* pillars of the labour movement in that the unions are the bedrock organisations that workers turn to at times of struggle at the point of production.

Matgamna rejects this view. In line with his earlier position his resolution in IB 21 commented: "In addition there is - it can be said dogmatically - no prospect for an independent revolutionary tendency in the next period competing with the LP."

Competing at what level - at the polls? We would agree. But, the polls are not the only focus - indeed

given that they happen once every 4 or 5 years not the primary focus - for revolutionary activity. It can be said dogmatically that in the factories, workplaces and the estates a really revolutionary tendency could compete with the LP for active members. The LP does not have any honourable record in these fields.

Matgamna is trying to scare people. He is saying that we must stay in the LP at all costs and that outside there is nothing but a sectarian wilderness. Look at the SWP, that proves the case! But comrades, the SWP are in crisis because of their centrist syndicalist politics. Besides, we are not immune from crisis in our ranks and a loss of members. The truth is that Matgamna uses the SWP as a cover for attacking all of those who oppose his positions. He has, like Healy and Pablo before him, turned the tactic of entryism into a strategy to build a left propaganda bloc encompassing the Bennites, not a revolutionary tendency.

To this end he is prepared to liquidate further. In IB 21 one of his key supporters proposes sinking into the mire of Briefing groups or selling Tribune. SO has now become the main campaigner for the formation of Briefing groups. Matgamna applauds and coyly suggests: "In general they (the marxists) must create alternative means of continuing their work. This would obviously be a transitional phase of our work. At a certain point, after the election perhaps, we would have to assess where we are at and perhaps rationalise publications."

In which case SO's fate might well turn out to be the same as Workers' Action's. This liquidationism has cost the WSL dear. We have lost members, making the active core of the fused group small as the claimed membership of each of the two groups at the time of fusion - we have had repeatedly pathetic turnouts for national events. Our branches and meetings take on more and more the loose character of social democratic meetings. Our discipline is dire. Our finances are in a ruinous state. We are witnessing a de facto liquidation into the Labour left. This is a practical consequence of the leadership's theoretical liquidation.

A dramatic turn is necessary. This must include a public self-criticism and a rallying of the revolutionary elements of the membership against the organisation's *centrist leaders* and the elements of the membership who support their line and who do not want to lose their place in the queue waiting for councillordom.

THE DESTRUCTION OF DEMOCRATIC CENTRALISM

Centrism, by its very nature, is forced to twist and turn. It has no definite programme, but steals from the programmes of others in an eclectic fashion. To carry out its twists and turns it must have a malleable membership that it can control. It can brook no revolutionary opposition. It exercises control not via open debate and democratic centralism, but by bureaucratic methods. We do not accuse the leadership of being bureaucrats as such. Their organisational methods are bureaucratic.

This leadership has robbed the WSL of a party organ (for example over the Malvinas.) As for WSR the Matgamna clique fail to produce it regularly and only produced No. 2 for blatantly *factional* reasons.

The Matgamnaite controlled apparatus pushed for a moratorium on debate over the Malvinas only after the special conference voted against them. They have repeatedly postponed the annual conference proper. They have been disloyal to all their opponents. Their attitude to the IT, which in our view was too conciliatory to Matgamna's clique, has been disgraceful. They have slandered the IT and manoeuvred against it. They threatened to expel the IT on spurious grounds prior to the conference. They tried to salami opposition with baseless assertions about an RWL plot. These assertions were made in a quasi-chauvinist fashion with reference to "foreign cults." Prior to this Matgamna had not produced any political arguments against either the RWL or the IT. All along he has been preparing a pre-emptive split or expulsions in order to remove opponents prior to a proper political debate and prior to his further and perhaps final liquidation into left social democracy.

His retraction of the threat came because he had won agreement from the Thornett wing of the leadership that they would work to marginalise the IT. The Matgamnaites are an unprincipled clique. Their only real principle is a hatred for any principle and intransigence (which they mis-call sectarianism). Against Benn and Co they repeatedly refuse to raise principled differences. To the IT and the TILC majority they bare their teeth in rage, whilst they lick the hand of Benn, Race and Co like spaniels. They pull down one principle after another in their desperate anxiety not to be cut off from parliamentary and municipal left leaders and the petit-bourgeoisie of the new labour left.

The time has come to call a halt.

WHAT MUST BE DONE

- The Matgamna leadership must be removed. It has shown that it is not fit to lead by:
- i) social pacifism on the Malvinas war.
 - ii) rampant revisionism on fundamental issues - Permanent Revolution, Imperialism, Ireland, Workers' Government.
 - iii) its disloyalty to the membership - viz the attempted expulsion of oppositionists.
 - iv) its conciliation and liquidation into Bennism and left reformism in general.
 - v) its hostility to building an international tendency-

viz its attitude to TILC.

It is an inveterately centrist leadership, moving rightwards towards social democracy. We ask the coming conference to throw it out and elect a slate which guarantees to implement the following policies:

Establish a programme commission to draw up a programme purged of the revisionism that has discredited the politics of the WSL.

For a major turn towards work in the trade union workplaces and amongst the unemployed. The current struggles in the car industry show that the openings exist for a turn to the militant minority in the factories. In particular we should systematise the production of revolutionary socialist workplace bulletins; the building of fractions and readers groups around the paper and bulletins; building genuine rank and file formations in the unions pitted against the bureaucracy; the fight against the TUC and the Stalinists for a national unemployed workers union and trade union organisation of the unemployed.

For *fraction* work in the Labour Party as the basis of a fight to build a tendency around our revolutionary politics. For a fight against the witch-hunt to the end. No registration. No expulsions. No disbandment of CLPs. For the recognition of all democratically selected candidates.

For open work amongst youth, women, blacks and gays on the basis of a fight for revolutionary politics amongst the oppressed. No more concessions to pacifism, feminism, separatism etc., at the level of programme. The WSL has kowtowed to feminism. The youth work panders to labourism and feminism.
 For a communist working women's movement
 For a revolutionary youth movement.

For a regular party paper and a quarterly theoretical journal as organs of programmatic clarification and as the means to fight for our politics in the working class. For other bulletins/papers (Labour Party, youth etc.) to be produced if logistically possible. For a monthly bulletin for Labour Party work.

T.I.L.C.

We now recognise that TILC cannot be turned into a genuine democratic centralist tendency, simply by proclaiming that this is what we want. What we do propose is that the goal of an international tendency can and must be achieved by a systematic discussion on programme involving all the TILC groups to include elaborated positions on the key questions of:

The Fourth International

Reformism and Stalinism and tactics for fighting them.

Imperialism, Permanent Revolution and tactics and strategy in semi-colonial countries.

The workers states and political revolution.

Principles of communist work in the unions, reformist parties and movements of the oppressed.

This discussion must be facilitated by the establishment of a special commission to translate and circulate all relevant documents. The incoming leadership should collaborate with TILC sections to ensure that a programme based on the method and doctrine of the Transitional Programme, but developed on the key points we have outlined, is drawn up and circulated in an international IB.

The international discussion should also cover the key tactics/perspectives of each national section. These discussions should be absolutely open, with no barriers to criticism and should, for example, include the following:

Labour Party work in Britain

The Labour Party Slogan in the US

Transitional Demands

LOR's attitude to the USFJ etc.

On this basis alone TILC could create the political base to move towards democratic centralism, with sovereign international conferences and an international leadership and apparatus.

RELATIONS WITH OTHER GROUPS

The incoming leadership of the WSL must commit itself to real revolutionary regroupment in Britain. To this end it must break off negotiations with the SL and London Labour Briefing who have demonstrated themselves to be rightward moving centrist groups. The path of revolutionary regroupment must be via fusion discussion with genuine revolutionary organisations. In Britain today that means fusion discussions with the Workers Power Group. They exhibit neither the sectarianism of the RCP/Spartacists nor the opportunism of the SL. The incoming leadership should contact Workers Power with a view to opening such discussion. ■

workers power

'Fortress Islington'

UNDER WHICH FLAG?

THIS MONTH, THE London borough of Islington's 'New Left' Labour Party will be celebrating the first anniversary of their crushing defeat of the SDP in the local government elections. Last May, with a massive 50:1 majority behind them, the council ran up the Red Flag to symbolise their determination to take the fight forward in the 'Socialist Republic' of Islington.

More recently, the Union Flag flew over the Town Hall to commemorate the Queen's birthday. This is also not without its symbolic significance. The last year has seen the council haul down its colours on several fronts. On a small scale the municipal socialists of Islington have been confronted by all the problems that would beset a Labour Government attempting to implement the progressive aspects of its programme within the framework of the parliamentary system. Islington is a living example of just how wrong those 'revolutionaries', such as the Socialist Organiser Alliance, are who think it is possible to smuggle in revolutionary political measures via gaining a Labour majority.

It is certainly true that Islington Council has attempted to introduce reforms. Improved rights for gays in the provision of council housing and a much greater emphasis on women's rights have brought down the wrath of the bourgeois press on the council. Clearly such reforms have to be supported and the council defended on its record on these questions. However, on the most central problems facing the working class the council's record is indefensible. Rather than the much-heralded confrontation with the Tories, the council has taken steps towards confrontation with its own workforce and supporters.

To date, the council has gone nearly all the way to satisfying the budgetary requirements of Thatcher and King, arguing that they have to repair the damage done by their SDP predecessors before they can begin to implement their own programme. For the working

class of Islington this has meant a rates increase of 30% — some six times the rate of inflation.

Despite all the rhetoric about more consultation and more open administration, the council has kept negotiations over pay for several sectors of its employees secret. Thus, a wage rise for nursery nurses, originally agreed to last year, was later withdrawn because the £48,000 it would cost would have infringed the budget allocation. A unanimous decision by the nurses to take strike action resulted in the council 'finding' the money by savings on 'unnecessary expenditure'. Similarly, secrecy surrounds the deal eventually struck with UCATT to end a strike by the council's building workers.

That those who, despite their protestations, in practice maintain the interests of the banks and money-lenders (who last year drained £14.6 billion from local councils nationally) must end up in confrontation with the working class has been most clearly shown in Islington by the rate increases. The retreat from opposition to all such increases to support for a 30% rise can be seen in the shifting position of Socialist Organiser supporter, and Labour Chief Whip, Alan Clinton.

Writing in London Labour Briefing last November, Clinton said that raising rates, "would be an attack on working class people just as unpleasant and unnecessary as all the other ones we are trying to avoid." The same 'Marxist' councillor soon began to change his tune. On the question of the pay award promised to the nurses he voted for its withdrawal to produce a 10-9 victory against the nurses. Mr. Clinton, however, was not yet finished. Drawing no doubt on the long years of experience he has in 'revolutionary' politics, he redoubled his efforts when it came to the full council vote on the rate increases. This time he not only ensured 'party discipline' (i.e. the discipline of the party's council group, not the discipline of the earlier pledges to the working class) he intervened to speak in favour of the 'Civic Budget' rate rises and all. The vote was won by fifty-one to one, allowing the lone SDP councillor to present himself as the guardian of the interests of the rate payers, including the working class ones.

That the 'left' councillors of Islington cannot fulfil their promises and



Labour Briefing after the election (inset: Labour Leader, Deputy Leader and Chair of Group); Socialist Organiser offers advice on rates increases - but their most prominent supporters ignore it.

cannot even recognise what their priorities should be, has been shown outside the council chamber as well. In a predictable response to the Labour Group's decision to go for a rates increase, the SDP mounted a demonstration for the night of the full council meeting at which the vote would be taken. The Labour councillors, who had done nothing to mobilise the trade unions in an effort to implement their own programme, now called on them to stage a counter-demonstration to the SDP. Not surprisingly this appeal fell on deaf ears amongst the workers of Islington.

The policies of Islington Council, their minor reforms notwithstanding, will lose them working class support. The experience of Lambeth and Lothian has already shown that a future defeat in Islington will not merely mean a return to the position as it was before last May. On the contrary, the right wing will be greatly strengthened both inside the Labour Party and outside it. In Lothian, the Labour councillors lost their seats — but a thousand workers lost their jobs.

In Workers Power 35, we argued that communists in such situations had to fight for an uncompromising policy not only against rate and rent increases but for increased spending at the expense of the bankers and finance houses.

To those who might argue that councillors in Islington cannot realistically take such a stand because they would be defenceless against government attack, we reply that such an attack was always absolutely inevitable, even on the basis of the Labour programme. That is why it is necessary, from the beginning, to campaign for active working class mobilisation to enforce even a programme of reforms, let alone the programme upon which revolutionaries would stand for election. The central weakness of the Islington Labour Party is that it saw its major task as simply getting elected. Experience is already proving that an electoral victory without mobilised and prepared rank and file working class support, is hollow indeed. Such a mistake is to be expected of reformists, no matter how left their private opinions or public statements.

For those who regard themselves as revolutionaries, however, what is involved is a conscious rejection of central principles. To stand for election, even at local level, on the platform of the Labour Party is to mislead the working class supporters of that party about the tasks and battles that lie ahead. It is to deny the need to fight independently for a communist programme. Where communists do not have the forces necessary to stand

their own candidates — and it is no disgrace to recognise the reality of weakness — they are obliged to present their programme in terms of demands on those who profess to stand in the interests of the working class.

Wherever such forces attempt to push through progressive measures, as has sometimes been the case in Islington, revolutionaries of course must attempt to unite with them and their supporters in defence against bourgeois attack. This means proposing and taking part in every possible joint action whilst retaining the right to criticise the fundamental weaknesses of the reformists and their policies, seeking to win their supporters to the revolutionary programme.

This has not been done in Islington. The supposed revolutionaries are completely indistinguishable from the reformists and feel obliged to defend the positions the council has been 'forced' to adopt. This is exactly the opposite of defending reformists against reaction, despite the positions they adopt. It is still to be seen if these 'revolutionaries' will also defend the council against the working class. ■

by Dave Jenkins (Islington NALGO)

NOTHING NEW FROM THORNETT CONTINUED FROM PAGE 9

of one or another single demand by official union bodies. Thus it was with the biennial resolution to the T&GWU conference on the sliding scale of wages in the late 1970s. In recent years it is the slogan 'open the books'. Thus in the general prescription of Alan Thornett's WSR3 article and the particular interventions of the WSL in the recent Cowley dispute the main emphasis was placed on launching a struggle around this slogan. Hoping to relive the golden days when Cowley shop stewards established an 'open the books' committee, Thornett and Co. presume that the 'open the books' demand - if fought for - would lead inexorably to the only answer to capitalist crisis - 'work sharing on full pay' and a 'workers government'.

In the recent Cowley dispute they placed their major emphasis on the fight to 'open the books' alongside a call for a strike committee elected by the stewards and bringing out all British Leyland workers. But these schematists have failed to understand the dynamic essence of the method of the Transitional Programme. At the heart of the system of transitional demands is the struggle to organise the working class for power through the struggle for workers control against the employing class. That is why we have argued that the key tactic

that militants should have fought for in Cowley was the *factory occupation*: a tactic that would have guaranteed no scab could ever work, kept the workers together and established control over the plant making possible the real opening of the books and files of the management. And they failed to raise the call to rip up the 92 page 'Slaves Charter' which would not only have served to galvanise solidarity action throughout Leyland but also opened the road of struggle for workers control for all British Leyland workers.

As a legacy of their factional feud with Healy the Thornettites have always opposed the demands for workers control in nationalised industries and fought instead for workers management. This only compounds their inability to understand how the method of the Transitional Programme applies to the living class struggle in Cowley. Instead they are left with an operative strategy which consists entirely of trade union demands and methods and a token demand from the Transitional programme. The latter thus appears a rather unsuitable trade union demand in the context of the battle at Cowley.

Last time Thornett and Co set sail with this perspective they suffered shipwreck. They were rescued from their desert isle by Matgamna's craft - bound for Social Democracy. Their hopelessly falsified class struggle perspective and their lifeless

dogmatic 'Trotskyism' meant that faced with Matgamna's 'creative' new ideas, and his apparent success they had no answer. Despite their claim to be fighting revisionism now they still cannot formulate any sharply distinctive practice either in the Labour Party or in the trade unions.

Despite their talk of turning to the working class and fighting for Transitional Demands they were as keen as the Matgamnaites on 'Health workers for the Full Claim' which tailed the left NUPE officials and fought for none of the much trumpeted 'transitional demands'.

Similarly despite their criticisms of Matgamna's adaptation to Labourism, they have neither used the Socialist Organiser's pages to denounce his programmatic revisions nor have they an alternative perspective for work within the Labour Party. In documents presented to this year's conference they praise Benn's stand on the witch-hunt as fulsomely as the 'Bennite' Socialist Organiser has ever done. "The Bennite left in distinction to the crypto-Stalinist currents around the LCC and Clause IV has stood fairly consistently against every aspect of the witch-hunt. Benn for example has strongly defended Militant." (IB48) No sign here that they'd be any more intransigent opponents of Benn than the lead editors on Socialist Organiser. And no sign either that they've any alternative to the rotten bloc being cobbled together with Socialist Action

and an unwilling crew of reformists under the banner of Socialists for a Labour Victory. Thorne himself was openly calling for a re-run of the old SCLV back in IB36, and he was projecting this as the means of taking the programme into the democracy movement. "It is necessary to bring programme centrally into the democracy movement. This is why the time is ripe for another SCLV type initiative." (IB36) It is a sign of just how far down Matgamna's road Thornett really is. He is now an advocate of forming what the old WSL denounced as a rotten bloc. And his literary assistant Harry Sloan has gone into print in SO 28.4.83 lamenting the slow start of the new SLV and urging it to get down to its promised campaign for Labour policies.

Thornett and Co. now say they want to fight Matgamna. But they won't be able to do that with the dusted down platform of the old WSL or with a modified form of Matgamnaism that pays more lip service to 'turning to the proletariat' and does so without breaking with the centrist politics of the WSL. Only a radical re-appraisal of the traditions of the old WSL can clear the way to a real fight against revisionism. Without it the alternatives will either be disintegration via a suicidal re-run of the old WSL (a demi-semi-mini-mass party), continued imprisonment in Matgamna's opportunist outfit or a jump down the poisoned well into the Socialist League. ■