# British political myths - the signing of Magna Carta in 1215

'MAGNA CARTA as the supposed foundation of British liberty was the fabrication of Sir Edward Coke, who died in 1628. The Great Charter of 400 years earlier attempted to define the relationship between King and barons in the latters' favour. Its elevation into a charter of rights was the product of Parliaments's need, for propaganda purposes, to find in history any precedent of counterbalances to King Charles' authority, an approach to which Coke, the foremost lawyer of his age and staunch opponent of royal prerogative, was well suited.

Whatever sound practical purpose there was to Coke's claim (his Instances were published by Parliament itself in 1642, after his death) vanishes later. Burke saw in Magna Carta the origin of Parliament itself, and was outdone by Chatham who called it the "Bible of the English constitution", in a long and fanciful tradition where loyalty to the "mother of parliaments" and, later, Empire, outweighed all pretence at historical accuracy.

Agreements between barons and their feudal overlord, the King, were an essential component of the feudal system, and the charter between King John and his barons is one among many others. It is an elaboration of the accession charter of Henry I. Its greater length, the importance given in it to the Church and the greater power given to the barons are explained by circumstances.

The English barons of the time were no longer holders of estates in Normandy, and thus disaffected from the King's ineffectual attempts to regain his domains there, especially at a time of popular discontent and difficulty in raising the taxes required for war.

In 1213 John quarrelled with the Pope and only reluctantly accepted Langton, the Pope's nominee, to the archbishopric of Canterbury. Langton from the outset was a guiding hand in the barons' revolt. The King increased the tax (scutage) on a knight from two marks to three, which northern barons refused to pay, in a rebellion which gathered strength after the King's defeat at Bouvines in 1214. John could not drive a wedge between Church and barons, and the latter, with the support of London, refused compromise . The King was forced to concede at the point of the sword at Runnymede in June 1215.

No sooner had he signed than the King renewed his war against the barons, with papal support this time. The Charter was damned and the barons excommunicated, although this had less effect on the barons (who invited Philip, later Louis VIII of France to head their cause) than John's death in 1216. As soon as they were rid of the hated John the barons turned against the foreigner, accepted Henry III, and ignored or dropped from the rewritten charter of 1216 and 1217 the more rigorous strictures against royal power.

The Charter contains none of the cherished notions of later ages, trial by jury, freedom from arbritrary arrest, control of taxation by representatives of the people, and so on. The benefits fall almost entirely to the baronial class. The villeins or serfs, the overwhelming majority of the population have no rights whatsoever, except as they are baronial possessions, which it was the aim of the charter to protect.

In comparison to previous charters, the rights conferred on the trading classes are generally less, and those of the Church greater. Chapter 13, however, grants London and its citizens all their "ancient rights and privileges". It would fall to the barons of a later age, the judges, to put an end to this, denying them the right even to control their public transport.

Perhaps the most famous tenet of Magna Carta is that of Chapter 39: "No freeman shall be arrested or detained in prison, or deprived of his freehold or outlawed, or banished or in any way molested, and we will not set forth against him, nor send against him, unless by lawful judgement of his peers and by the law of the land." But since only trade unions have sought to apply this principle on an effective scale, many a charter has been passed since, to deny that right, not envisaged by the makers of the Great Charter.

**Historic Notes**

# Statute of Labourers

"DEATH COMING into our midst like black smoke, a plague which cuts off the young, a rootless phantom that has no mercy for fair countenance. Woe is me of the shilling in the armpit! It is seething, terrible ... a head that gives great pain and causes a loud cry... painful angry knob... Great is its seething like a burning cinder." So did a Welsh lament describe the hideous Black Death which travelled across Europe from the East in the lost years of the 1340s.

Modern science may know of the rat-borne flea which carried the bacillus and even of the more terrifying pneumonic form which travelled through the air. Yet the old lament more powerfully communicates the fear and mystery of this pestilence in which, as Froissart laconically put it, "one third of the world died."

Whatever we know about the mechanics of the plague itself, the reactions of men to this, one of the world's most frightful calamities (modern historians estimate Europe's population to have halved by the end of the century), will remain for us an object of wonderment.

## Mankinds survival

How did they even survive let alone reconstitute civilisation apparently unchanged, though of course it could not really be the same after such a catastrophe. That there was hysteria alongside heroism is comprehensible. There were bizarre reactions of men to calamity, the outbreaks of anti-semitism (why particularly in Switzerland, Alsace and Germany?) which reached such proportions that even the Pope pleaded for mercy. Why the flagellant movement, penitents in groups of 200 or 300 marching through Europe scourging themselves, and in the German areas organising such pogroms that Jews were virtually exterminated? And yet the flagellants who became a law to themselves supplanting the Church hierarchy, "vanished as suddenly as they had come like night phantoms" when the authorities turned on them, seizing and beheading.

Even more inexplicable, however, is what one historian has called the plague's "greatest social disruption - a concerted demand for higher wages." Peasants, artisans, craftsmen, clerks, even priests were affected. Within a year of the plague passing through northern France, textile workers at Amiens had won three wages increases. In the guilds there were strikes for wages or shorter hours.

The response of rulers everywhere was repression. The English rulers in emergency passed the first 'Statute of Labourers' (23 Edward III) in 1349 without so much as waiting for a Parliament. All were required to work at the same pay as two years before. There were penalties for refusal to work, for leaving of employment to seek higher pay, and for the offer of higher wages by employers. Reissued in 1351 when Parliament reassembled, it provided that a vagrant serf could be forced to work for anyone who claimed him and outlawed the giving of alms to 'able-bodied beggars'. This statute formed the basis of all the 'conspiracy' laws that succeeded one another down the centuries in an effort to thwart combination of workers.

## Rulers repression

Yet the immediate sequel to this legislation shows that, even though it was passed by authority at a time of unprecedented suffering when the plague had scarcely abated, it was a belated and ultimately futile attempt to impose subservience which men had already rejected.

How they had the courage to do so then we shall perhaps never know. The testimony of employers in 1352 - that wages were double or treble the pre-plague rate - of the increasing brutality of the succeeding legislation (twice in the 1360s), with fines being replaced by gaol, stocks in every town, the branding of fugitives with F on the forehead with hot irons, is proof that the legislation was unenforceable. Indeed the tide of rebellion had swelled so far that it culminated in the great Peasants' Revolt of 1381.

The observer today is principally struck with awe at the courage of the British people at this time when their rulers (and even historians with hindsight) can only have expected subservience and submission.

One other aspect of the Plague Legislation is of interest. That is its fundamental difference in approach from the attitude of rulers in Britain today. For all the brutality of branding, whipping and flogging of the 'able-bodied poor', and the consistent attempt to lengthen by statute the working day, the great object of the legislators was the driving of men into employment.

The Statute of Labourers denounced, not only those who chose "rather to beg in idleness than to earn their bread in labour". It stipulated that every able-bodied man under sixty with no means of subsistence must work for whoever required him. Alms-giving was prohibited. Reprehensible and self-interested in its underlying greed, which strove down the centuries to lengthen the working day, inveigling in the words of an economist of 1770, against the "conduct of our manufacturing populace who do not labour, upon an average, above 4 days in a week", still its aim was to eradicate what men saw then as a crime against God and society - unemployment.

## Thatchers Plague

Even the destruction and havoc of the Plague would have puzzled the men of those days less than today's reversal of the laws on which they singlemindedly built the nascent capitalist system, based on their need to employ, to exploit. The Plague would have been easier to comprehend as punishment visited by God on a sinful world, than the dotage of the system they created, which in its decline enacts lack of work as its 'summum bonum'.

Today, as then, the most difficult thing to comprehend are the unpredictable reactions of men at times of crisis. Would that we might react against our Plague as our forefathers did.

# HISTORIC NOTES Have enough and say 'Ho'

THE LEVELLERS (see issues 33, 34 and 35 of The Worker) did not arise solely because of the liberating effects of a struggle against the 'divine right' of kings. Just as they prepared the ground for future democratic and egalitarian movements, so they reaped from the intellectual seeds of brave men and women before them. In this and the next issue of The Worker we look at two of these movements, the Peasants' Revolt and the Lollards.

"Be ware or ye be wo.
Know your friend from your foe.
Have enough and say 'Ho!'"

So ran one of John Ball's famous rhyming letters to the people of England, calling them to revolt. Such letters could be easily transmitted by word of mouth, and show, that even in the 'dark ages' the people of Britain were struggling for independence.

Ball, "a foolish priest in the country of Kent" had been freed from his third prison sentence for egalitarian and heretical sermons. His liberators were the band of men led by Wat Tyler - in revolt against government attempts at wage fixing (Statute of Labourers 1351), the Hundred Years War, and the increasing Poll Taxes (levied two years running) to pay for it. Virtually all we know about Tyler is that he was killed in front of the king by the mayor - Sir William Walworth. (To this day the Walworth Road in Southwark is named after him.) But Ball had already come to the notice of the authorities, and some reports of his 'sermons' survive to this day.

"Ah! Ye good people, the matters goeth not well to pass in England, nor shall not do till everything be common, and that there be no villeins not gentlemen, but that we may be all united together, and that the lords be no greater masters than we be. What have we deserved, or why should we be kept thus in servage? We be all come from one father and one mother, Adam and Eve; whereby can they say or show that they be greater lords than we, saying by that they cause us to win and labour for that they dispend?"

Ball's proposal was to gather and march to London to petition the young King Richard. And it is a testimony to the chord he struck, and the organisation of thousands forgotten today that a reported sixty thousand people from Kent, Sussex, Essex, Bedford "and of the countries about" began the march to London. The frightened landowners attempted to rout the army more than once - and failed. The peasant army, swelled by artisans from the town, took control of Southwark, Lambeth and the Tower.

Realising his weakness, Richard used a trick which we ourselves often see today. "Withdraw ye home into your own houses and into such villages as ye come from... and I shall cause writings to be made and seal them with my seal... containing everything that ye demand. And to that intent that ye shall be better assured, I shall cause my banners to be delivered into every bailliwick, shire and counties." So ran the French Ambassador's report of his message to Ball, Tyler and Jack Straw.

The trick worked. Many were satisfied with these promises. Many more were confused. The hungry, frightened 'army' found itself divided and the authorities were able to manoeuvre a confrontation with those who were not satisfied with an empty promise only. They were defeated, the leaders seized and executed, their heads displayed on the Tower as a warning to others. "These tidings anon spread abroad, so that the people of the strange countries, which were coming towards London, returned back again to their own houses and durst come no further." And Parliament hastily retracted all the concessions made.

'Order' may have been restored, but that does not always mean tranquillity. No sooner had the 'peasants' revolt' been defeated, than riots errupted in all parts of the country, with monasteries, manorial houses and other institutions being sacked. No sooner had these 'unrests' died down than a new and more determined challenge emerged, in the form of Lollardy.

## HISTORIC NOTES

# After the Peasants' Revolt

WHEN WE TALK of the Peasants' Revolt of 1381, we mention with pride the names of Wat Tyler, Jack Straw and John Ball, but too often we never know about the other men and women who lived, fought and died then. By reading assize rolls of the day, we can put more flesh on the bones. Here we give the stories of several men who led the rebellion at a local level in Cambridgeshire.

RICHARD DE LEYCESTER and JOHN BUK (of Ely)

On the Saturday after Corpus Christi, Richard, who owned a shop, along with John Buk and others, marched through the town of Ely, encouraging everyone to rise in insurrection, and organising them to go and destroy those who they said were disloyal to the King and against the people. On the Sunday, Richard led a group including skinners, wrights and other labourers and craftsmen to the monastery, where he spoke from the pulpit and said that they should burn down the houses of traitors and cut off their heads.

On the Monday they broke into the prison and freed some of the prisoners. Then Edmund of Walsyngham, one of the king's JPs, was condemned to death by Richard. The lord was taken by John Buk to a place of execution where he was beheaded by John Deye of Willingham. John Buk paid John Deye 12d, with money taken from Lord Edmund's purse.

At the trial Richard told the judge "I cannot make further answer, and hold myself convicted." Both Richard and John Buk were sentenced to be hanged and drawn immediately. All their property was seized by the king.

ADAM CLYMNE (of Ely)

On the Saturday after Corpus Christi, Adam and many other insurgents entered the house of Thomas Somenour and took away various documents and wax used for the seals of the king and the bishop of Ely; they set fire to these.

On Sunday and Monday Adam proclaimed that all law officers who were carrying out their duties should be executed. Adam carried a banner to rally the commoners, and declared on behalf of the Great Fellowship that any one who carried out service for, or obeyed their lord would be executed. In the trial it was said that Adam had taken on Royal powers; this he denied, but was found guilty and hanged and drawn forthwith.

JOHN SHIRLE (of Nottingham)

At his trial, John Shirle was described as a vagabond because he had travelled from county to county during the disturbances. The "crime" he was hanged for was to try and rally the people after the rebellion had ended. He had talked to a crowd in a Cambridge tavern on the day of the proclamation of the so-called King's Peace.

He said that the lords and ministers of the king should have been drawn and hanged instead of John Ball. He said that John Ball was a true and good man, who told of how the king and the lords were oppressing the people and how it was for that he had been killed. John Shirle said that the death of John Ball must be avenged - that the King and his ministers should die. At his trial John Shirle stood his ground and did not deny the charges.

Historic Notes

# LOLLARDS - NEW OUTLOOK

"ALL wars are against the principles of the New Testament and are but the murdering and plundering for the glory of Kings." "Many of the trades of the commonwealth, such as goldsmiths and armourers, are unnecessary and wasteful." "The property of the Church should be distributed to the poor and the clergy should keep to their vow of poverty."

These were some of the conclusions reached by the Lollard movement in 1395. Conclusions which ensured that they would be suppressed as subversives.

The Lollards, or 'mumblers' had emerged at the same time as the Peasants' Revolt in 1381, although the links between the two movements were not direct, for the Lollard movement started from the centre of the British theological establishment - Oxford University.

John Wycliffe, a fellow at Oxford, had risen to influence as a hireling to the crown in its attempts to resist the power of Rome abroad, and the Church within. This humourless, pedantic scholar was paid to use theology against the theologians, and in doing so found himself arguing against Church and monarchy: and ordered to 'shut up or else'.

But already his attacks on the corruption of the Church and clergy, on the mysticism of doctrines like 'transubstantiation', and the elitism of the Church had been taken up by others in the 'lower orders'. They were especially attracted to the argument that "All Christians and lay lords in particular, ought to know holy writ and defend it." For the first time the content of the Bible was translated into English and ordinary men and women could 'learn the words of the Gospel according to their simplicity'. The Church could no longer claim the authority to tell people what to think and do, and the grip of the authorities on the minds of the 'masses' would never be the same again.

The Lollard movement was more than just a religious sect. It was a fight for the right to literacy. Men and women risked heavy punishments merely for reading, writing and worshipping in their own language. In that sense, too, it was a nationalist movement. And more important, it was a movement for intellectual independence - for these blacksmiths, carpenters, ploughmen and weavers interpreted their bible in a very different way from their 'superiors'.

Surprise, surprise. Pope and King suddenly forgot their quarrel and agreed on the one thing that all ruling classes have in common: that such heresy infecting the lower orders should be suppressed, so that, in the King's words, "There may not one spark remain hid under the ashes, but that it be utterly extinguished and speedily put out." The history of Britain ever since has shown the vanity of that hope.

The introduction of the death penalty by burning for Lollardy could not persuade men and women to stop thinking their own thoughts. Bibles and tracts in English rather than Latin were smuggled out of London around the country. Literacy classes were held in conjunction with collective bible readings and discussions held in back rooms, kitchens, windswept fields ... in secret. Organisation and communication between different groups was maintained - the only reason we know of the Lollards at all is because of the prosecution brought about by those who betrayed. But nevertheless, this did not stop discussions with the kindred Hussite movement in Bohemia, nor the organisation of an abortive uprising in 1413.

One rebellion, scores of executions, and over a hundred years later the tradition of democratic debate, learning, organisation and independence of mind in opposition to the state was still thriving with the Lollardy movement.

## Historic Notes

# Class wars in 1549: part1 of a 4-part series

IN THE SECOND week of May, 1549, the Duke of Somerset (then Lord Protector of the realm for the child King Edward VI) received a report from one of his spies telling of a disquieting new development in the ceaseless ebb and flow of class warfare. On the previous Sunday, 5th May, some two hundred men, mostly weavers and tinkers and other workmen, had gathered at the small cloth-making town of Frome and set to work tearing down hedges and fences which the growing bourgeois class had erected around their commonly-held lands.

Lords, bishops and justices were sent out to appease the precocious ruffians who were trying to save their homes and livelihoods. Bishop Barlow, their tactician, made one crucial error in his negotiations for the rulers. He thought that the rebels were so ignorant that they were being led into action by a group of powerful leaders. He tried to trick these "leaders" into stepping forward by asking the men to send a delegation with a petition of their grievances to him.

The men chose their delegates. They went to see the Bishop, who promptly clapped them in jail, assuming that would put an end to the trouble.

Rather than quelling the people's flame, Barlow's action stoked it up. Peasants and workmen all over the south gathered in anger and solidarity, uttering such subversive opinions as: "Why should one man have all and another no thing?" They boasted that if one of their number were arrested then 10,000 others would come to his rescue.

Further uprisings were to follow. All were made necessary by the appalling conditions the peasantry was being pushed into.

A particularly violent confrontation took place in Kent where the expropriating gentry gained the upper hand and on May 13th hanged several peasants as an example; then they fortified Canterbury with heavy artillery borrowed from the Crown's arms monopoly. Soon British peasants, workmen and tradesmen would be up in arms, governing one city and besieging another as part of their fight against the hideous destruction which baby capitalism was causing.

They were to bring down one form of Government, put the ruling class in panic and engage in pitched battles with the King's mercenary troops. How this came about will be considered in the next three weeks in "Historic Notes". Enough will have been said this week if we can learn from Bishop Barlow's mistake. The massive action which was carefully coordinated by the oppressed classes in May four hundred years ago was itself only possible because of a long tradition of struggle against oppressors on which the peasants of 1549 could draw, so intensifying class contradictions into an antagonism which soon changed the course of history. The peasants and handicraft workers created all the wealth of society and the revolts were the real motive force of development made by a class, not a group of leaders, good or bad.

## Historic Notes

# Class wars in 1549: part 2 of a 4-part series

THE CAUSES of the peasant revolts in 1549 were numerous. One writer summed them up at the time by saying: "The most substance of our feeding was wont to be on beef, and now it is on mutton. And so many mouths goeth to mutton, which causes mutton to be dear."

In reality sheep were eating up beef, men and their small, private strips of land, their common holdings, and everything of value for the peasant class was being destroyed. Most couldn't afford to buy the mutton which grazed on the lands once owned by them as taxes were being forced up with prices, less people were required to work on the land, houses were being pulled down and rents were going up far above the means of the traditional peasant. People were being physically removed from their land and told to accept vagrancy as a viable alternative.

Many spoke out against the evils of this change. John Bayker, a self-described "poor artificer or craftsman, wrote: "Is it not a pitiful case, to come into a little village or town where there hath been twenty or thirty houses and now are half of them but bare walls standing?"

When the peasants came together to oppose this destruction they were not just fighting against enclosures but they were openly defying the Government and all it stood for. If we look at the complaints of the rebels in Norfolk we see that all of them were directed against a class enemy which no longer intended to rule and administer a peasantry and small-scale productive forces; it needed to seize their land for its new commercial enterprise, destroy the peasants and exploit the resulting class who owned nothing and could only sell their labour power.

In 1497 Cornishmen had marched on London in protest against Henry VII's raising of their taxes in order to finance his war efforts. When they reached Blackheath Fields the King's men attacked and massacred two hundred of them. In 1549 they were wiser and joined with men from Devon and the neighbouring counties to form a strong army. They stole weapons from the yeomen and squires and allied themselves with the gentlemen equally affected by the dramatic economic changes of the time who were able to offer them their knowledge of warfare.

Local enemies they speedily imprisoned. They took over villages and churches and the whole of St Michael's Mount and rebuffed all the desperate promises of reforms handed out to them by Government officials. They were disciplined and well armed, and at the beginning of July 3,000 of them laid siege to Exeter.

They underestimated the forces of Exeter and the Government's troops sent to destroy them, but lacked no sense of courage and ingenuity; at one stage the tinners amongst them started to dig tunnels to attack the city craftily by sneaking up under its walls. Smaller uprisings occurred elsewhere in the country, but in Norfolk the struggle for land, wages, food and employment took on an organised military form.

So threatened were the rulers that power struggles erupted among them, as they still do, if one ruler failed to deal effectively with the rebels then he could be replaced. Though not united like the Red Army in China four hundred years later, the peasants and others, through disciplined action in many parts of the country, were making it impossible for their common enemies to rule in the old way. It was a sign of the ruler's weakness that they had to employ foreign soldiers for their offensive, a kind of primitive NATO of cut-throats, in order to make up their number. An account of how the people's armies fared in Devon and Norfolk will appear over the next two weeks.

## Historic Notes

# Part 3 - Class Wars 1549

PEASANTS of the South West, with other workmen and sympathetic gentlemen, had formed an army in defence of their lands and lives. They laid seige to Exeter, a crucial supply and political centre for the area, controlling most of the surrounding villages. The government's troops were sent to destroy them.

Their first major battle took place at Fenny Bridges where the longbows and bravery of the Cornishmen proved useful allies against the fancy mercenaries from abroad. Their seige caused the people of Exeter to question the political structure of their city, where all wealth and political power was in the hands of a few, selfish, rich merchants and the like.

The relief of Exeter was essential unless some of the monarch's and businessmen's richest supporters were to be destroyed. A fierce battle took place in the now sleepy village of Clyst St. Mary. The rebels dug in and the strength of their conviction made them repulse the government troops several times and capture many of their weapons. However, they were eventually overcome; though they never surrendered, a thousand were killed in hand to hand fighting over two days. Others managed to retrieve artillery, morale and energy and they escaped with them to other parts of the South West ready for the next confrontation.

On August 6 1549 Exeter was relieved and the government forces occupied it as a base from which to begin their political reconstruction of the area. Their first priority was to get rid of the last outposts of militant resistance. This was urgent, for peasants all over the South, in Hampshire, in Sussex, were joining to consider the possibility of a new rising. Ironically, some met in "The Crown" inn in Winchester, and they plotted to rob the cathedral clergy to get funds.

The government's hungry army took to indiscriminate plundering of villages and town houses. The horrendous 'pacification' procedures began. Gallows were set up on every street corner and village green, and anyone remotely suspected of supporting the revolutionaries was severely dealt with. A Protestant priest was commissioned to pass many sentences. He hanged Catholic priests who had helped the peasants in chains from church steeples, garbed in all their religious finery. Many who had sympathised had their lands confiscated and loyal personages benefited from this plunder.

The rebel troops at this time were amassing and preparing for battle again. Battle, unrelenting and bloody, broke out at Sampford Courtenay later in August. And this time the back of the rebel army was really broken. The government appointed a fierce man, Sir Anthony Kingston, to destroy once and for all every scrap of resistance. This he did with grim efficiency and relish. Practically everyone put into positions of responsibility by the people was dealt with. The new owners of the land were executioners of feudal owners and peasant sharers. Changes of ownership and control came about through revolutionary violence, though at this time it was violence against the fragmented world of peasant producers.

The concluding part of this series follows in Issue 35.

# Historic Notes 1549 - Revolt in East Anglia part 4

**Concluding this series on the large scale combat waged by peasants and artisans fighting for food and land in the mid sixteenth century, we look at what happened in Norfolk.**

THE NORFOLK men had established an efficient, organised tradition of defence against the exploiters. As enclosures of their lands increased, as more were driven into vagrancy and unemployment, their forces of opposition intensified and they moved from defence to attack. On July 8th, 1549, they gathered and in speech after speech they informed each other of the need to revolt and stop the closures. Local skirmishes ensued as the rebels took over the landowners' lands and massed an army. Then the whole of East Anglia began to rise.

The gentry fled, leaving a few hardies, and the army forcibly entered Norwich, the county town. They started to govern it themselves. They formulated careful accounts of their main grievances against the impositions of late feudal rule and took them up where they were, realising that their own actions were more productive than petitions to the King.

Under the so-called "Oak of Reformation" the people administered their own justice and condemned the evil actions of the feudal lawyers who had oppressed them. Here they also held free, open debate to resolve their doubts and differences.

The Government's forces were tied down in the South West in their war with the peasants, the rest were in London protecting the threatened Lord Protector. However, local landlords began to collect troops and guns for themselves. The rebels responded accordingly. Having overcome the city they made life so dangerous for central government that eventually an army was sent out against them. Their crucial encounter came in August at Dissindale.

The peasants sang: "The country gnoffes, Hob, Dick and Hick,/ With clubs and clouted shoon, shall fill the vale/of Dussindale/With slaughtered bodies soon." In fact it was to be the murdered peasants' bodies that filled the vale. The Government men ruthlessly massacred them saying they were worth no more than beasts. And after their victories they engaged in horrific "pacification" measures like those undertaken in the South West.

In all ten thousand people protesting courageously against raised rents, stolen lands, unjust taxes, lack of food, violent inequalities and administrative corruptions, were killed in 1549. The scale of this massacre was massive, for the population of Britain at that time was only about three million.

Looking back at these years we see the bravery and militancy of our ancestors fully borne out and get some idea of the great sacrifices they were prepared to make in the protection of their primitive forms of producing food and goods, no matter how inadequate.

The lessons subsequently learnt by the class warriors were handed down a century later to the troops who fought to remove the king and create a greater democracy. Having brought ourselves closer together by our industry and union organization, having built the base from which real collective civilization can emerge, having controlled nature more effectively, we should remember our ancestors who did not enjoy such mastery and unity, and complete our task fully. Every factory or school we let the bourgeoisie close is a sell-out on history.

# Historic Notes – 16th century expropriation

ROBERT CROWLEY, the Archdeacon of Hereford between 1559 and 1567, was a man who constantly annoyed the church authorities and rising bourgeoisie with his political poems and pamphlets and popular printing presses. He annoyed them because he identified with those oppressed by the accumulation of capital and because he articulated a critical understanding of political ideas and events. Though he professed to hate rebelliousness, the impetus behind his work, the tradition and contemporary movement of which it was part, were revolutionary, working class.

Of the expropriating bourgeoisie he said: "Yea, there is not so much as a garden ground fre from them. No remedye therefore, we must nedes fight it out, or else be brought to the lyke slavery that the French men are in." He doesn't blame vagrancy, caused by the enclosures, on personal indolence so much as class oppression. When he tells beggars to find work he is condemning the system, exactly like our own, which deliberately creates unemployment.

> ...there are pore people
> Welmoste innumerable,
> That are dryven to begge
> And yet to worke they are able.

Crowley could see only two classes and the ruling class was characterized by its individualistic, self-seeking corruption:

> The charitie of rich men
> is now thorowe colde
> And this is a Citye
> in name, but, in dede,
> It is a packe of people
> that seeke after meede
> For officers and al do seke
> their owne gaine,
> But for the wealth of the
> commons
> not one taketh paine
> An hell without order I may
> it well call
> Where everye man is for him
> selfe,
> And no man for all.

He plainly denounced those stealing land for profit to their faces and asked them to 'Caste down the hedges and stronge mowndes, That you have caused to be made Aboute the waste and tyllage growndes.'

He called the class enemy 'Cormerauntes and gredye gulles' What pained him was their callous destructiveness:

> They take our houses over our heades, they bye our growndes out of our handes, they reyse our rentes, they leavie great (yea unreasonable) fines, they enclose our commons... These idle bealies wil devour al that we shall get by our sore labour in our youth, and when we shall be old and impotent, then shall we be dryven to begge and crave of them that wyl not give us so muche as the crownes that fall from their tables.

And it is this insight, rather than the contradictory, weaker side of Crowley's politics where he calls for compassion, charity and obedience, that is of most relevance to us today. Capitalism is destroying our country in its absolute decline as it did when it first appeared. No less terrifying than the enclosures are the closed factories and schools and hospitals. No less horrifying than the emergence of wage slavery is its problematic continuation. Crowley only partly recognised that the dispossessed peasants were the future fathers of revolutionary theory and practice, but he did fully realise that they had claims on each other and material resources far in excess of those who stole from them.

# Historic Notes — Stow's 'A Survey of London' 1598

'THE INHABITANTS of the towns about London, as Iseldon, Hoxton, Shoreditch and others had so inclosed the common fields with hedges and ditches that neither the young men might shoot nor the ancient persons walk for their pleasure in those fields; their bows and arrows were taken away and honest persons arrested". So wrote John Stow, tailor, freeman of the Merchant Tailors Company of London in 1598.

His indignation was shared by the citizens of London "who", he wrote, "congregated in a great number and followed a turner dressed in a fool's coat, who was crying, 'Shovels and Spades, Shovels and Spades'. So many people followed it was a wonder to behold. Within a short space of time, hedges about the city were cast down and ditches filled up; such was the diligence of these workmen that soon all was made plain". Approvingly Stow described how the King's Council had to accept the wishes of the people of London, so commanded the Mayor to see to it.

Stow was proud of London. He quoted Geoffrey of Monmouth the Welsh historian as saying that the city was founded by Brute descended from Aeneas the son of Venus, but as a sophisticated man agreed with Livy that this was pardonable as humans like to think of their achievments as more sacred and of greater majesty. He also pointed out that London was a town of note, founded by King Lud before the arrivals of the Romans.

His heroes are not the nobles but the citizens, the artisans, grocers, poulterers, fishmongers, tailors, goldsmiths, silk weavers, who used some of their wealth in creating beautiful buildings, schools for poor boys such as St. Pauls, bringing sweet water to the city and giving charity to the poor.

He would have admired but accepted as commonplace the heroism, the calm and the orderly re-generation of London by its citizens after the great fire caused by the Nazis. He would have have understood the new artisans, the firemen, the bus drivers, the builders who again brought sweet water and made all plain.

He would not understand or approve of the way London is under attack by governments, Labour and Tory and above all by Borough Councils, Labour and Tory. The wanton destruction of thousands of houses, the creation of places of desolation. He would have condemned the driving out of London of its trades and its tradesmen; he would scorn the idea that the city should become merely a seat of government or a tourist trap.

In a very modest way the Communist Party of Britain (Marxist- Leninist) has endeavoured in its pamphlet: "London Murder" to show how greedy rich men and foolish arrogant councillors have brought London and its citizens to their present sorry state. Reading Stow's "Survey of London" and the CPB(ML)'s pamphlet "London Murder" gives a glimpse of the dangers for London but also the capacity of its people to rebuild and recreate after disaster, natural or man-made.

For pleasure go back to Stow . Read how "in the holidays all the summernyouths are exercised in leaping, dancing, shooting, wrestling and casting the stone while maidens trip in their timbrels (whatever they were) and dance as long as they can well see". Read of the rebels Jack Straw, Wat Tyler, of whom Stow disapproved. Nevertheless he described Wat Tyler as a "rebel upon whom no man durst lay hand". That is not a bad epitaph for a leader of the people.

# HISTORIC NOTES Levellers as pioneers

THE LEVELLERS are usually presented as being a small fringe group of extremists having only an insignificant role in history. Yet in truth they had at the time of the Civil War by far the largest, best organised party in the country, the first democratic party in our history, with strong links with the masses and the first soldiers' councils in history, not seen before or since until the Soviets in Russia.

Although they acted in the interests of all classes of working people, the Levellers were composed almost exclusively of the more independent class of workers, craftsmen, apprentices and small traders, men whose traditional status and livelihood were under attack by the new capitalist order.

The rising merchants had become more divided from the master craftsmen and journeymen as the wealthier masters had ceased to work at or even manage their trades, especially in London which had become more capitalist than anywhere else in England. This gave rise to a separate class of journeymen who could never afford to become masters as they had in the past. So a division of interests occurred within the Livery Companies.

Small masters and craftsmen were still members of the companies, but no longer did they have any control over trade: the large merchants had usurped the right to nominate the officers who fixed wages and prices.

The question of suffrage was very real to these men as they fought for an equal voice in the companies and the right to run them in their own class interests. The battle raged during and after the war, ending with the defeated workers leaving to form their own distinct class organisations, the Trade Unions.

Very aware of their downgrading of status and economics, these workers formed the backbone of th the Leveller movement. Many joined the army during the war to fight their enemies and ensure that the post-war settlement restored their rights.

The landless urban and rural proletariat never joined the Levellers -- they were so abysmally poor and dependent on their masters that they could not afford the luxury of holding their own opinions.

In the country the existence of base tenures meant that the peasants dared not oppose their landlords. These base tenures were lands held on the condition of fines for commutation of service, fines extracted on the renewal of a lease, the threat of non-renewal of lease, raised cost of lease, etc. If a peasant did not follow his landlord's wishes completely, he ran the risk of having his lease terminated or the price of it raised by several hundred per cent.

As long as these were the conditions of holding land, democracy and freedom of speech could not function, so the Levellers made the abolition of base tenures one of their main demands, repeated in every petition.

But apart from this demand, the Levellers had a complete lack of any agrarian programme, which was necessary for the link with the peasantry which would have made them an invincible force.

The civilian Levellers were pioneers in the organisation of modern working class parties. They had their own newspaper, a party colour (green), indirect election of leaders and regular subscriptions which paid for the printing of petitions and propaganda, and for the roving missionaries.

Women had total equality in the party. Once, they collected 10,000 women's signatures on a petition which 1000 of them presented to parliament.

It was in the Army, however, that the Levellers were most active and powerful. As they said, the New Model, "no mercenary army", was composed of men who "made some conscience of what they did." So they had their own ideas when, after the defeat of the king in 1647, parliament voted to disband most of the Army, send the rest to Ireland, make peace with the king and settle the presbyterian religion on the country.

These were soldiers who had joined up voluntarily in many cases to fight for a cause. Four-fifths of them were literate and thus able to read Leveller literature for themselves and debate for what they were fighting. They were certainly in no mood to see the country return to an intolerant right-wing presbyterian dictatorship presided over by their class enemies, the big merchants and usurers, still less force this same dictatorship on the Irish who were fighting for their freedom.

This, coupled with the fact that parliament offered only 6 weeks' pay to cover 48 weeks' arrears, ensured that only seven per cent of officers and a handful of soldiers volunteered. Instead, they drew up a petition for back pay, an end to the press gang, allowances for war widows and orphans and indemnity for acts of war.

Parliament branded the petitioners as enemies of state, to which the officers and men replied by electing representatives called Agitators, 2 per troop, levying subscriptions (4d per man) and voting to resist disbandment.

Parliament then sent men to seize the army's siege train and munitions, but the Leveller soldiers attacked and took them for their own use. The soldiers then abducted the king from parliamentary custody in order to prevent a counter-revolutionary restoration, and helped the peasants petition for an end to tithes, an end to enclosures and an end to rotten boroughs.

The stage was set for a full-scale confrontation. Next week, Historic Notes follows what happened.

# HISTORIC NOTES The Levellers - Part Two of our series on the fight for freedom in the Civil War

Last week, we saw how the Levellers, unwilling to see the creation of a mercenary army, unwilling to go to Ireland to suppress their brothers there, unwilling to submit to a right-wing presbyterian dictatorship presided over by rich merchants, and desirous of receiving their their wages, abducted the king, Charles, and stood their ground to prevent a counter-revolutionary restoration. This week, we take up the story.

THE ARMY assembled at St Albans and for two months debated everything which concerned them. A Council of the Army was elected, of all Agitators and officers above a certain rank (including Ireton and Cromwell). The army's Agitators wanted to march on London and force parliament to do its will, but the weighting of officers on the Council ensured that a compromise was adopted.

Next, the Levellers drew up an Agreement of the People, which was intended to be accepted by all the people to form the basis of the new society. It included the abolition of rotten boroughs, a biannual parliament, freedom of conscience, equality before the law (MPs and aristocrats were immune from legal proceedings) and an end to the press gang.

The General Council of the Army debated the Agreement at Putney Church from 28th October to 11th November 1647. During hot debate on the extent of the franchise, the rift between the propertied Grandees and the property-less soldiers became clear. It was agreed that the army and civilian Leveller representatives would meet at Ware jointly to sign the Agreement.

The king's escape from army custody strengthened the Grandees' hand, as the soldiers were well aware of the need for unity in the face of a new civil war. The Grandees were quick to capitalise on this, and by threats and promises induced most of the men to drop the agreement and sign the officer's draft.

One regiment refused, mutinied, drove away its officers and rode to Corkbush Fields at Ware, proposing to rendezvous with the people and adopt the Agreement. Isolated as they were, the Grandees were able to crush their revolt by court-martialing the regiment's Agitators and sentencing 3 to death. After throwing dice for their lives, the loser, Private Arnold, was shot. The strength of feeling aroused was shown by the burial of Arnold by the people, with full military honours and mourners by the thousand.

Having been temporarily pacified by promises and violence, the army allowed itself to be dispersed to garrison towns in January, 1648, which severely weakened the revolutionary movement. The Army Council continued to publish declarations, though it was now entirely under the control of the Grandees. The Levellers showed they were still active by publishing a pamphlet calling for the annual election of Sheriffs, JPs, parsons and militia officers. These demands hit directly at the means by which the exploiting classes held power, their legal system, their propaganda mouthpieces, and their police. But in the name of unity against a greater enemy, the demands were not pressed during the Second Civil War (May-August).

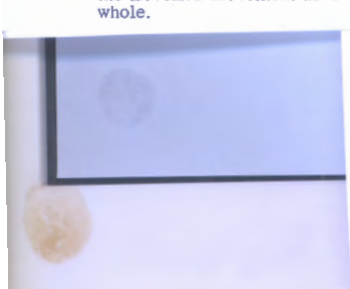
The Irish had been taking advantage of the soldiers' refusal to fight by driving out English settlers and retaking their own land. But parliament decided to strike while the army Levellers were weakened: once again, they started to raise an invasion force.

Next week we conclude our three-part series on the Levellers with a look at how Cromwell took advantage of the weakness of the movement to smash it. This brave chapter in British history ends with an assessment of the Leveller movement as a whole.

# HISTORIC NOTES The Levellers - Part three of our series on the fight for freedom in the Civil War

IN THIS issue we are printing the concluding part of our 3-part series on the Levellers, with a look at the way in which Cromwell took advantage of the weakness of the movement to destroy it.

This brave chapter in British working class history ends with an assessment of the Leveller movement as a whole.



Cromwell himself took charge in order to pull out all the stops. Troops had to be raised, a way had to be found to get round parliament's notorious meanness; food, pay, clothes and medicines were all needed in unprecedented quantities.

Soldiers who refused to go were dismissed without arrears of pay (over a year's arrears in many cases) and sent home in disgrace. Even so, in some regiments over half of the men chose the latter course as the most attractive. The radicals who would not enlist were replaced by a mercenary rabble of royalist pow'a and deserters.

The Levellers asked what right the army had to inflict on the Irish the sort of slavery they endured when they and the Irish had a common cause - freedom. They called on the soldiers to elect Agitators again, which they did. Scroop's horse regiment halted at Salisbury on May Day, 1649, on the way to embarcation. They refused to go further, instead drawing up a petition for pay, pensions, arrears for those who refused to fight, and arguing against the slaughter of the Irish at the Grandees' behest.

Other soldiers rode to join them. In all, 1000 men assembled at Burford in order to parley with Cromwell, who rode out to meet them. After Cromwell's treacherous surprise midnight attack, with 340 prisoners taken of which 3 were sentenced to death and shot, the Leveller movement within the army was finally broken.

The Leveller party was still active, publishing its most revolutionary manifesto (signed by 10,000) but it could do little without the army. There was much sympathy for them in the army, but the soldiers left now felt that the threat of a Scots invasion led by Charles II and the Dutch war meant that unity was needed above all.

In the formation and programme of their organisation, the Levellers tackled all the problems of their day, anticipating many later struggles. Their programme was aimed at nothing short of the transfer of power from the exploiters to the exploited. It included, in addition to the demands referred to above, the tilling of waste lands in common by the unemployed, a graduated income tax, abolition of prisons, abolition of the death penalty for all but the most serious crimes, and legal proceedings to be held in English rather than French or Latin which the poor could not understand - and much, much more.

HISTORIC NOTES

# 17th Century :

# William Walwyn's 'The Bloody Project'

THE second Civil War, started on May Day 1648, led the British people into further fratricidal warfare. After two years of peace, this disruption was bound to cause a great questioning of motives. From the heart of the renewed horror a great revolutionary pamphlet, 'The Bloody Project' was written by one of the most pacific of the Leveller leaders, William Walwyn.

His pamphlet expresses the disillusion of the people who were becoming aware that they were fighting a bourgeois revolution - sacrificing themselves for the growing bourgeoisie. They had formed a Puritan coalition but this had constantly broken up into self seeking factions.

Walwyn writes that the main quarrel in their kingdom is "a putting down of one tyrant to set up another." If this continued and the English people fought for one or other of the tyrants it would be they who would suffer while "the King, Parliament, great men in the City and Army" acquire "Honour, Wealth and Power".

In Walwyn's opinion to "shed blood for money or to support this or that interest" and do it "for a cause not rightly stated" is sinful as it is "to engage in war to kill and sley men, but upon a lawfull call and invitation from the Supream Authority." This authority could only be provided by a body elected by and for all people. If this were established people could obey the orders to fight because the orders would be their own. Walwyn wants every individual to be politically aware and know that political decisions are made by everybody, from the individual conscience the "good of the Nation springs".

Many of our ancestors, like Walwyn, called for a science of Revolution. We now have that science: we have had our bourgeois revolution. Let us unite, as Walwyn advised, and make socialism in Britain.

When Scotland and England united in 1707, it set the scene for progress throughout Britain...

# 1707: The Treaty of Union

**WORKERS, SEPTEMBER 2014 ISSUE**

Great Britain was born as a state in 1707. The Treaty of Union was ratified by the Scottish Parliament on 16 January 1707 amidst much furore and rhetoric and a large measure of disdain and distaste in both England and Scotland. After ratification by the Parliament in Westminster, the separate parliaments of England and Scotland ceased to exist. They were replaced by a Parliament of Great Britain. They had already shared a ruler, Queen Anne of the House of Stuart.

The battle of Culloden, 1746. Scots – including highlanders – actually fought on both sides.

This union was a formal recognition of the ascendancy of capitalism over feudalism in all of this country. The absolutist Stuart monarchs of the 17th century toyed with union; the brief but productive Commonwealth (1649 to 1660) made tentative moves in that direction. Once united, the combined resources and talents of the two countries were at the service of capital, then in its dynamic phase.

Some Scots cried, "We are bought and sold for English gold." That was not far off the mark in a way, though not by direct bribery. Budding Scottish capitalism was weak compared to that in England. It had been mortally wounded by recklessly pouring capital into the ill-

fated Darien Scheme. This damaged the Scottish economy on a scale greater than the failures of RBS and others in 2008.

In the 1690s Scots venture capitalists had proposed the establishment of a colony, Darien, on the Panama isthmus in Central America. This was an attempt to match the burgeoning imperial ambition and colonial acquisitions of English capitalism. The scheme aimed to cut the time and cost of transporting goods to and from China and Asia and to establish Scotland as a power to match France, Holland and England. An estimated £400,000 was raised; half the total capital available at that time throughout the country below the tribal Highlands.

The one person who had visited the Darien peninsula warned against the venture. Lionel Wafer, a buccaneer and ship's surgeon, told all who would listen about the heat, humidity and fever-plagued conditions, but he was ignored. The colonisers of the first five ships that sailed from Leith in 1698 were attacked by disease and by the Spanish. A third of them, around 400 people, were dead within months of landing. Over the next two years others arrived to meet a similar fate. In all, nine ships were lost; 2,000 men, women and children were drowned, buried, captured by the Spanish or sold to English plantation owners. Half the capital, £200,000, was lost.

## Bankrupt

Scotland was bankrupt; English capitalism took advantage. The treaty of 1707 did not allow for equal terms of trade. The Scottish linen industry was impoverished by cheap imports brought from Ulster by English merchants. Scottish coal owners had to sell cheaply into the English market.

There were bloody but relatively short-lived anti-Union riots. However there was little enthusiasm outside of the Highlands for a return to the absolutism of the Stuarts. James Edward Stuart, the Old Pretender and half-brother to Anne, received only marginal support for his claim to the throne in 1715. That was despite riots in London against the Hanoverian king, George I.

The Stuarts always wanted to be restored to the crowns of Scotland and England; they intended to rule as their forefathers from London, not Edinburgh. By the time of the 1745 Rebellion of Charles Edward the Young Pretender, the Stuarts were even more marginal though supported by French loans. Their army reached as far south as Derby, before retreating in the face of the delayed British response.

The battle of Culloden in 1746 ended the uprising. The British army there included three Scots battalions and two of Highlanders. Nonetheless the vengeance wreaked afterwards on the people of the Highlands was nothing short of genocide. That began a process

carried on by their own clan chiefs and landowners through the Highland Clearances which took place over the following 100 years.

Across Britain other changes came with the rise of modern industry and of the proletariat that grew with it. Workers dug coal, made iron and textiles, built ships and railways and much more. In the 200 years since the last Jacobite Rebellion, the population of Britain rose from under 10 million to over 50 million, more than 95 per cent of us being workers.

Our own organisations, unions and political parties and labour movements born of those unions were uniquely non-sectarian and nationally based. A common interest against capital overrode earlier divisions of religion and location that formed the background to the political events of the 17th and early 18th centuries. For the most part British workers moved on from religious and linguistic backwardness, some of which is still prevalent in European trade unions to this day.

Since industrialisation Scottish workers have been an important part of the British working class, whether exercising their skills, science and creativity or organising in defence of our class. The union of the two countries into a Britain made by workers has made us, with our national institutions and organisation, the guardians of a working class future for this, single, nation. ■

# Historic Notes — Adam Smith and the economics of destruction

THOUGH it appears to everyone that Britain is now being governed by the most illiterate and unthinking persons that any state could be cursed with, these statesmen claim that their acts are based on sound economic theory. The master they seem to be following is the Nobel prize-winner, Friedman, though he feels that the Tory Government is not following his precepts in all their splendid simplicity! So we have on television a programme chaired by the ex Labour Prime Minister's son-in-law, where the American-from-Europe may display his wares in the market place, and Friedman goes to Downing Street to confer with Thatcher.

To date he has extolled the successes of Hongkong and South Korea and has made great play with the name of Adam Smith. We were given the spectacle of the cameras in Smith's University, unnamed. Did the University - was it Glasgow or Edinburgh? - not wish to be named and if so why? It would be worth our while to look at the work of Adam Smith and other "Classical Economists" to see exactly which thimble holds the pea. For the moment, let us put on one side Karl Marx. He has always been as great an embarrassment to economists as gunpowder was to castlebuilders.

The great era of Classical Economics was 1800-1850; it is sometimes claimed that it began with the publication of Smith's "Wealth of Nations" in 1776. Adam Smith lectured in Edinburgh in 1748 and was a Professor of Logic and Moral Philosophy in Glasgow from 1751 to 1764, and for 160 years was recognised as the most influential economic writer. Through such bodies as the Political Economy Club, the British Association and the Royal Society, Smith influenced the thinking of many in positions of power.

They were the men for the period, a time of change as population and national income exploded; the population rose from 6 million in 1700 to 22.7 million in 1871. National Income rose from £50 million in 1700 to £916 million in 1871. Nevertheless real wages did not start to rise until 1800. This was the period of expansion in manufacturing, cotton, railways and in agriculture. Smith's underlying theory was of "harmony", that a benevolent order was to be found in the interaction of phenomena, not quite "god in the machine", but coming from a good Scot, of course, moral. It was the "pursuit of self-interest". Smith wrote "It is not from the benevolence of the brewer or the baker that we expect our dinner but from their regard to their own interest. We address ourselves, not to their humanity but to their self-love and never talk to them of our necessities but of their advantages". Competition provided the framework and it worked by means of the price system.

However, Friedman and the Tories have discarded parts of Smith's thinking, who believed that competition eliminated excess profits and allocated capital and its resources when the technology, processes, tastes and total resources are all in a state of flux. He also believed competition itself to be part of the growth process, ordering the markets, increasing productivity and leading to further capitalist accumulation. Adam Smith always insisted on the framework of justice, sympathy in each man for the feelings of others, leading to private rules of behaviour and the formulation of positive laws of justice. He accepted the conflict between masters and workmen over levels of wages if masters combined to depress wages and he recognised the conflict of individual interests and social interests.

"The Wealth of Nations" is worth studying if only to see how our new tyrants through their economist, Friedman, now using British people as experimental rats, demean and degrade Adam Smith, using the dross and throwing away the gold.

Britain was the first country to industrialise. That was before our rulers turned against manufacture...

# The Industrial Revolution and the transformation of Britain

**WORKERS, MAY 2012 ISSUE**

Astonishing, unprecedented changes occurred in 18th and 19th century Britain, which heralded an utterly different way of life. Britain was the first country to become an industrial nation and embrace a mechanical age. Its industrial revolution broke a tradition of economic life rooted in agriculture and commerce that had existed for centuries.

Britain was the first to industrialise because a conducive mix of internal circumstances cleared away hindrances: there was a national identity, the peasantry had disappeared, tenant farmers and labourers weren't so tied to the land, feudal regulations had gone, there was free trade across the country, a commercial revolution had taken place, the Civil War had ended royal monopolies, the aristocracy was involved in commerce and capitalist farming, our island was free of foreign armies with lots of natural resources, rivers and ports.

Salt's Mill, Bradford: the textile mill was built in 1851. Now it's a heritage centre... Photo: Workers

There was a leap forward in society. Previously the only sources of power available had been wind and water, human and animal strength. These were gradually displaced by machines and inanimate power. Industrialisation demanded new skills, especially in the precision engineering, machine tool and metal-working trades.

New expertise was needed to build and maintain machinery, operate boilers, drive locomotives, mine coal and tend spinning-mules and power-looms. Work grew more specialised, while the new type of worker could command high wages, belong to a trade union, maintain a family and aspire to education.

There was a spectacular trans-formation of the coal, iron and textile industries with the development of steam power to drive machinery, as in the cotton industry, which had an amazing effect on the productive energies of the nation. Factories no longer had to sit by rivers, and could run 24 hours a day with shifts.

The factory system developed fast in the textile areas of Lancashire, Yorkshire, the East Midlands and in certain parts of Scotland. Fresh sources of raw material were exploited. Capital increased in volume and a banking system came into being.

Coal was the fuel of the industrial revolution. Production doubled between 1750 and 1800, then increased twenty-fold in the nineteenth century. Pig-iron production rose four times between 1740 and 1788, quadrupled again during the next twenty years and increased more than thirty fold in the nineteenth century.

The inventors of the new machines − people like James Watt, James Hargreaves, Richard Arkwright, Samuel Crompton, Edward Cartwright − were as much products as producers of the new conditions. As conditions grew ripe, the great technical inventions came. A combination of rapidly expanding markets, a supply of available wage labour and prospects of profitable production set many minds to work on the problem of increasing the output of commodities and making labour more productive.

## Child labour

Child labour was widespread during industrialisation, particularly in textiles. In the early 18th century it is estimated that around 35 per cent of ten-year-old working class boys were in the labour force, rising to 55 per cent (1791 to 1820) and then almost 60 per cent (1821 to 1850). Factory owners were looking for a cheap, malleable, fast-learning labour force and found them among the children of the urban workhouses, who were only lodged and fed, not paid.

Industrialisation allowed the population to increase rapidly. In 1700 Manchester, Salford and suburbs had perhaps a population of 40,000; by 1831, it was nearly 238,000. Other great manufacturing

centres underwent a similar swift expansion and often hamlets grew into populous towns. The estimated population of England and Wales in 1700 was about 5 million; in 1750, 6 million; in 1801, 9 million; in 1831, 14 million. In 1801, there were only 15 towns with a population of over 20,000 inhabitants; by 1891 there were 63.

Advances in farming such as an increase in the acreage of land under cultivation, crop rotation, machines for planting seeds, selective breeding of animals and better use of fertiliser expanded food production. Forced enclosures of land concentrated it into the hands of bigger landowners. That was blatant robbery but the process produced enough food for those flocking to growing industrial cities and meant smallholders became either hired labourers or worked in industry.

The balance of population shifted from the south and east to the north and midlands. Men and women born and bred in the countryside came to live crowded together as members of the labour force in factories. Mass production demanded popular consumption. Average incomes rose though the rich benefited more than the poor. It brought higher standards of comfort and made a wide range of consumer goods available such as matches, steel pens, envelopes, etc.

The increasing demands of industry meant that good communications were of fundamental importance in order to transport things and people. The difficulty of travel that was typical of medieval times onwards was ended. Better surfaced roads, canals, steam packets at sea and eventually railways transformed the economy and people's lives. The village was no longer the world.

The transformation caused by the industrial revolution brought suffering as well as improvement, notably in the long working hours, overcrowded urban conditions and use of child labour. But life had been harsh in the preceding rural existence where individuals were left to fend largely for themselves. The industrial revolution concentrated attention on economic and social defects and brought collective solutions to the problems people faced whether through the formation of trade unions, a factory inspectorate or demands for health and urban planning.

Britain was for a while "the workshop of the world". Latterly its rulers have destructively turned against manufacture. Now, wanting a future, the people and manufacturers must press for its return

The destruction of the old Highland society took with it not only a class opposing the rise of the bourgeoisie − the feudal Scottish clan leaders − but also trampled on the rights and well-being of tenant farmers trying to eke out a living...

# The Highland Clearances

**WORKERS, JUNE 2011 ISSUE**

The Highland Clearances offer an example of the way class contradictions are resolved by the tyranny of capitalism. The ending of the clan system helped pave the way for the rising industrial bourgeoisie to focus its attention on developing industry rather than defending its internal borders. In the process of enclosing vast tracts of land for sheep, the tenant farmers were forcibly removed and thousands transported.

A significant event in this process was the clashing of two armies, representing contrasting economic systems, at Culloden Moor in the Scottish Highlands in 1746. The Duke of Cumberland's forces, acting for King George's government, routed Prince Edward's Jacobite army, last hope of the exiled Stuarts. In doing so they broke decisively the power of ancient, tribal clanship that had existed in Highland society, bringing into line the final area out of kilter with the rest of bourgeois Britain. After Culloden, the Highlands were refashioned and incorporated into a modern, capitalist environment.

## The old order broken

Following Culloden, the ancient feudal rights and organisation of the clans were abolished. No exception was made: the Gordons, who had stayed loyal to King George, were treated no differently from the other clans. Even the most harmless symbols of clan loyalty were prohibited: wearing the kilt and playing the bagpipes were forbidden, a ban not lifted for 30 years. The intention that "a sheriff's writ should run" in the Highlands as certainly as it ran everywhere else was achieved. Subsequently, all the Highlands observed the laws of the bourgeois parliament in Whitehall and lived on the same system as the whole of Britain.

Almost immediately, roads were constructed that made the demise of the highland clans complete. Between 850 to 1500 miles of roads were hastily built; in effect military, strategic roads that split the block of Highland clans into fragments. This extinction of the older society completed a process started long before, which alone made it possible for Britain in the next hundred years to become the workshop of the world. There were now no feudal lords to be conciliated or cajoled by the rising employing class.

## Clearances and suppression

The Highland society, which had operated for generations, made no economic sense to modern bourgeois ways. Tenant farmers scratched a living off the rugged terrain, paying only small rents to chiefs whose wealth did not match that of their lowland contemporaries. By the end of the 18th century, the surviving chiefs and new landowners realised that serious profit could never be made that way.

In England the capitalist agrarian revolution was transforming agriculture. New farming techniques and mechanisation together with enclosure of formerly common land made farming more productive and profitable. These property upheavals had been going on in England since the 17th century in a much more gradual way. In the Highlands, however, these agrarian improvements had been delayed, partly because some landowners were too poor to put them into practice, partly due to the complex clan system that regulated and restrained Highland society.

The Battle of Culloden, painted by David Morier two years after the event.

With sudden rapidity the Highlands were driven through a series of changes that had taken hundreds of years in England. After 1746 harsh suppression and legal measures undermined and destroyed what remained of the clan system. Realising that their old ways were over, the clan chiefs transformed themselves into landlords who saw their clan retainers as an unprofitable expense. Landowners began to view their territory as a source of economic revenue instead of military men. More became absentee landlords and sought to convert their acres into cash.

The cry of "sheep devour men" was heard again. Landlords slowly disengaged themselves of all their followers who could not be used as shepherds or compelled to rent small farms. A first big clearance took

place on the Drummond estates in Perthshire in 1762. In 1782 the Glengarry estates, Inverness-shire, followed suit with the rent roll rising from £700 to £5,000 in 32 years. It is estimated that as many as 200,000 people were evicted in clearances by the turn of the century. These early clearances were for sheep; later ones were for deer. Between 1811 and 1821, some 15,000 tenants were removed from the 1.5 million acres of the Countess of Sutherland's estates. Buildings were set alight to force the tenants to leave; many were herded onto ships. Many thousands of Highlanders left their homes and were forced to make new lives on the Scottish coastal plains, in the Scottish lowlands or across the oceans. Some were drawn to the burgeoning industrial revolution: for instance, many went to work at the New Lanark Mills that opened in Lanarkshire in 1784. The clearances continued until the mid-19th century, when most farmers had been cleared.

Cheviot sheep, bred for toughness and able to thrive in difficult weather conditions, could generate large incomes, perhaps more than ten times as much as cattle on the same land. But the tenant farmers had to be removed. Many, who retained their loyalty to the chiefs, complied. Those who objected found they had limitations imposed upon them.

## Landowner laws

The law strongly favoured the landowners: the farmers had no leases and were merely tenants at will who could be evicted from their homes with only minimal notice. There were incidents of resistance. In some cases brutal methods were used to evict tenants. The armed forces were called upon by landowners in times of trouble.

As it transpired, landowners needed funds to carry out the clearances and the returns from sheep farming were only temporary. Indeed, by the end of the nineteenth century that industry had collapsed and the Highlands were drastically depopulated. Its economy still does not thrive to this day. The callous land grabs in the Scottish Highlands were not accidental but flowed from capitalism's drive to displace and uproot all pre-existing economic forms, to remake everything in its own image, and crush everything getting in the way. We can learn from this and be warned! ■

Historic Notes

# 200th anniversary of the iron bridge

The 200th anniversary of the building of the first iron bridge is upon us. It marked the culmination of 70 years work four miles up the valley at Coalbrookdale. The work was done by men denied opportunity for development of their skills elsewhere.

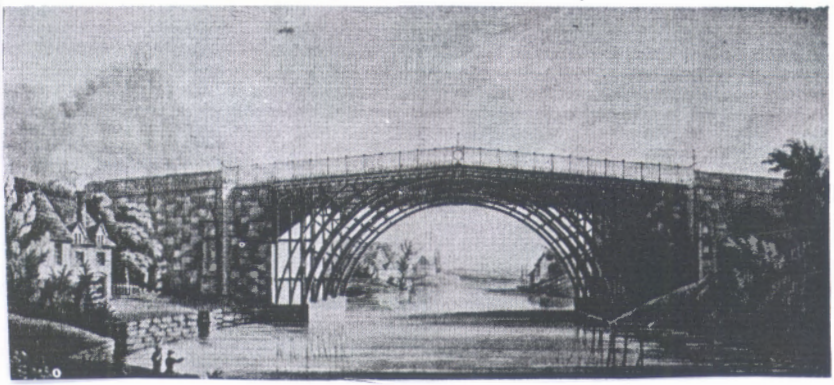
Abraham Darby innovated the process of smelting the iron. He staked his fortunes on the idea to use coke instead of charcoal and set up his iron furnaces on the banks of the Severn in 1709.

The supply of relatively cheap iron was a major technical breakthrough. During the 18th century, iron gradually took over from wood for making ploughs, wheels, machines, pit props, and from stone for certain building purposes. Under the management of Darby's son and grandson, the Coalbrookdale works continued to play a key role. This was no accident, but stemmed from the traditions and beliefs of the Dissenters who made the revolution. Abraham Darby's father was a part-time farmer, part-time nailmaker and locksmith. This was normal in the Black Country — there were said to be 20,000 such smiths within a ten-mile radius of Dudley Castle. The overwhelming majority of these, masters and men alike, were Quakers. In the cities the power of the trade guilds was still strong, and because the guilds were closely linked to the Church of England, it was practically impossible for a Dissenter to find employment or to start a business in any old-established trade centre. It was Dissenters who pioneered new trades in hitherto rural areas, such as the Black Country. They had made the area into a stalwart of the Parliamentary side in the Civil War. Although Radicalism had lost much of the fire in its belly after the restoration of Charles II and the establishment of the Church of England, the spirit survived. Although business success rapidly divided craftsmen into master and men, nevertheless the master remained outside the constitution. Their children were sent to the Dissenting Academies, the first schools to teach the sciences.

Meanwhile 50 miles away, the rural backwater of Coalbrookdale was being transformed into an industrial centre. In 1711 Newcomen invented a steam engine designed to solve the problem of drainage of mines, which allowed mining of over 20 ft depth to start.
In 1722 the first iron cylinder was cast at Coalbrookdale. Wrought iron was still the main form of iron, and in 1749 Abraham Darby II used coal successfully in its smelting, but it was still their skill in casting which paved the way. Out of the molten womb of these same furnaces were born improved engines with rotative motion which wound coal from company mines, powered forge hammer, rolling mill and cylinder boring machine; James Watt's separate condenser, Heslop's double cylinder winding engine.

From then on their fame derived from their connections with transport, paving the way for locomotives. In 1777 Abraham Darby III turned his back on the profits to be made in casting cannon to be used in the American War of Independence, and instead the original furnace was rebuilt and enlarged to cast the great ribs for the iron bridge. The parts, weighing 378 tons, were brought to the site by water, hoisted by rope, both halves simultaneously, and secured at the crown. This was the inspiration of Telford's bridges, the new length of span and economy over stone being vital to the transport revolution of the time. Although the suspension bridge soon took over (in 1826 the Menai Straits was built with a single span of 580 ft.), it was the use of iron that was the key.

Whilst not romanticising a picture of an industrial 'Merrie England', remember that these inventions did not derive, on the whole, from dreams of vast profits. Safe profits lay elsewhere. This minority of entrepreneurs believed in themselves, their righteousness, their importance to humanity. The attempts of Mrs Thatcher today to claim their reflected glory in the name of free enterprise, whilst destroying their work, would make these good Quakers turn in their graves.



Historic Notes

# How the Times have changed

"The Times" was founded on January 1st 1788 by John Walter, coal merchant. He turned to journalism after bankruptcy in a printmaking venture and was described by a contemporary as "as dishonest and worthless a man as I have ever seen." The chief source of the paper's income was "suppression fees", bribes paid by various interests, and not least the government, for selective coverage of news.

It was his son, John Walter II who, on taking over the editorship in 1802, began the tradition of more impartial collection of news for which "The Times" became famous. He maintained his own channel steamer, connected to a special train, ran his own pigeon service and courier post, and was one of the first to use the electric telegraph. "The Times" account of the battle of the Trafalgar was published days before the government, so prodigal of men's lives in its mismanagement of the war against Napoleon, even knew.

"The Times" based its success on the adoption of the most advanced printing systems of the period. The introduction of new machinery then, as now, always carried the danger of redundancy and worse conditions.

It acquired its immense readership, because of its editors' devotion to a new ideal of factual reporting. Delane in 1841 took over the editorship from Barnes, champion of Electoral Reform in 1832, who gave the paper its nickname "The Thunderer". The philosophy of Delane, carrying on from his predecessor in an editorship which ended in 1877, was "to obtain the earliest and most exact intelligence of the events of the time and instantly by disclosing them make them the property of the nation.

John Walter III, who controlled the commercial side, had the business acumen not to interfere with his great editors. Contrast the paper under Thomson! At one point, the print run effected first by Steam and then by the rotary press which "The Times" was the first to adopt, had a circulation greater than that of all its competitors together. In the days before the international news agencies were invented to filter the news on which todays press depends, '' The Times" had its correspondents all over the world. Some individuals were so outstanding that they altered the course of history: like Russell, whose despatches from the Crimea turned the tide of public opinion against the cruel and incompetently waged war. Although its reporting was too little and too late, "The Times" stirred the nation's conscience over the Highland Clearances. Nevertheless, the paper was always a capitalist enterprise and as such passed in 1894 from the Walters into the ownership of Northcliffe and then the Astors, whose pro-fascist connexions were notorious. Dawson was brought in to "extend the imperial side" He edited through the years of Britain's imperial decline and the depression, from 1923 to 1941. He used the paper as an instrument of personal policy. A friend of Baldwin, he saw himself as the "Secretary-General of the Establishment." The paper declined in circulation. It was seen more than ever earlier as a means to personal enrichment of its owners and since they were incapable of running it successfully for this end, they sold it in 1966, an ailing paper, to Thompson. The ideal of journalism pursued make facts the instant property of the nation, was always threatened by capitalism, and has now savagely, but we hope only temporarily, been suppressed by the paper's capitalist owners.

Capitalists and workers are engaged in a constant battle to exert influence and control over pay and conditions as the two classes contend in the sphere of work and industry. This is as true now as it was at the birth of our class several centuries ago…

# Unions in illegality: the Combination Acts of 1799 and 1800

**WORKERS, SEPT 2010 ISSUE**

**When the 18th century began, the guild system still applied. A guild comprised several kinds of "class": from the merchants (or large masters) to the apprentices, though power rested in the hands of the merchants. Therefore small masters and journeymen began to form unions of their own to protect themselves and their interests. Nevertheless they failed to obtain incorporation or the right to create combinations, effectively compelled to secrecy when it came to organisation.**

During the 18th century, mercantilist capitalism gradually gave way to industrial capital. The old methods of wage fixing became ineffective. A rising class of capitalist employers prompted the emergence of defensive labour organisations, combinations of workmen whose cooperation was the only means at their disposal for survival and protection. The combinations, embryo trade unions, were mostly of skilled and semi-skilled workers, artisans and craftsmen. They aimed to achieve abolition of the worst evils of the capitalist system and some improvement of living conditions. More and more trade clubs or societies were seeking to fix wages and conditions by collective bargaining. Employers resisted these efforts, constantly petitioning the government to uphold ‘ancient law’ and suppress the ‘unlawful’ organisations of workers.

Class clashes were numerous: 383 disputes were recorded between 1717 and 1800, but most incidents went unrecorded or were settled without recourse to law or officialdom. Most of the disputes centred on wages. In 1766 the shipwrights of Exeter, for example, decided not to work for masters who were seeking to employ them at "less wages than have been from time immemorially paid to journeymen shipwrights" and imposing longer hours than had been "usual and customary".

Some combinations were powerful and effective, threatening their masters to "strike and turn out” if their demands were not satisfied. During the 18th century, many acts were passed outlawing combination in one specific trade or another, as for example in 1718 against wool combers and weavers. In the same period workers lost several laws affording limited protection in this or that industry.

**Repressive**

Although the launch of the proceedings remained in the hands of the employers, the Combination Acts brought the government into a more repressive role against trade unionism because of fears that it would spread to the newly industrialised regions, especially the Midlands and the North, a goal only partially achieved.

The Battle of Waterloo: it marked the end of the Napoleonic Wars, but not of the anti-union legislation brought in during them.

The outbreak of war against revolutionary France intensified these fears because it was thought that revolutionary ideas would spread among the working class and that the unions would become centres of political agitation.

So at the end of the century, the government gave the "masters" complete control of their workers. As the Industrial Revolution in Britain got underway, all the legal restraints on workers in particular industries were standardised into a general law for the whole of industry. All the regulations and laws that recognised a worker as a person with rights were withdrawn or became inoperative. Initially, the act against illegal oaths was used to break up the existing trade unions. Then, the Combination Acts of 1799 and 1800, originally specific to the millwrights, were turned into a general prohibition and outlawing of trade unionism.

The acts forbade any combinations of workers to act together to improve their wages, reduce working hours or otherwise change their conditions of labour, with any violation punishable by three months imprisonment, or two months of hard labour. Magistrates, who were usually agreeable to the employers, passed sentence. It was the first time that penalties were prescribed for workmen as a class.

**Ingenuity**

With trade union organisations declared illegal, workers hoodwinked their opponents by reappearing as mutual benefit associations or similar bodies. (There are no limits to human ingenuity.) A large number of secret organisations carried on the fight against the employers and spurred the workers into resistance.

Where the government partially managed to constrain trade union development and activity, it did so more as intimidation than through undertaking prosecutions. Unions operated in a context of risk rather than of full and constant constraint. Over twenty-five years of illegality, the Combination Acts did not stop workers' organisation nor were they totally enforced.

**Convicted**

Thousands of journeymen were convicted under these Acts, whereas no one employer was. The Times Compositors Union was suppressed in 1810 after they asked for a rise in their wages. Workers employed in the new factories and mines were constantly persecuted and often forced to combine secretly, for instance the iron founders in southern Wales. Resentment grew into opposition, most notably in the Luddite rebellions of 1811 and 1813 (to be featured in a forthcoming 'Historic Notes').

Introduced in wartime, the acts were not repealed with the return of peace in 1815. Repeal came in 1824, celebrated by an outburst of strikes. In 1825 a less stringent law was put in their place.

The temper of young industrial capitalism was harsh. Workers were refused education, political rights and any voice in their conditions of employment but they did not succumb and found ways to make progress.

# The French Revolution : A turning point in Time

THE FRENCH Revolution is one of the great events of world history. Two hundred years ago this week the Bastille was stormed by the people of Paris to prevent the King using force against their representatives in the Third Estate who had decreed the end of royal absolutism.

Rioting on the night of 13 July,1789, accompanied the search by Parisians for arms. From dawn on July 14 ironworkers made pikes. The crowd attacked the Invalides, took 32,000 firearms and marched on to the Bastille which surrendered when five cannon were drawn up for use against the notorious prison.It was a symbolic act.

The provinces heard the news between 16-19 July and the 'municipal revolution' followed the lead of Paris. "There is no longer a King, a parlement, an army or a police force", remarked one contemporary. Those aristocrats fearful of the consequences fled France within days.

Three orders or estates marked out the population. The First Estate was the clergy, the Second the nobility, while the Third was everyone else. Those who prayed, those who fought, and the Third Estate that worked to keep them. Contempt for manual work, with a King on top.

In a famous pamphlet of 1789, Sieyes had asked,"What is the Third Estate? Everything. What has it been up until now? Nothing. What does it ask? To become something".

### Buckled

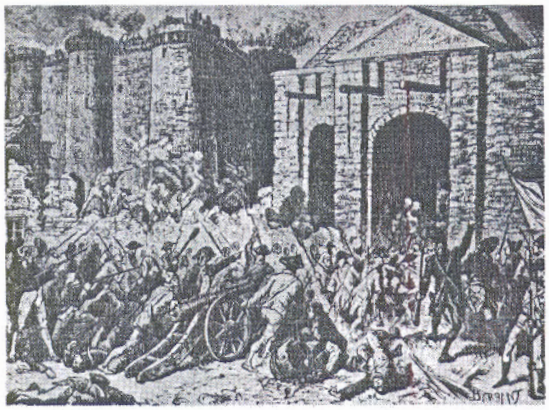
Historian Albert Soboul remarks,"The legal structure of society bore no relation to the social and economic realities". France buckled under the strain of this 'Ancien Regime' as revolution moved closer.

A country of peasants and artisans, France had 25 million people in 1789, when the average life expectancy was 29 years.

Growing overseas trade and big industrial concerns were transforming a traditional economy based on agriculture. The economic power of the nobility was in decline. The social position of the aristocrats was now under threat. They would not give up their power without a very determined fight: counter-revolution.

The bourgeois, on the other hand, held back by feudalism, were inspired by the Age of Reason. It had given philosophical expression to their class frustrations. The Revolution's basic aim, seid Alexis de Tocqueville in 1856,"was to sweep away the last vestiges of the middle ages". The bourgeoisie led the Third Estate into revolution, in the bourgeois interest.

The peasants carried on their backs the 350,000 nobles, the 1½% of the population that owned one-fifth of all the land. This was not a homogenous class.The 4000 aristocrats of the court nobility lived in luxury at Versailles as part of the King's entourage. Provincial nobility lived among the peasants, on feudal dues set centuries before, in run-down manor houses. Hated by peasants, despised by the court aristocrats, and resentful of thriving middle classes in the towns.



## Storming the Bastille, July 14 1789

The clergy numbered 120,000 and owned 10% of of the land,their economic strength resting on the tithes levied on peasants and on landed property. They took a considerable proportion of the harvest and resold it. The lower clergy,however,was poorer than those higher up. In 1789, all the 139 bishops were of noble birth. There were very deep divisions.

The Third Estate numbered 24 million in 1789. All the popular classes were within; there were the artisans and traders of the lower and middle bourgeoisie as well. The liberal professions were in the Third also, and the financiers and big bourgeoisie.

The middle classes owned between 12% and 45% of land, according to region, especially near the towns. When property rights were later challenged by the Revolution this section of the Third Estate would fight its former allies.

The popular classes in the towns knew hardship. Half their income went on bread, but general inflation by 1789 meant that 88% of their income on bread slashed what they had left to spend on anything else. Thus urban unemployment rose dramatically on the eve of the Revolution. When they worked, 16 hours a day was not unusual. They hated aristocrats whose prices were beyond them.

Says the historian Soboul,"..the aristocracy was cutting itself off from the nation by its uselessness, its pretensions, and its stubborn refusal to consider the national good".

### Aristocrats

The peasants numbered 20 million. Although they owned 35% of the land - often poor quality and in strips - a landless peasantry formed a rural proletariat dependent solely on wages. And in 1789 there were still 1 million serfs. Peasants were important by sheer weight of numbers in the war on the aristocrats.

The aristocrats were attached to their feudal privileges which burdened the popular classes. The nobles refused compromise when reform was pressed. Hence their downfall when with the King they plotted counter revolution and caused bourgeoisie in alliance with urban and rural populations to drive them out.

The destitution and misery of the countryside turned many against the landowners in July 1789.

The 'Great Fear' spread as the rural poor heard the many rumours of their aristocratic enemies who were said to be planning a bloody revenge. There were six outbreaks of panic between July 20 and August 6, affecting most regions, such that peasants armed themselves with pitchforks, scythes and hunting rifles.

## HISTORIC NOTES

### Burning castles

Peasants burned castles and piles of documents that had legally burdened them under the Ancien Regime. In some places they hanged landowners and their families. The feudal order was being overthrown. The peasant committees and the village militias took power. The bourgeois militiamen sent to 'keep order' in several places fought some bloody clashes with bands of armed peasants.

In the National Assembly of bourgeois landowners an alarm was being sounded.

Throughout August they discussed what should be put in place of the old order. On August 26 the Assembly adopted the Declaration of the Rights of Man and of the Citizen, inspired by Enlightenment ideas, which condemned aristocratic society and the abuses of the monarchy.

The King refused to give royal assent to certain decrees of early August and disagreed with the Declaration of Rights. Louis XVI should have the right of veto argued monarchists in the Assembly who were defeated 849-89.

Louis XVI was expected to counter-attack. The white Bourbon cockade replaced the tricolour trampled at a banquet of his royal bodyguard at Versailles castle on October 1. On 4 October, outraged Paris gathered in the streets.

Having demanded bread in Paris, 6000-7000 women left for Versailles on October 5. They were ahead of 20,000 men of the National Guard who set off to intervene. The effect of this direct action was that the King signed the decrees. The crowd accompanied him in a huge procession to Paris where, with the Queen and the Dauphin, he was put into the Tuileries where his 'loyal subjects' might honour his presence in their midst. The royalists conceded defeat, and some joined the second wave of emigration.

### Authority

These people, when the term 'people' was held in contempt by aristocrats, did not behave as loyal subjects any more it seemed but rather as citizens.

The Assembly was being petitioned regularly by those who wanted change. The public present in the galleries heard debates every morning and evenings after 6 o'clock.

Peasants had stopped paying taxes, and no authority could compel them. The Assembly put pressure on King and Catholic Church. The Decree of September 29 called for all of the silverware that was not necessary 'to maintain the decorum of religious worship'. The Decree of November 2, decided in the Assembly 568-346,put Church-owned property at the nation's disposal. Crown lands: ditto.

Louis XVI lost his head

From March 1790 these lands were sold off in a huge transfer of property that only the bourgeois had money to buy. There was profit in Revolution. Poorer peasants looked on.

Land confiscation made necessary reorganisation of the Catholic Church in France. In February 1790 monastic orders were shut. Monks could leave cloisters or form communities under state sponsorship. Then on April 13 the Assembly refused to recognise that Catholicism was the State religion. On April 20 the Church was deprived of the right to administer lands. The Civil Constitution of the Clergy was adopted by the Assembly on 12 July.

Royalist Catholics were active plotters of the counter-revolution through 1790, into 1791 and beyond.

Defenders of Revolution in hundreds of thousands rallied in Paris on July 14 but the National Guard on parade was a bourgeois militia. In April 1791 Robespierre, who in 1789 had demanded universal suffrage without success, argued, "To be armed for self-defence is the right of everyone without distinction, and to be armed for the defence of the nation is the right of every citizen. Does this mean that those who are poor are to be treated as foreigners or as slaves?"

Citizens feared France was to be invaded, assisted by emigres and rebellious nobles within. Nobles led attempts at insurrection.

### Alarm

Anti-clericalism spread through popular societies organising the citizens, notably among the Jacobins. They denounced Catholicism.

Printers,blacksmiths and carpenters in Paris tried for guaranteed minimum pay. In spring 1791 there were agrarian disturbances. The 'new feudalism' of the merchants and businessmen was denounced by citizens.

Louis XVI looked to his fellow monarchs in Europe to invade. They were very alarmed at the spread of revolutionary ideas. It was Edmund Burke who from England called for a counter-revolutionary crusade. Pope Pius VI condemned the principles of the French Revolution.

At midnight on 20 June, 1791, disguised as a man-servant, the King fled Paris with his family. But at Varennes on 21-22 June he was recognised, and his intrigue foiled. The return to Paris through resentful villages was ominous. He had plotted against France.

National fervour reigned among the people. But for the Assembly stocked with bourgeois, all they would recognise was a nation of property owners. The King was one of them. However, Varennes had split the bourgeoisie: middling elements rejected the King while big bourgeois more and more talked like the aristocrats of old.

When war came the much despised people of France were needed to fight it for the bourgeois. They won many concesaions as a result. The King, who had wanted war as his only hope, lost not only monarchy but his head.

### Smelling a rat

Robespierre opposed the war, smelling a rat. He saw danger for France so ill-prepared for war. "Start by taking a long look at your internal position here in France; put your own house in order before you try to take liberty to others elsewhere."

The intrigue of months led to Louis XVI himself in April 1792 calling successfully on the Assembly to declare war on Austria. War only came to an end in 1815, rather longer than intended.

Officered by nobles,the army suffered military reverses. Officers had a vested interest in defeat.

But the national crisis stimulated revolutionary feeling. It was known that Queen Marie-Antoinette was keen for Austria's success. The whole country rose on 10 August,1792,against the monarchy.

Regarded as the second revolution, August 10 was associated with universal suffrage and the arming of passive citizens. Democracy was now present in the politics of the Revolution.

Part Two to follow in next issue of The Worker.

# French Revolution -Struggle Between Classes Part 2.

LOUIS XVI and his family were closely guarded by the Insurrectionary Commune of 10 August,1792, following the treacherous but foiled attempt by the King to conspire with foreign powers to topple the Revolution and restore the monarchy to France.

France was surrounded by enemies. But the Commune was determined to defend the gains made and so this revolutionary body took the initiative against the legally-established authority of the Assembly, which met for the last time on 20 September,1792.

This major conflict between popular masses and big bourgeois was struggle between rival authorities.

The 288 elected members of the Insurrectionary Commune, mostly lesser and middle bourgeoisie, now had to be accepted as representative by the Legislative Assembly, itself controlled by the Gironde, which advanced the interests of big bourgeoisie for whom the Revolution had gone far enough.

1792 was a year of crisis for France. Yet it was the fear of foreign invasion that had the effect of invigorating patriotic feelings amongst the people. They it was who constituted the nation such that 'Vive La France' was the cry that went up whenever reactionaries tried to kill off the Revolution.

In Paris in August,1792, many hundreds of suspected counter-revolutionaries were rounded up. Verdun was under siege and Paris was called to arms, ready to march on the invaders. As a precaution, 1100 prisoners were killed, although some were just common criminals.

The Catholic Church, a sponsor of counter-revolution, was squeezed further with the decision to deport priests in days. In future, the State would register births, deaths and marriages. Despite the religious protests, the State legalised divorce.

### Sans Culottes

New infantry battalions had been formed since July but made up of artisans and journeymen. They stopped the Prussians, the most professional army in Europe, at the Battle of Valmy on 20 September. Goethe was present and his immortal phrase was engraved on the monument: 'This day and this place open a new era in the history of the world'.

All of aristocratic Europe was against France. Thus unity among the various revolutionaries was considered vital. But that did not last.

Girondins and the Montagnards were opposed to each other in the National Convention. Their class interests were at odds. Seating arrangements placed the Gironde on the right, while Montagnards sat on the left.

Those on the left acknowledged the vital role played by the sans-culottes in saving the Revolution. It had been the working class republicans of Paris, who wore proletarian trousers rather than aristocratic breeches, hence the name, who had moved against the King. Montagnards saw as essential the granting of concessions to maintain popular support. However, the Girondins did not.

In September 1792 the Girondins attacked the Montagnard leaders they most feared: Marat, Danton and Robespierre.

"I have always fought against those who have been motivated by a desire for self-advancement", said Robespierre, known as The Incorruptible. "It is impossible to want a revolution without having revolutionary action." The Gironde hated and feared him.

Indeed Karl Marx would, decades later, regard The Terror as "a plebian way of getting rid of the enemies of the bourgeois, absolutism and feudalism".

The battle between the Gironde and Montagnards grew venomous inside the Convention and without. Centre forces around the Marais(the Marsh or Plain) accepted the wartime concessions to the masses and followed the lead of the Montagnsrds when they moved against the King.

Toussaint Louverture led sucessful slave revolt in Haiti, inspired by 1789

The Gironde was the dominant force, yet the Montagnards eventually would come to the fore.

The Girondins printed paper money, a feature of their inflationary policy. Thus rather than sell their grain and save the paper money, the farmers preferred to hoard the grain. Economic crisis and food crisis was the result.

Workers agitated for price controls, which infuriated the Gironde so concerned for its own class interests.

Grain riots in the Beauce and surrounding departments saw thousands of men assessing grain supplies in markets. 'Long live the Nation. Corn prices will come down.' The Gironde reacted violently to such events.

Soldiers were organised in regiments of regulars and volunteers. Regulars had fewer rights, but the volunteers could elect officers and leave after one campaign. Mutual resentment forced their amalgamation for victory, but it was difficult to raise the 300,000 seen as necessary to win the war. Yet military defeats caused great upsurges of patriotic feeling to be expressed by the people.

For instance defeated Dumouriez plotted with Austrian generals in March 1793 to restore monarchy under a Louis XVII as well as bring back the 1791 Constitution. His plan to march on Paris was ruined by soldiers' refusal to go with him. A hail of volunteers' bullets followed him as he fled to the Austrian lines.

Peasant grievances fed into the revolt in the Vendee in the west of France. Resentment at military manpower decrees caused killings in a revolt led by nobles and clerics in a very traditionalist Catholic region. They called for the return of alter and throne. Many lives were lost between March and October 1793, although it rumbled on into the Napoleonic period.

It seemed that only the Montagnards were committed to public safety and the defence of the Revolution. Counter-revolutionaries had to be crushed; that was the popular sentiment.

Committees were set up to engage in Revolutionary Surveillance. The Convention took special powers to itself. Sans-culottes mobilised their forces.

On 28 March,1793, laws against emigres banished them for life from French territory. Their property reverted to the Republic.

On 5-6 April, the famed Committee of Public Safety was set up. Nine men met in camera and supervised war on counter-revolution.

Said Jean-Paul Marat,"It is by means of violence that liberty must be established, and the moment has come for..the despotism of liberty in order to crush the despotism of kings". The Jacobins and popular societies stepped up the campaign against them. On 26 May,1793, it was Robespierre who called on the people to revolt. The insurrection took place on 31 May.

They demanded the fixing of bread prices by a levy on the rich; voting rights to sans-culottes alone; to the old, the sick and the relatives of those fighting in the armies, public aid; the arrest of suspects; exclusion of the Girondin leaders from the Convention; creation of a revolutionary army; and a purge of the various administrative bodies.

The insurrection on 2 June surrounded the Convention with 80,000 men of the National Guard. Surrender was inevitable.

The pressure from the sans-culottes was resisted by the Montagne, although the Montagnards knew that only their active presence had beaten the Gironde. Foreign armies had pushed the French back. But the assassination of Marat on 13 July caused yearning for vengeance, and new energy was found to go on.

Power was centralised. Mass conscription came in. Robespierre inspired and took inspiration from the popular support. But there were contradictions too.

Terror was organised. On 16 October, the Queen was guillotined. Girondins suffered the same fate. Of 395 defendants in the last quarter of 1793, nearly half were executed. Provincial towns involved in civil war was where most executions took place; in peaceful towns relatively few.

The Committee of Public Safety believed there was a foreign plot through deputies with business interests. Suspicions lingered on and poisoned relationships. Montagnards split over such tensions; factionalism intensified.

Those alarmed at the Terror grouped around Danton. A large delegation of women in December 1793 persuaded the Convention to examine whether prisons held innocent people. In April 1794 Danton went to the guillotine with a number of others.

Food shortages worried the people. The popular movement and the Revolutionary Government were now to diverge; the end was near. The Jacobin dictatorship antagonised the sans-culottes.

The Terror detained an estimated 100,000 people. It is calculated that some 40,000 were executed. Who were they? The historian Georges Lefebvre remarked, 'those who run counter to their own class interests are treated with much less circumspection than the original adversaries'.

By spring 1794 military successes made Terror much harder to justify, yet the economic situation seemed to require it. Fervour for revolution also cooled. On 28 July Robespierre and 21 colleagues were not saved from execution without trial. On 29 July 71 more were guillotined.

Albert Soboul argues of both Saint-Just and Robespierre that 'They were both too conscious of the interests of the bourgeoisie to give their total support to the sans culottes, and yet too attentive to the needs of the sans-culottes to find fsvour with the middle classes'. With the fall of Robespierre,'The Revolution resumed its bourgeois course'.

## HISTORIC NOTES

On 20 November,1792,the discovery in castle walls of arms and papers that proved Louis XVI had had secret arrangements with foreign enemies sealed his fate. His trial began on December 11 despite the Girondins' attempts to prevent it. The 1791 Constitution guaranteed the inviolability of the monarch and was founded on a property suffrage, but circumstances had now changed. The Gironde was beaten.

A few abstained,but otherwise the Convention was unanimous about the King's guilt. The death sentence was imposed by 387-334. A reprieve was rejected by 380-310. On 21 January,1793, the King was executed. The 'divine right' of the monarchy was shown for what it was.

Europe was shocked. The old regimes called it regicide, but their old corruption did not prevent their outbursts of moral righteousness. Wrote one deputy for Pas-de-Calais, "We are fully committed now. The paths have been cut off behind us and we have no choice but to go forward whether we like it or not. Now as never before we can truly say that we shall live as free men or die."

Between March and September 1793, Britain signed treaties that organised belligerents against the revolutionary nation. The monarchies formed a general coalition against France. The King's execution had been only the pretext for Britain's involvement: in fact France and Britain were two nations fighting for political and economic mastery. Said Brissot to the Convention, "Now you have to fight, both on land and at sea, all the tyrants of Europe".

Robespierre and 1793 Constitution: Tension between property and people

# Multiculturalism : reactionary from roots to fruit

WHEN he was asked what the legacy of the French Revolution was, it is said that Chou En-Lai, the great Chinese communist replied: "I don't know. It is too soon to say".

Chou was well aware that revolutions and the ideas that help shape them can have the most profound and strangest of consequences.

The French Revolution swept two ideas to the forefront of men's minds. In revolt against the feudal view of society obsessed with rigid orders of class, rank and status, the revolutionaries proclaimed the universal brotherhood of man. And, against those who declared that the existing order of things is pre-ordained and fixed for all time, they argued that man can reshape his own society according to a rational programme

Reactionaries have always hated these ideas. Thatcher, for instance, insists that any attempt by people to order the economic affairs of society is doomed to failure. The markets must be 'free', chaos must rule.

Interestingly, a new book by French author Alain Finkielkraut reflects a growing need to defend the ideals of the French Revolution. And significantly, his book, which appeared for the first time in English last year, sees the main threat coming as much from the 'left' as the 'right'.

The French Revolution, Finkielkraut points out, created its own "ferocious counter-revolutionaries". In the face of the universal brotherhood of man brought together by reason, the German romantics argued that the culture and spirit of their particular nation was unique. And, anticipating Marx's idea that being determines consciousness, used this idea to stress the message: we are separate, different, and even our reason and our thoughts reflect this uniqueness. Says Finkielkraut: "They repudiated universalist feelings and glorified various particularisms." A train of thought picked up and used by Adolf Hitler.

Now in one of the stranger ironies of history, the same ideas are being revived, but this time by the "multiculturalists". The multiculturalists recreate racism through their anti-racism, says Finkielkraut, "With the substitution of the cultural for the biological conception of collectivity, racism has not been abolished, it has simply returned to its starting point."

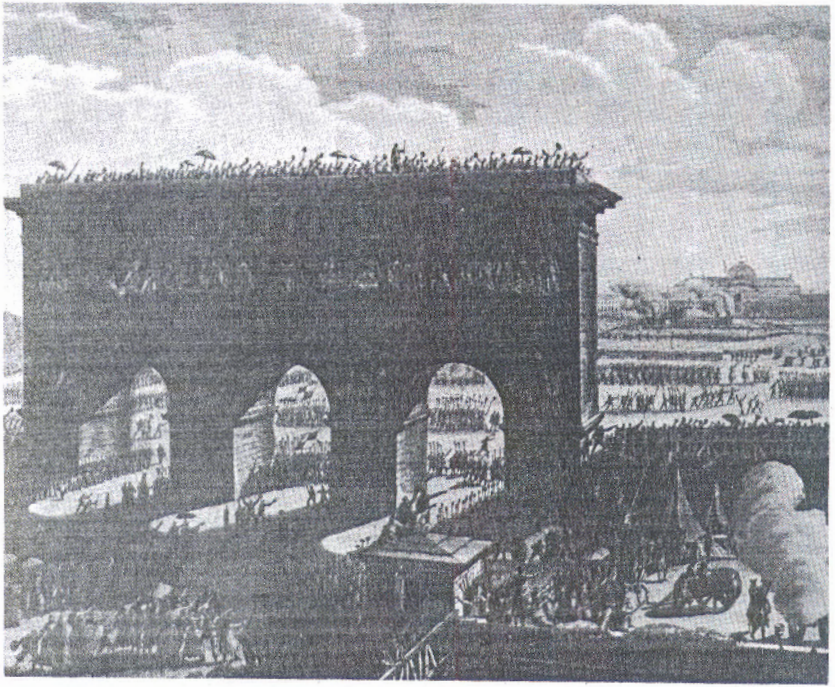
The word 'culture', he continues, has been seized by the multiculturalists to serve as a standard to "divide the human race into collective, inaccessible and irreducible entities". And while preaching the values of 'toleration' between cultures, they breed the opposite. Their whole theory assumes that one 'culture' cannot understand or accept another: they live on separateness and division. "They carry notions of differences to the extreme, vitiating any community of nations or cultures between men".

Finkielkraut stresses that the motive of the multiculturalists has been to expiate a fault: to restore to other people what had been stolen or destroyed by Western imperialism. In reply to imperialists who prated the superiority of their culture, the multiculturalists replied that while cultures may be different, they are equal.

But by insisting that all cultures are 'equal', the multiculturalists, who like to think of themselves as radical and progressive, end up defending the indefensible - cultures that are narrow, reactionary and oppressive. Cultures, for instance, "that cast out barren women; where the witness of one man counts for two women".

Such a train of thought goes further than the absurdity of branding people who attack such ideas as 'racist' or 'imperialist'. It is an attack on thought itself, charges Finkielkraut. Hence the title of his book, "The Undoing of Thought".

These are the same people, he points out, who argue that man's thinking cannot transcend his cultural background. It is quite a common ploy nowadays, to use the line of argument that "you cannot understand this question because you are white, or because you are a man". But, says Finkielkraut, that is a rejection of thought and reason. I no longer think because I am; my 'culture' or race merely "thinks in me".



When Shakespeare is dismissed as a "dead, white, male", when all cultural creations are declared to be of equal validity (when , as he puts it, a pair of boots is declared equal with Shakespeare) there can be no greatness, there can be nothing to aspire to, no purpose in intellectual or moral effort, no concept of progress.

Capitalism, Finkielkraut points out, has already seized on this idea. In its drive to turn all human creations into commodities, it has blotted out the line between culture, and "entertainment" that can be marketed. Sport, fashion and leisure now all count as "culture".

## Non thought

But, he adds, when this phony egalitarianism equates the highest intellectual activities with betting or rock and roll, "non-thought", as he calls it, has "donned the same label (i.e. culture) and enjoyed the same status as thought itself". "This is the first time that those who in the name of high culture, dare to call this non-thought by its name are dismissed as racists and reactionaries."

"When hatred of culture becomes itself a part of culture, the life of the mind loses all meaning."

Finkielkraut himself does not suggest many solutions. His own appears rather weak after 200 years, and that is simply to praise the values of the Enlightenment, of liberty and reason. But he avoids the question of what is "liberty", or how to reason with the unreasonable.

But the strength of his book is his acute analysis. The multiculturalists and the anti-racists are still regarded today as being "left wing". But Finkielkraut shows how their entire thinking, from its roots to its fruit, is deeply reactionary.

**One year on: celebrating Bastille Day. Two hundred years later the ideals of brotherhood and reason are under attack from the 'left' as well as the right.**

The end of the 18th century saw a new system that encouraged employers to pay below-subsistence wages. It was called after an area in Berkshire...

# 1795: The road to Speenhamland

**WORKERS, MAR 2014 ISSUE**

In 1597 the English parliament ruled that rogues and vagabonds (note the emotive terms) should be sent back to their parishes for punishment and forced labour. The Poor Law Acts of 1598 and 1601 inaugurated a system of poor relief based on parish responsibility and parish rates which was to last until 1834.

An (idealised) image of the St James's Workhouse, London, around 1800.

The system encouraged Justices of the Peace (usually local employers) to fix parish wages as low as possible, as workers could be kept alive by having their wages topped up by the rates. Money for parish poor relief was raised by collecting a rate, based on the estimated value of each property, and collected by the parish constable and "overseers of the poor".

In 1637 in John Milton's village of Horton, a local mill-owner cost parish ratepayers £7 5s (£7.25p) a week to supplement the wages of

his workers. (Little wonder that ratepayers often opposed new industries setting up in the parish.)

Later, the 1662 Settlement Laws restricted the parish obligation to look after persons who had a permanent settlement; anyone else seeking assistance had to return to the place where they were born.

In 1723 the Workhouse Test Act made the poor enter workhouses in order to obtain relief. Between 1601 and 1750 a vast, cumbersome system of poor law was created, mainly serving the interests of landowners in rural society.

## The Speenhamland System

In the second half of the 18th century England's economy and society began to be transformed. There was population growth, industrialisation requiring greater mobility of labour, and mass enclosures of land. The earlier system of poor law continued, but was amended to respond to the new conditions.

In 1782 Gilbert's Act excluded the "able-bodied poor" from the workhouse and forced parishes to provide either work or "outdoor relief" for them. It also permitted parishes to build workhouses. "Indoor relief" (in workhouses) was confined specifically to the old, sick or dependent children.

Britain was at war with revolutionary France from 1793 until 1815. Grain imports from Europe stopped, and poor harvests in 1795-6 meant grain prices shot up. Many at the time also blamed middlemen and hoarders for the rises. Food riots marked the spring of 1795. The ruling class feared that working people might be tempted to emulate the French, and revolt. Acute social and economic distress spread throughout the rural south of England, placing strains on the poor law system.

In May 1795, magistrates in Berkshire (one of the counties most affected by enclosure) met in Speenhamland and observed, "The present state of the poor does require further assistance than has been generally given them." Seeking to retain control over the labourers and prevent disturbances, they established a minimum level a family needed to survive and decided to use the poor rate to make up the pay of those who found themselves below the level.

Their proposed basis for "outdoor relief" was that "when the gallon loaf (8lb 11oz) shall cost one shilling, then every poor and industrious man shall have for his own support three shillings [15p] weekly either produced by his own or his family's labour or an allowance for the poor rates and for the support of his family one shilling and sixpence". For every penny that the loaf rose above one shilling they reckoned that a man would need three pence for himself and one penny for each member of his family. This system spread rapidly and was soon adopted or modified in many other counties experiencing social distress.

"Speenhamland" was not created to support the unemployed or eradicate poverty. It aimed to provide a (mainly rural) labour force at low direct cost to employers, using local taxation ("poor rates") as subsidies to supplement the poverty wages of farm workers.

The system allowed employers, including farmers and the nascent industrialists of the town, to pay below subsistence wages, because the parish would make up the difference and keep their workers alive. Workers' low incomes went unchanged. Speenhamland was a tactic to institutionalise poverty without letting it reach chronic heights or outright malnutrition.

The impact of paying the poor rate fell on the landowners of the parish concerned. It complicated the 1601 Elizabethan Poor Law because it let "working paupers" draw on the poor rates. The Berkshire magistrates had also proposed another option – that farmers and other employers should increase the wages of their employees. But that idea met with little response.

Under the Speenhamland System ratepayers often found themselves subsidising the owners of large estates who paid poor wages. It was not unknown for landowners to demolish empty houses in order to reduce the population on their lands and also to prevent the return of those who had left. At the same time, they would employ labourers from neighbouring parishes. These people could be laid off without warning but would not increase the rates in the parish where they worked.

During the 20 years after the end of the Napoleonic Wars in 1815, attitudes to the poor began to change and the system was criticised by landed ratepayers as being expensive. Others said it impeded mobility of labour. It encouraged farmers to pay low wages and to lay off workmen in winter and re-employ them in spring and summer, as it enabled them, just, to survive.

## Forced labour

A Royal Commission in 1834 called for the abolition of "outdoor" rate relief and recommended the maintenance of workhouse inmates at a level below that of the lowest paid workers – a crude piece of intimidation to everyone. The resulting 1834 Poor Law Amendment Act created a system of "indoor" relief and forced labour in a rapidly expanded system of hated workhouses. But that's another tale.

Systems such as working tax credit and housing benefit, and the introduction of universal credits, are basically a re-enactment of the Speenhamland principle. They are another version of institutionalised poverty, a modern attempt to divert our class from trade union struggle for wages by offering paltry handouts taken from our class's taxes (see article in May 2013 issue of Workers at www.workers.org.uk). ■

# HISTORIC NOTES

# Mutiny at Spithead 1797

IN 1797 the fortunes of the British ruling class seemed to be waning; after 4 years of war Napoleon was triumphing over Europe. Britain and Ireland were on the point of rebellion and there was a run on the pound and the Bank of England. But more terrifying to the establishment was the mutiny of the fleets at Nore and Spithead.

There was discontent with food, pay, accommodation, conditions of service, punishments, leave and treatment of the sick and wounded. In a small ship 186 feet long and 52 feet wide, 1600 had to live, crowded together with only 14 inches space allowed between each man. Throughout the war press gangs raided inns, small towns and villages, knocking on the head any man they met or snatching him forcibly from his home. Free fights and riots from the victims did not stop the King's Men. Sailors returning from 3-year voyages, even before they could draw their pay, were seized and sent to war-ships for the duration. The prisons and poor-houses were scoured. It resembled the 'comb-out' of the First World War by the army (the term illustrating the contempt of the establishment for ordinary men, a contempt which seems to be shared by a new breed of 'marxist-leninists'.)

Starved, half-frozen in leaking ships, these conscripts plus the innocents who had accepted bounties in the hope of paying their debts, began to articulate their grievances. These were many. For 150 years, pay had not increased; it was 6 shillings a week for an able-bodied seaman and 4 shillings and 9 pence for an ordinary seaman. A sailor was lucky if he got half his pay after paying into the Chatham Chest for the disabled, paying up to 2 months pay to a profiteering purser for his 'slops', his outfit. His pay was stopped if he was in sick-bay even with wounds received in battle, and his pay was always in arrears from 2 to 10 years.

The food was execrable - weavilly biscuits, years-old meat as hard as mahogany and porridge so foul that even the pigs which were carried aboard refused it. Water was flavoured with vinegar to hide the slimy taste, so scurvy was rife. To fall sick or wounded at sea was a death warrant and with little or no medical attention blood poisoning and epidemics caused more deaths than wounds. Badly wounded men were thrown alive overboard on the plea that they would die anyway. No shore leave was allowed lest the sailors did not return.

All these ills were overshadowed by the punishments, flogging which took the flesh off a man's back for the most trivial offence, up to 300 strokes. In the latter event a defaulter was given the alternative of hanging as a more merciful and just as sure a death.

Letters were sent to the Admiralty by sailors: 'We are nockt about so that we do not know what to do. Every man in her would sooner be sot at like a taregaite by Muskettree than remain any longer in her'. 'We hope your Lordships will be kind to us and grant a new commander for the Captain is one of the most barbarous and inhuman officers that ever a sect of unfortunate men had the disagreeable misfortune of being with'. From the 'Charlotte' secretly and for months, the task of enrolling every man in the Spithead Fleet was undertaken. First they approached their admired old Admiral 'Black Dick Howe' but receiving no answer decided to petition the House of Commons and meanwhile would be 'Taking charge of the ships until we get a proper answer from the Government'.

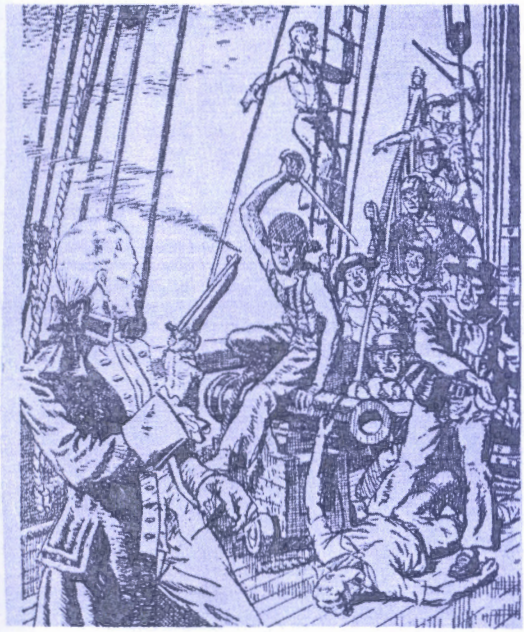
On April 16 the Channel Fleet was ordered to sea and the sailors refused. The crew of the 'Charlotte' started by manning the shrouds and cheering. Every ship refused to sail. The leading delegates rowed from ship to ship giving news and instructions and the agreed demands, at the same time ensuring strict discipline on the crews. There was to be no drunkenness, sending messages ashore or insulting the officers. Demands were for better pay and conditions very modest ones but the Admiralty refused them all at first, later proposing a shilling for the able-bodied and nine pence for the rest, which was refused. New offers were also rejected until the King's Pardon had been printed and rushed to Portsmouth on the seventh day of the mutiny. Sailors remembered former treachery of the Sea Lords who promised pardon to the 'Culloden' mutineers and then hanged them.

Once again the Admiralty blundered, sending secret messages to the captains to use the most stringent means to suppress any sign of mutiny. Men broke into the captain's cabin of the Duke to obtain the order. He had destroyed it but they promised to flog, duck, then hang him if he did not divulge the contents. Sensibly he did so and the news flashed round the fleet. The mutineers now seized arms and ammunition, locked up an Admiral, Captain and a Lieutenant to await court-martial by the crew, then hoisted red pennants. They brought all ships to St Helens. The sailors were now the masters. The Admiralty were adamant and the crew made the tactical error of blockading the shipping in and out of the Thames. Then the Merchants moved in.

Parliament passed a Bill punishing 'incitement to mutiny' by death; shop assistants and clerks rushed to Tilbury to man ships to attack the 'rebel navy', where no doubt they were as incompetent as the students who manned the trams in the General Strike of 1926.

The Admiralty ordered removal of all beacons and buoys from the estuary making the Thames unnavigable. Some of the ships manned by the crews ran aground, some were re-taken by officers. On June 12 the delegates decided that united action was no longer possible and 'it was every ship for itself'. The mutiny was over. One delegate committed suicide, others escaped to Europe but the leader, Parker, allowed himself to be taken and begged that he receive all the punishment and that no other should receive it. On June 30 he was hanged from the yardarm of the 'Sandwich'; 29 of his fellows were hanged. Nine were flogged, one receiving 380 lashes, and 29 imprisoned.

Reforms were made afterwards, but not enough for there was another mutiny, this time at Invergordon in 1931. The greatest gain of all was, however, that never again could the rulers of Britain rest in complacency, sure of the safety of 'The Wooden Walls of England'.

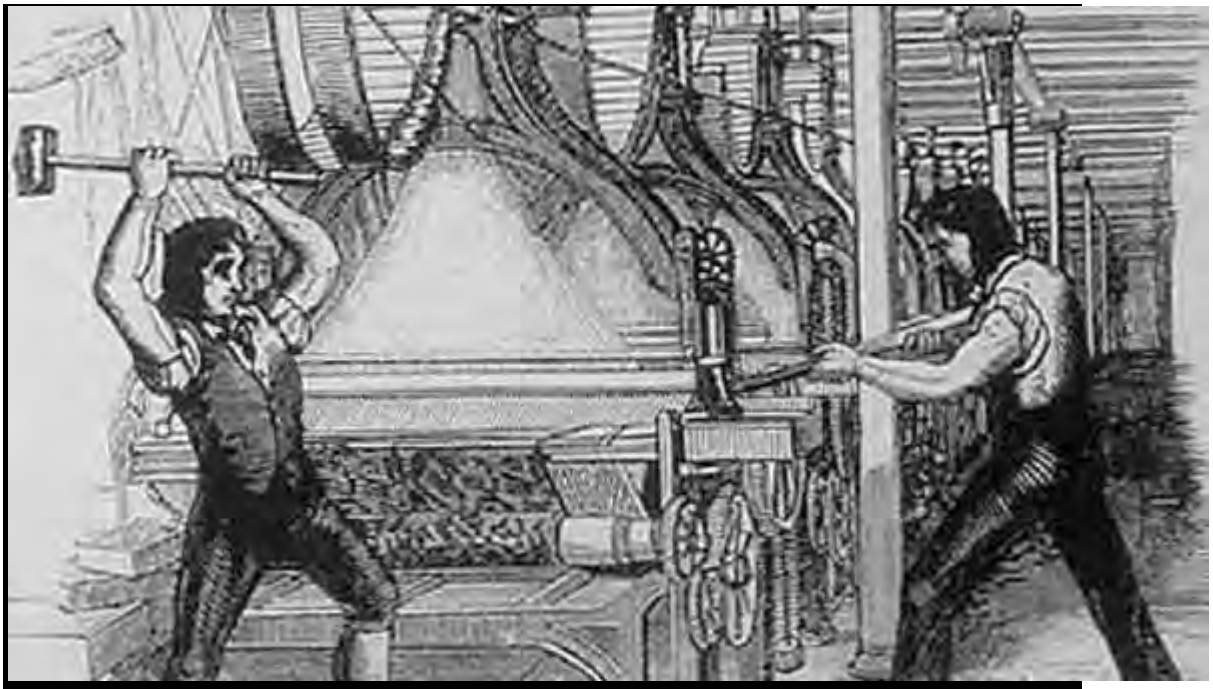


Deemed not respectable enough by the labour movement's later historians – they dismissed "Luddites" from their accounts...

# The early 1800s: national workers' organisation arrives

**WORKERS, SEP 2013 ISSUE**

It was during the first half of the 1800s that a nationally organised working class first emerged throughout Britain with centres in for example Sheffield, Birmingham, Leeds, Nottingham, Glasgow and the West Country.



Contemporary portrayal of machine-breaking.

The early vanguard were the clothing workers, known as "croppers", who had become strong enough to enforce a closed shop in many of the workshops in Wiltshire and Yorkshire. Parliament by 1806 had been warned that a croppers system "exists more in general consent to the few simple rules of their union". Until then croppers had evaded all chance of conviction for "combination". They had formed themselves into a "club" and had accumulated over £1000 to provide for their members in the event of sickness preventing them from being able to work.

The croppers were also in correspondence with the cotton weavers, who through combination had formed an impressive nationwide union that existed from 1809 to 1812. With its centre in Glasgow it had strongholds nationally including Manchester and throughout Lancashire, Cumbria, Scotland, and Carlisle.

## Strike

By 1811 the weavers could raise 40,000 signatures in Manchester, 30,000 in Scotland and 7,000 in Bolton. A disciplined and well supported weavers' strike from Aberdeen to Carlisle then took place in 1812 with the aim of securing a minimum wage. The strike was eventually broken when the Glasgow leaders were arrested and jailed, with sentences ranging from four to eighteen months. The ruling class feared Britain was on a direct road to an open insurrection, so unions had to be broken.

Responding to what had happened to the Glasgow weavers, Luddism, which had been first deployed in Wiltshire in 1802, then took up the baton. It moved out from the grievance of the croppers to more general revolutionary aims among weavers, colliers and cotton spinners. "It is a movement of the people's own" was how William Cobbett, a political commentator of the day, described it.

The Luddites are normally portrayed as a lunatic irresponsible fringe that stood in the way of progress by trying to wreck factory machinery. But Luddite opposition to machinery was far from unthinking. Along with machine breaking they made proposals for the gradual introduction of mechanisation, with alternative employment to be found for displaced workers, or by a tax of 6d. per yard upon cloth dressed by machinery, to be used as a fund for the unemployed seeking work. All of the proposals were rejected by the employers.

The focus in portraying Luddites simply as machine breakers was initially founded by Fabian historians (the Hammonds and the Webbs) writing in the late 1890s and early 1900s. The Fabians took it upon themselves to pioneer the written historical study of the early labour movement. Their aim was to portray the period 1800 to 1850 in the narrow context of the subsequent Parliamentary Reform Acts used to widen the vote from the 1860s onwards and to link this to the growth of the Labour Party during the early 1900s. They did not see Luddites as satisfactory forerunners of the "Labour movement". So Luddites merited neither sympathy nor close attention.

Liberal and conservative historians decided among themselves during the early 1900s that "history" would deal fairly with the Tolpuddle Martyrs but the men executed for Luddism between 1812 to 1819 should be forgotten – or, if remembered, thought of as simpletons or people tainted with criminal folly. The Fabian view persists to this day in many quarters. But the facts tell a different story.

## Politics

Rather than simpletons "Luddites and Politics were closely connected" shouted Thomas Savage in 1817 just before he and five other Luddites were executed at Leicester. In November 1816, 14 Luddites went to the scaffold in York defiantly singing "Behold the Saviour of

Mankind". Asked whether the 14 should all be hung simultaneously on a single beam the presiding judge replied, "Well no, sir, I consider they would hang more comfortably on two." Their relatives were not allowed to bury the bodies.

A similar thing happened in Nottingham when 3,000 mourners went to the funeral after the hanging of Jem Towle, a leading Luddite – but magistrates prevented the funeral service being read. A friend later said, "It did not signify to Jem, for he wanted no Parsons about him."

The Luddites, from 1812 to 1819, were the first to launch the agitations which led to the 10-hour movement during the 1840s. It was they who said that if a new machine were to be introduced the extra value generated should mean workers do fewer hours for the same or more pay or be redeployed. In particular they argued that child labour should be curtailed in factories as part of negotiating the introduction of new machinery. In "polite circles" at the time, factory child labour was considered "busy, industrious and useful".

The employing class, its government and its snivelling apologists hated the Luddites so much because of their thought-through views on political economy. It was these ideas, not the cowardly gradualism encouraged by the Fabians, that eventually led to self-confident British trade unionism. In keeping with the recent victory over Napoleon and his designs on Europe, the call by workers in 1816 was "Ludds do your duty well. It's a Waterloo job, by God."

The Luddites were renowned for their organisational skills, and through their transition towards collective bargaining after 1819 applied those skills to developing the British trade union movement. Many of them for the rest of their lives were involved with the social movements that followed. It was Marx and Engels who keenly identified in the passing of the 10-hour bill in 1847 that "for the first time•in broad daylight" the political economy of the working class was in the ascendency.

In 1834 the Whig Ministry, shortly after widening the vote to include the new factory owners, sanctioned the transportation of the labourers from Tolpuddle for the insolence of trade unionism, which by now was already firmly rooted elsewhere. The sour fruits of Parliamentary Reform had been anticipated by comments in the Poor Man's Guardian by a worker from Macclesfield on 10 December 1831. He reckoned that "it mattered not to him whether he was governed by a boroughmonger, or a whoremonger, or a cheesemonger, if the system of monopoly and corruption was still to be upheld". What is most revealing from this period is the way British working people in the teeth of a ruthless enemy created a political force without negative and petty regional division between the North and South of our country. ■

# Historic Notes: Developing capitalism integrated Britain

SCOTS and English in the course of the struggles of 400 years have achieved a national British unity which any Devolution plans will never destroy.

With a rising bourgeoisie the movement to oppose the Church of Rome arose on both sides of the then separate Kingdoms of Scotland and England. While Henry VIII dissolved the monasteries and distributed the proceeds to sections of the bourgeoisie to gain its allegiance, so James IV and V (1488 - 1513 and 1513 - 1542) sold to landowners the right to inherited possessions. The sufferings these monarchs imposed on their people in the abortive incursions against England (at Flodden, 1513, Solway Moss 1542, Pinkie 1547), the increased taxation imposed by the alliance with the Pope and France were followed by the incompetence of Mary Queen of Scots. She fruitlessly tried to impose Catholicism and French alliance on a population who by now, as in England, were for Reform, and demanded closer trading ties with England.

City dwellers rebelled and took over monasteries by force. John Knox's ideas, including, among other things, education for all and abolition of the Church hierarchy, had spread. The idea of unity with England could not be uprooted. The basis of the power won by James VI of Scotland, after a troubled regency, was the satisfaction of this demand.

James' accession to the English throne in 1603 signifies the beginning of an era when the disparate and sectarian movements of discontent and Reform on both sides of the Border gradually found a single focus - against the Royal power itself. When King Charles convened an Assembly of the Scottish Church in 1638 and Parliament in 1639, the Covenanters packed both and threw out the King's proposals. With the Solemn League and Covenant of 1643, Scots and English fought together for Parliament in the Civil War. The Scots, to whom the King in extremity surrendered, handed him over to London for his due execution.

When the forces of wealth restored the King in 1660, and imposed the Dutch William as successor, they did so with the connivance of those who had enriched themselves through trade or land, in Scotland as in England. The land enclosures which had been one of capitalism's first cruelties in England came now to Scotland, with the abolition of 'run-rig' or strip farming.

The Jacobite uprisings of 1715 and 1745 for the restoration of the old monarchy by demoralised sections of Highlanders were put down with savagery by English and Scots together. Highland chiefs began to exploit their clansmen and force them off the land, ultimately to be sold into starving emigration, all in order to introduce capitalist farming on the English or Lowland model. The most wicked example (because it was a prototype) was the activity of the English agents for the Duchess of Sutherland.

Any idea of an independent, tartan-clad, Gaelic speaking, free Scottish nation was destroyed with ferocity by capitalism and its agents in the form of Lowland Scots, English entrepeneurs and Scottish aristocracy, the former clan chiefs. In a word, the British bourgeoisie. Only when the Highland clearances had been completed towards the end of the nineteenth century and the inhabitants totally dispersed, was the myth of the 'noble highlander' created - as artificial a symbol of national unity as the confectionary labels it adorns, as Victorian a 'tradition' as the Christmas tree, and popular only with the American clan societies whose money puts off the final decay of the castles of a Macleod or MacDonald.

In contrast, as capitalist farming was established from the Lowlands to the Channel (only the 'savage' Highlanders holding out), South-East Scotland became a model for British agricultural efficiency, Ayrshire famous for its milking herds, the North-East for its beef cattle. Eighteenth century Britain was shaped by the strengths and weaknesses of Scots such as Adam Smith, David Hume, Robert Adam and James Watt.

Scotland was an integral, essential part of the British industrial revolution, its population, in spite of emigration and the decimation of the Clearances, soaring from one million in 1700 to 4½ million in 1900. The iron furnaces of James Beaumont Neilson, burning Scottish mined coal provided the steel for the Clydeside, and its succession of great marine engineers, from Robert Napier onwards. Advances in technology and industry completed the integration of the economies and people of Scotland and England.

The working class of Scotland and England fought a single British capitalist enemy. The English Combination Act was accompanied in Scotland by judicial decrees against trade unions. The Repeal of the Act in 1824 was effective on both sides of the Border. With the skilled workers, there began the long struggle for the establishment of a national trade union movement, a single British working class united against a national and now international capitalist enemy. Attempts through Devolution or any other means to split up that unity will be fruitless.



# Highland clearances - devolution 1800-1850

THE ECONOMIC misery of Britain can be cured, say the Government, by splitting the country up into sections. It has always been a capitalist strategy to segregate and divide, in the modern jargon 'devolve'. An isolated area allows the people to be preyed upon more easily.
The policy of isolation and backwardness forced on the Highlands at the outset of the last century shows just how profitable and inhuman the constant capitalist strategy of devolution is.

Today we have the legislative farce of a Scottish Assembly. So in 1832, the Scots were offered the great Reform Act, which left virtually all the people as disenfranchised as before. Yet even the great marvel of Reform took second place to cholera, which came to ravage the Highlands in that summer. It found a population of crofters and smallholders cleared wholesale off their land by the waves of evictions of the previous 30 years - and crowded into piteous townships or the urban hovels of Glasgow or Edinburgh. Millions of sheep now grazed on the valleys the people had cultivated. The people died, while the sheep lived on for a nobler end - profit.

A nascent capitalism's policy, then, as now, to Scotland and Britain as a whole, was destruction of a self-sufficient economy - of cereals and cattle, on which the Gaels had lived for generations. Ousted by sheep, the people now lived on and grew potatoes. Then 1836 brought the potato blight.

Capitalist farmers grew wheat on the best of the land emptied of people. In Ross-shire, for example, they sold half of their 20,000 quarters to London, the rest for flour. The shameful export of food for profit, now institutionalised by the EEC, had already started.

"Destitution Boards", like today's regional and other boards, were set up, with as little effect. As the INVERNESS COURIER wrote: "There never was a time when there need be less fear of famine. In the shipping ports of the South, the granaries are choked full." So now the 'surplus' population, once terribly evicted, was to be offered starvation on the hills, exploitation in the factories of the south (if they were lucky), or the hell of emigration in [illegible] ships to a New World [illegible] capitalist as the old.

If none of these, there was always the murderous discipline of the army. A whole village in Skye was named after the mass of combatants returning from Waterloo. Then in the midst of famine, came the Crimean War. The real problem, they said, was not the misery at home, but the Russians abroad.

Not so, wrote Donald Ross. "Talk of secret diplomacy and Russian intrique forsooth! Are not whole straths and districts bargained for, and quietly let to sheep farmers and sportsmen months before the unhappy occupants know about it?" He denounced the "Russians of Ross-shire," the police (whether Lowlanders or English made no difference) whose truncheon attack on 70 empty-handed women at Strathcarron serves as an example of many, many more such incidents throughout the period. For example, Naomi Ross "was most violently kicked in the breast and also in the most delicate part of her person. Had poor Naomi been wandering on the banks of the Danube and been ill-used, I could understand it, but in Christian Scotland to be butchered alive, who can think of it without a blush of shame."

Today we have Callaghan at the Lord Mayor's Banquet with pious platitudes about the EEC, just as the then Prime Minister, little Lord John Russell, used the same great occasion to advise the suffering people to eat less bread, along with Queen Victoria who ordered her household to eat no more than a pound of bread a day, while a string of Dukes pledged "to reduce as far as practicable (!) the consumption of bread and flour."

Economic and agricultural destruction, poverty, intervention boards. In the isolation and then destruction of the Highland people by a nascent capitalism we can see every trait of the destruction that a declining EEC capitalism would wish to visit on Britain as a whole, or, as they would prefer, its devolved and weaker parts.

Wilberforce's opposition to the slave trade was founded on the same basis as his hatred of trade unions, free speech, habeas corpus and universal suffrage: the interests of capitalism...

# William Wilberforce: enemy of the working class

**WORKERS, JULY 2007 ISSUE**

**Far too much credit for the abolition of slavery is given to William Wilberforce, one of history's biggest hypocrites and reactionaries. It was only by their own action that the slaves were freed.**

During the 18th century, Britain became the slave carrier for the sugar planters of France and Spain, her rivals. The sugar colonies were far more important to France than to Britain. St Domingue (present-day Haiti), controlled by the French, was more fertile than the British West Indies (which included Jamaica), where the soil was becoming exhausted. The sugar from St. Domingue cost a fifth less and its exports and profit rates were twice that of Jamaica. By 1789, its sugar production was a third more than that of all Britain's West Indies colonies.

Prime Minister William Pitt raged that the slave trade, "instead of being very advantageous to Great Britain, is the most destructive that can well be imagined to her interests." To ruin St Domingue, he urged his friend William Wilberforce to campaign against the slave trade: the abolitionist movement was created to serve British state interests.

The British ruling class's frenzied reaction to the French revolution of 1789 intensified the antagonism with France, as she became not just a rival but also a political alternative. In 1791, St Domingue's slave-owners offered to leave French rule and put themselves under British rule, to keep their slaves. In 1793, Pitt accepted their offer and agreed, blocking abolition for the next 14 years.

When St Domingue's slaves rebelled against Pitt's betrayal, he sent hundreds of thousands of troops to try to crush them, in a disastrous and futile war. 50,000 British soldiers died, 50,000 were permanently invalided. When St Domingue's revolutionary government ended slavery and declared independence from France in 1804, the British ruling class did not need the slave trade any more and so could abolish it in 1807.


Toldpuddle: time for a rally against Wilberforce? He piloted through Parliament the anti-union Combination Acts, which made all unions illegal.

**Reactionary in Britain**

In Britain, Wilberforce was the foremost apologist and champion of every act of tyranny, from the employment of Oliver the Spy and the illegal detention of poor prisoners in Coldbaths Fields jail to the Peterloo massacre. Wilberforce supported the 1794 Habeas Corpus Suspension Act, which let the government imprison people against whom it had no evidence at all. Habeas Corpus was suspended until 1802. Across Britain, trade union members, journalists and publishers were arrested and detained.

Wilberforce backed a series of Acts between 1795 and 1799 to suppress sedition, used to curb freedom of speech, assembly and organisation. Consequently, the state prevented meetings of the Literary Society of Manchester, the Academical Society of Oxford, and even of a mineralogical society, on the grounds that the study of mineralogy could lead to atheism. He backed the Tory government's Six Acts of 1819, including the Blasphemous and Seditious Libel Act, known as the Gagging Act.

In 1794 he backed the prosecution of twelve members of the London Corresponding Society for high treason. Their crime was to advocate universal suffrage. When a jury acquitted the defendants, he backed the government's decision to arrest 65 leading members of the society and imprison them without trial for two years. No wonder that it was said of Wilberforce, "he never favoured the liberty of any white man in all his life."

Wilberforce wrote that Christianity "renders the inequalities of the social scale less galling to the lower orders, whom also she instructs in their turn to be diligent, humble, patient: reminding them that their more lowly path has been allotted to them by the hand of God; that it is their part faithfully to discharge its duties, and contentedly to bear its inconveniences." William Cobbett called him the prince of hypocrites, who praised the benefits of poverty from a comfortable distance.

The bishops and baronets of the Proclamation Society (as Wilberforce's Society for the Suppression of Vice was earlier called) prosecuted the impoverished publisher of Tom Paine's The Age of Reason. In 1801 and 1802, it launched 623 successful prosecutions for breaking the Sabbath laws. Pitt's government declared The Rights of Man seditious and prosecuted those who published and sold copies of Paine's book.

**Censorship**
The government, with Wilberforce's support, imposed censorship, launching 42 prosecutions of publishers, editors and writers between 1809 and 1812. It became a criminal offence to write that the Prince of Wales was fat (he was), or to report that Foreign Secretary Lord Castlereagh had ordered the flogging of Irish peasants (he had).

Wilberforce also backed persecution of the whole working class. He proposed a general Combination Act, calling combinations – trade unions – "a general disease in our society". The Pitt government's acts of 1799 and 1800 were the severest of their kind ever enacted in Britain. They made all unions illegal as such, whether conspiracy, restraint of trade or the like could be proved against them or not.

In theory, the acts applied to employers as well as to workers, but workers were prosecuted by the thousand, never a single employer. In 1834, a year after the emancipation of the slaves, the penalty for trade union activity was still transportation for life.

In sum, as his biographer the last Lord Birkenhead wrote approvingly, Wilberforce "was a Tory through and through; he never shed the political ideas he had inherited from Pitt and his religion intensified his conservatism."

The British Empire, still so often praised for its shaping of world history over the last few centuries, was at root a slave empire...

# Abolition? What abolition?

**WORKERS, MAY 2007 ISSUE**

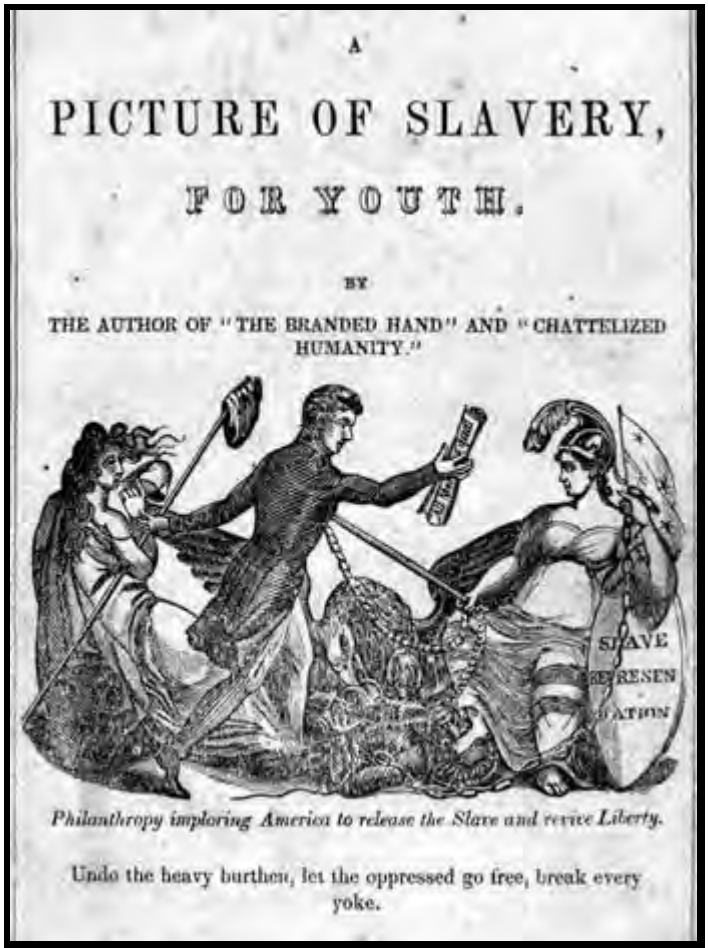
**The British Empire, still so often praised for its shaping of world history over the last few centuries, was at root a slave empire, held together by slave-trading between slave colonies, a world system mirroring only more grotesquely its domestic system of wage slavery. Between 1660 and 1807, British-owned ships carried 3.5 million Africans, 40,000 a year, across the Atlantic – more than any other country. British property owners were the world's chief slavers.**

A part of Britain's ruling class, not the nation, owned the slave ships, the slaves and the plantations. British workers did not control their own labour power, never mind own other people. William Cobbett noted that in 1832, "white men are sold, by the week and the month all over England. Do you call such men free, on account of the colour of their skin?" Black chattel slavery and white wage slavery were parts of the same system.

**Wage slaves at home**

By the 19th century the more powerful part of Britain's ruling class were those who exploited wage slaves at home. They led the abolitionist movement, ignoring the eighteen-hour days worked by children in Bradford's mills. They backed the laws that attacked trade unions and suspended Habeas Corpus. They funded their foreign philanthropy by increasing the exploitation of their white slaves at home. The trade unionist Oates said, "The great emancipators of negro slaves were the great drivers of white slaves. The reason was obvious. The labour of the black slaves was the property of others. The labour of the white slaves they considered their own." As the Derbyshire Courier noted, "We make laws to provide protection to the Negro: let us not be less just to the children of England."

Bronterre O'Brien wrote, "What are called the working classes are the slave populations of the civilized countries." From birth, workers were mortgaged to the owners of capital and land, forced into wage slavery. Britain's property owners gained far more profit from their 16 million wage slaves than from their million chattel slaves. O'Brien again, "We pronounce there to be more slavery in England than in the West Indies ... because there is more unrequited labour in England."



Fine words, but the truth is that abolition began to serve the employers better than slavery.

The empire was based on exploiting wage slaves and used the free movement of goods, capital and labour to extend its exploitation. The wars of the 17th, 18th and 19th centuries were fought to keep, or add to, Britain's imperial and slave-trading conquests. For example, in the 1790s, British slave owners united with French slave owners to try to defeat Haiti's revolution. The government sent more soldiers to the West Indies, and lost more, than it had when trying to crush America's independence. Of the 89,000 sent, 45,000 died, as did 19,000 sailors. France lost 50,000 dead. Haiti's freed slaves defeated the armies of the two greatest slaver powers, but the British forces laid waste to the island, destroying almost all its sugar plantations.

By 1807 the slave trade was becoming less profitable: it employed only one in 24 of Liverpool's trading ships and the West Indies sugar industry was dying. All the plantations were running at a loss; many had been abandoned. Two-thirds of the slaves carried in British ships were bought by Britain's imperial rivals France and Spain, to grow sugar which undercut West Indies-grown sugar on the vital Continental market. All these factors opened the way to the Abolition of the Slave Trade Act; from 1 May 1807, no more slave ships sailed from Britain.

But the government let the British Army and the Royal Navy force slaves into unpaid military service and buy and sell slaves until 1812, breaking its own law. The office of Jamaica's Governor General wrote in August 1811, "I am commanded by the Commander of the Forces to direct that you will go on purchasing Negroes for the Kings Service after you have completed your own regiment. The men so purchased are only to receive rations and slop clothing, no pay is to be issued to them until they are further disposed of."

Further, in 1814, Foreign Secretary Lord Castlereagh agreed that Bourbon France could resume slave trading to restock her colonies and to resupply Britain's West Indies plantations. As Lord Grenville said, "We receive a partial contract at the Congress of Vienna by which the British Crown has sanctioned and guaranteed the slave trade."

Slavery lost its former importance to the metropolitan economy. The slave colonies took an ever-smaller share of Britain's exports. From 1820 the slump in the West Indies grew worse and worse. In 1832, an official wrote that the West Indies system "is becoming so unprofitable when compared with the expense that for this reason only it must at no distant time be nearly abandoned."

**Revolts at home**

The years 1830-32 also saw the Swing Rising in Britain, revolution in France, a major slave revolt in Jamaica and the parliamentary Reform Act. All led to the 1833 Slave Emancipation Act, which freed the 540,000 slaves in the British West Indies. Parliament gave the planters £20 million (£1 billion in today's money) as compensation for the loss of their slaves. The working class paid the money in tax, though they pointed out that the Church should have paid, as it owned so many slaves itself and as its priests justified the slavery of both black and white, at home and abroad. The Empire then imposed

another form of servitude on the "freed" slaves of the West Indies – compulsory six-year "apprenticeships". Later in the century, it used indentured labour, with workers forcibly imported from India.

Slavery had been profitable in the 18th century; abolition was even more profitable in the 19th. The effort to "stop the foreign slave trade" was designed to damage rival empires and to protect the West Indies planters, now denied annual slave imports, from competition by sugar producers Cuba and Brazil, still reliant on buying slaves. The suppression of the slave trade on Africa's West and East coasts brought ever-closer control of West and East Africa, at first by private com-panies like the British East Africa Company, later by the Empire itself. Abolition was a weapon to expand the empire.

Throughout the century, the Empire continued to steal people, land and resources from Africa, reinforcing slavery there and killing millions of African people. The Empire continued to contribute to and profit from the slave trade well into the twentieth century. As Marx wrote, slavery is "what the bourgeoisie makes of itself and of the labourer, wherever it can without restraint model the world after its own image."

Abolitionism was an early form of the fake internationalism we see today – LiveAid, Live Earth, Blairite calls to intervene everywhere, Oxfam's delusions about Britain being "a force for good on the world stage". We would be satisfied if Britain was a force for good in Britain, and the world better served.

# HISTORIC NOTES

# The Friendly Societies

A NINETEENTH Century writer, talking about the British working class, wrote that the strongest emotion among them was "... a universal determination to provide for themselves in sickness and in health, from the cradle to the grave and, at all costs, to keep out of the clutches of the hated Poor Law and to escape the ultimate brand of shame, resort to the workhouse in old age."

It was this desire for independence and self-respect that led workers early in the Nineteenth Century to establish Friendly Societies. These consisted of groups of men and women who clubbed together to pay weekly contributions into a fund, from which they received money if ill or unemployed, and which provided a level of support in old-age, finally paying the funeral expenses on death.

In the days before the Welfare State such funds were the only means by which the working class could escape the horrifying grip of total poverty. The Nineteenth Century saw terrible housing conditions lack of cheap essentials, and appallingly long hours of work in bad conditions for low wages. These were the background for the radical working class movements of the time.

Friendly societies provided for a need that went far beyond mere survival. They were the means by which the working class maintained their independence and pride. They were not thrust upon them by any other class but were an outgrowth of working class morality and social independence, a specific response to poverty and the indignities associated with it.

Their emphasis was on collective organisation in the face of poverty. They offered a way not only to overcome poverty, but also charity, a way in which they could achieve independence of the State, the Poor Law and the Workhouse.

With many principles in common with Trade Unions and with the same working class culture and collective identity, Friendly Societies provided the basic organisation from which many Trade Unions developed and in which many Trade Union leaders were trained. Their aims were often directly in opposition to the bourgeois state.

Throughout the Nineteenth Century Friendly Societies provided for workers a form of insurance, and organisation. This enabled us in the Twentieth Century to fight for better welfare provision. This, however, is rapidly being destroyed and the choice that we are now faced with is, either a future like our past; or revolutionary change.

Much maligned, almost a byword for backwardness, the Luddites were in fact fighting for their livelihoods and self-respect at a time when trade unions were virtually illegal…

# The 1810s: The Luddites act against destitution

**WORKERS, DEC 2010 ISSUE**

Luddite machine breaking began in 1811 in the hosiery districts of the Midlands counties. Framework-knitting **traditionally had been carried out in workers' homes, though** the frames belonged to the employers. Trouble arose around **the making of new, cheap "cut up" hosiery and the use of a** new wide frame that reduced the numbers of workers employed and also produced shoddier goods. More and more factories began installing machinery and increasingly handloom weavers were thrown out of work.

The mill owners in Nottinghamshire and Derbyshire suddenly began receiving letters threatening the destruction of their machines. These proclamations were signed in the name of Ned Ludd, or sometimes General Ludd and his Army of Redressers. Threats did not remain idle but were translated into physical action. Under cover of darkness and in a disciplined manner, bands of men attacked mills and factories with a military precision to destroy the mechanical looms ('frames') that were cutting their wages and putting them out of work.

A still-working spinning mule at Quarry Bank Mill, Cheshire. The introduction of power looms massively increased the supply of cotton yarn, undermining the traditional livelihoods of the handloom weavers.

In Nottingham over a three-week period in March 1811, more than two hundred stocking frames were destroyed by workers upset by wage reductions and the use of un-apprenticed workmen. Several attacks took place every night and 400 special constables were enrolled to protect the factories; even £50 rewards (a phenomenal sum for the time) were offered for information.

Action against machines quickly spread north to Lancashire and the West Riding of Yorkshire, and into Leicestershire. Contemporary accounts indicate that bands of machine-breakers were huge, numbering hundreds or sometimes thousands of people. Unlike the Midlands, the offending machines in the cotton and woollen industries of the northern counties were chiefly to be found in factories rather than workers' houses, hence under the direct protection of employers' hired guards, which led to more violent, often less successful acts.

In Yorkshire in the 1810s, the croppers – a highly skilled group of workers who produced the cloth's fine finish – turned their anger on the new shearing frames.

Their most notable attack took place at Rawfolds Mill near Brighouse in April 1812. Two croppers and a local mill-owner lost their lives; three croppers were transported and fourteen were hanged. In February and March 1812, factories were attacked in Huddersfield, Halifax, Wakefield and Leeds. Throughout 1812, activity also centred on Lancashire cotton mills where local handloom weavers objected to the introduction of power looms.

## Thousands of troops

In an attempt to control these widespread Luddite manoeuvres, there were in 1812 as many as twelve thousand troops deployed by the government in the four northern counties – more troops than Wellington had available in Spain that year to fight Napoleon's armed forces! Luddites met at night on the moors surrounding the industrial towns, where they rallied, manoeuvred and drilled their forces. They enjoyed, particularly in the early years, extensive popular support in the immediate community.

Luddism was not the first example of attacks on new machinery in Britain. Sporadic machine breaking had occurred long before the Luddites, particularly within the textiles industry. Indeed, Hargreaves and Arkwright had had to move to Nottinghamshire, away from open animosity in Lancashire. But the industrial revolution by this time was adding to the misery and causing the movement. Bad housing, employment of women and children at cheap rates, insanitary and unsafe conditions in factories and mines, and the replacement of labour by machines all played their part in the distressed state of the people. The ongoing Napoleonic Wars also added to their desperate plight when Napoleon's blockade prevented British manufacturers and traders from selling their goods, having a destructive effect on the cotton industry.

Employers cut wage bills, workers were sacked and machines were made more use of. In addition, there was a series of bad harvests (1808-12). Food prices rocketed and food riots broke out in 1812 in places like Manchester, Oldham, Ashton, Rochdale, Stockport and Macclesfield. (A load of potatoes could cost twenty weeks wages.) Great economic distress subjected workers to "the most unexampled privations". From being among the most prosperous of workers, handloom weavers quite suddenly found themselves facing destitution.

The government introduced a series of repressive measures to deal with the Luddites. The Frame Breaking Bill (1812) made the destruction of machinery punishable by death. Trials of suspected Luddites were held before judges who could be relied upon to hand

down harsh sentences. Several dozen Luddites were hanged or transported to penal servitude in Australia. The spy system was reintroduced. The Anti-Combination Act (1799), under which trade unions were forbidden, remained in force. No wonder Luddism was characterised by one historian as "collective bargaining by riot".

## Revival

Despite the repression, further sporadic incidents occurred in subsequent years. In 1816, there was a revival of machine breaking following a bad harvest and a trade downturn. 53 frames were smashed in Loughborough. But by 1818 machine breaking had petered out.

It is fashionable to stigmatise the Luddites as mindless blockers of progress. But they were motivated by an innate sense of self-preservation, rather than a fear of change. The prospect of poverty and hunger spurred them on. Their aim was to make an employer (or set of employers) come to terms in a situation where unions were illegal. They wanted to protect a centuries-old, craft-based way of life that gave them livelihood and self-respect. Frames were left untouched in premises where the owners were still obeying previous economic practice and not trying to cut prices.

At times the Luddites did improve real wages. Luddism was a deliberate tactic employed by a self-acting, self-organising working class grappling with many desperate problems during industrial capitalism's harsh autocratic beginnings.

Historic Notes

# Luddites – workers against exploitation

THE TERM 'Luddism', has in common parlance, come to mean 'mindless wreckers'. Nothing could be further from the truth.

Luddism was a coherent working class movement which grew up in the early 19th century in the cloth industry in Nottinghamshire and which spread to Lancashire, Yorkshire and other surrounding counties. The slick explanation for this movement, which made a concerted attack on machinery in the cloth industry, is that it was a spontaneous outburst of violence against new machinery which had brought about a loss of jobs and a drop in wages.

Thus the 'ignorant' workers smashed the machines which were the tangible cause of their employment and falling wages. However, hosiery machines had been in use in Nottinghamshire since Elizabethan times. Moreover, the workers in the industry had suggested and made many improvements to the machines since that time. Similarly, in 1812, when the Luddite movement in Lancashire was growing, power looms were not much in evidence. In fact, hand looms increased in number well into the 1820's. New machinery in itself was not the target of Luddism.

So-called friends and experts on the working class, if they bother to acknowledge the existence of Luddism at all, take a slightly different line, but come to the same conclusion - 'stupid, ignorant workers who can see no further than their noses.' The explanation is that the poor workers were misguided, that all mechanisation was progressive at a time of emerging capitalism.

All such explanations are facile. First, to say that the Luddite movement was spontaneous and unorganised is to say that the persons involved had not thought about it. In fact, the Luddite movement was very organised, with well thought out campaigns. The organisation was so good, at a time when any working class solidarity was illegal, that the ruling class never broke it. Indeed, this is the reason that we know so little about it. Vast numbers of men, from far and wide, were organised with military precision into forces to attack planned targets, often factories, where the owner had introduced new machines to undercut labour, produce shoddy goods and herd workers like cattle. Were the Luddites wrong to organise against this? Far from mindless wrecking, the stockingers of Nottingham hung notices on frames, owned by employers who had agreed to the conditions laid down by the workers, declaring: "This frame is making full fashioned work, at the full price." These frames were untouched.

Those participating in Luddite activities were from a wide range of trades, not just from the cloth trades. As the records of those Luddites caught and convicted show, there were cutters, cobblers, farm labourers, inn keepers and mechanics. That the Luddites were an integral part of the working class communities in which they lived is shown by the support they received from their communities which hid them; hardly ever was an activist informed upon, except by spies, and that only rarely because spies found great difficulty in breaking into the organisation and communities.

Luddism must not be seen in isolation from other working class movements, both before and after 1812-14, the hey day of the movement. Known Luddites included men who were at the forefront in organising the emerging trade unions, then illegal. Future leaders in the battle for the Ten Hour Day and in the Chartist movement, as well as former Despardists and Jacobins.

Some apologists of Luddism say that it was a 'narrow' trade union movement, to achieve higher wages and preserve jobs. As if trade unionism was ever narrow! What was at issue was the 'freedom' of the laissez faire capitalists to destroy the customs of the trade, with the lowering of wages, the destruction of skills and a reduction in the quality of the finished product. The principles that the Luddites fought for were the exact opposite of these. It is the same fight that we are faced with today; firstly survival and eventually the destruction of the system that maligns us, physically, morally, economically and mentally.

## HISTORIC NOTES

# PETERLOO .. A MASSACRE REMEMBERED

LANCASHIRE was buzzing with the expectations of a new age at the end of the Napoleonic wars in 1815. The cost of the wars had been off-loaded on the British people in the form of indirect taxation. A weaver, for example, lost 50% purchasing power through tax burdens. Bread itself became a delicacy against the backdrop of the Corn Laws and soaring prices.

John Bull's glorious return from the bloody wars was greeted by misery, high unemployment, and starvation for himself and 300,000 other unemployed soldiers.

Manchester was in the grip of a cholera epidemic when, in March 1817, 30,000 weavers assembled, each armed with a blanket for the march to London to demand reform. The 'Blanketeers' got no further than the assembly point at St Peter's Fields where magistrates ordered in the light cavalry with their new unlimited powers; one man was killed and there were several injuries.

The British ruling class had become obsessed with the notion of insurrection, more so, in fact than the British working class who actually needed revolution. The bourgeois class feared a repeat of the events in France thirty years earlier and had improved the organisation for suppression.

By July 1817 the local mill owners, cotton merchants, shopkeepers and publicans began to form the Manchester Yeomanry, an armed organ dedicated to the suppression of 'insurrection'. They recruited from the most bigoted scum and lowlife from the thousands of alehouses around the town.

### Strength sapped

The summer of 1818 saw the textile workers starved back to work after a long and weary strike. In order to evade the Combination Acts, cotton workers conducted trade union affairs under the guise of debating societies or independent clubs. The Lancashire cotton workers organised in their thousands.

By 1819, rallies as large as 20,000 were a regular occurrence in the cotton mill towns of south east Lancashire. Captain Chippendale advised his superiors at the Home Office that 'The minds of the lower order in these parts is exclusively occupied with ... expectations of an approaching explosion which is to produce a complete change in the present order of things.'

August 16 was set aside for a rally on St Peter's Fields to demand universal suffrage for adults and for the Corn Laws to be repealed. Henry Hunt, a leading would be reformer, would be the main speaker. The day before the rally the Manchester Yeomanry sent their sabres to get sharpened.

### Bloodthirsty

Come the morning of the rally, there were reports of gangs of Yeomanry thirsting for blood in the city's pubs. By lunchtime 80,000 workers had assembled in St Peter's Fields, attracting the esteemed presence of the capitalist press, the first political event of its kind to do so; they sat alongside the speakers. Stationed out of sight, a troop of Hussars, hardened veterans of the Napoleonic Wars.

Magistrates had made a good vantage point of a house overlooking the rally and, watching the carnival, became more and more frustrated at not being able to call in the troops. They gave an order for Henry Hunt to be arrested. The Deputy Constable was reluctant to walk through the mass to the speaker's stand without a military escort, the chivalrous Sir Hugh Hornby-Birley, a local mill owner, was all too happy to oblige by offering the services of his Manchester Yeomanry. Before his gallant men had even reached the crowd they had knocked down a young woman, killing her child.

### Riot Act

Despite the incursion, the crowd remained peaceful and patient, unaware they were being read the Riot Act. Sixty mounted Yeomen drew their sabres in order to hack their way through the human forest towards the speakers' rostrum.

In the havoc that followed, special constables and cotton workers were slashed indiscriminately. Watching from their window, the magistrates convinced themselves that the Manchester Yeomanry was in grave danger, thus the order was given to unleash the Hussars, who merely swept the whole bloody morass of carnage from one end of the field to the other, the butchery being so bad that even the Manchester Yeomanry fled in blind panic. St Peter's Fields had been cleared in minutes, only the badly injured and the litter of corpses remaining.

### Regrouped

Ragged hordes were seen fleeing in their thousands away from Manchester back home to Lancashire as swiftly as possible. One large contingent did not stop till they reached Harpurhey, at the time a village some distance from the city, where they regrouped for a silent march back to Oldham.

### Dedication

Those early days of trade union activity took place without telecommunications, public transport and the modern media we take for granted, and it is important not just to commemorate their suffering, but to learn from their dedication.

Printed and published by the Communist Party of Britain (Marxist-Leninist) 155, Fortess Road, London NW5

# HISTORIC NOTES

# The Merthyr Riots, 1831

FOR A brief period in the summer of 1831 the workers of Merthyr took control of their town. Incensed by privation, disease, degradation and miserly wage rates the people, with miners in the vanguard, rose against the authorities. The uprising was triggered off by a substantial reduction in the wage rate but demands for voting rights, Parliamentary reform, and the ending of the truck system were also features. 'Bara neu waed!' 'Bread or blood!' is said to have been the rallying call.

The first target of the people was the Court of Requests. This was an institution which gave bailiffs the orders to seize workers' personal belongings which were auctioned to repay debts. The building was ransacked and records were burnt. Infuriated, the magistrates summoned troops from Brecon. The soldiers marched through the town and occupied the Castle Inn.

Townspeople rallied to this point and the troops were completely surrounded. So afraid were the mine and iron works owners at this massive show of strength by workers that they offered to concede some of the demands, but the soldiers panicked and a worker was killed. It was then that the crowd attacked and attempted to seize the arms of the soldiers.

Twenty were killed. Shot or boyonetted to death. Seventy were wounded.

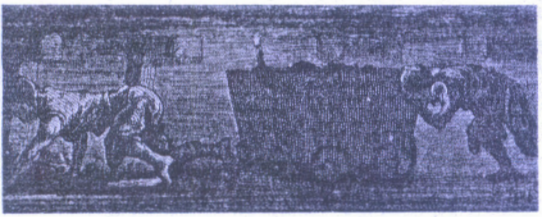
Cavalry reinforcements were sent to the aid of the trapped infantry. The following day the people of Merthyr captured ammunition supplies which were being transported from Brecon. The same day troops from Swansea were overpowered and their arms taken before they could enter the town.

News of the uprising spread to all parts of South Wales and thousands travelled to Merthyr to support the people.

The authorities, terrified that towns in other parts of Britain would rise, completely surrounded Merthyr with a huge force. They were prepared to slaughter every man, woman and child occupying the town.

The people faltered. They became divided. Some were prepared to accept the terms the "iron masters" had offered on wages. Others wished to stand out until guarantees were given to end the truck system and the insanitary living conditions in the town. There were those who wanted voting rights granted before they would surrender.

On Monday June 6th morale had become so low that the people began to disperse. The uprising had ended.

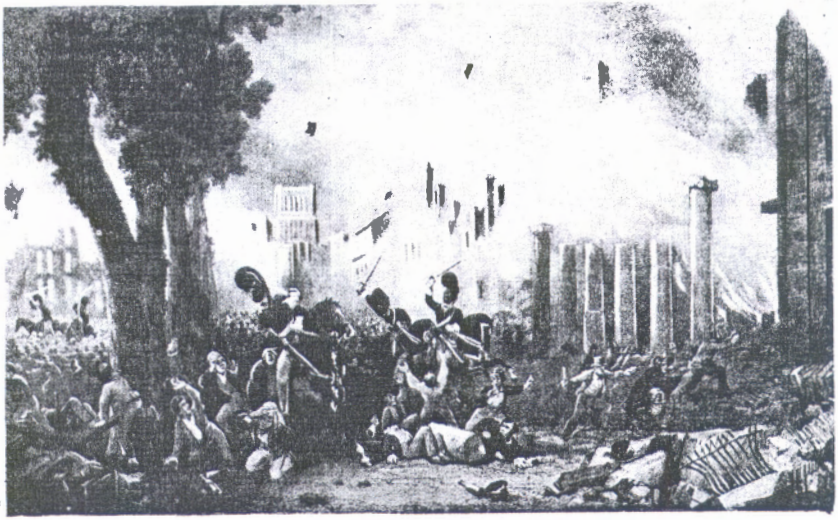


Conditions in the early days of coal mining

# HISTORIC NOTES Working Class Union 1831

# 'Rights of Property are theWrongs of the Poor'

THE British working class has waged war on capitalism for over one hundred and fifty years. The capitalist development of the factory system in the early decades of the nineteenth century with all the accompanying exploitation and misery was a stimulus to working -class organisation and unity. During the formative period in the history of the working class it was already obvious to workers that, as the producers of all wealth, their birthright was nothing less than the complete control of the means of production and the state. It was quickly realised that capitalism was a system of exploitation which could only survive at the expense of the well being of workers. In 1831 the 'National Union of the Working Class' identified political oppression with social injustice. A statement from its congress said: " Why were the laws not made to protect industry, but property or capital? Because the lawmakers were compounded of fund and landowners, possessors of property, and the laws were made to suit their own purposes. Had the producers of wealth been the makers of law, would they have left those who made the country rich to perish by starvation? " The delegates at the congress discussed the contradictions that had been caused by the rise of capitalist indutries. Many pointed out that whilst constituting a majority in society the working-class was victim of the new industrial system and expanding economy, developments which should have brought material benefits for all. " The rights of property are the wrongs of the poor," declared one member.



Soldiers attacking working people in Queens Square, Bristol, 1831

At the third Co-operative Society Congress of 1832, several speakers described operators and employers as separate and hostile forces. In 'Pioneer', which appeared in 1833, Morrison criticised Owen's paternalism and claimed that the working class was an independent class: "Orphans we are and bastards of society." As Morrison pointed out, "The capitalist merely as a property man has no power at all, and labour... regulated by intelligence, will in a very few years be the only existent power in this and in all civilised countries."

There were different strands of working class organisation springing up in the 1830s but Brontere O'Brien, who is identified with three of the main movements, the struggle for reform, Trade Unionism and Chartism, described the common element of working class consciousness: "A spirit of combination has grown up among the working classes of which there has been no example in former times... The object of it is the sublimest that can be conceived, namely to establish for the productive classes a complete domination over the fruits of their own industry."

Workers have struggled to free themselves from the capitalist yoke for over a century and a half. Even in 1830 the workers were forming their own ideology, a Marxist-Leninist ideology. Workers fought to end exploitation and in their day-to-day class struggles they aspired to the control of society by the productive class itself. They saw unity and combination in the Trade Unions as their strength against capitalism. They realised that their potential power was boundless. Today the working class has the experience of a century and a half of struggle behind it and capitalism in decline shows the aggression of weakness.

## HISTORIC NOTES

# Workers and the vote. An introduction

THE STRUGGLE for freedom of the press has existed since it was possible to print dissenting views. John Bunyan, the tinker author of Pilgrim's Progress was imprisoned many a time for his publications. In the late 1800s papers like 'Hogs Wash' and 'Pigs Meat' (a reference to workers being termed 'the swinish multitude'), fought a running battle with papers like the Government subsidised broadsheet 'The Times.'

But it wasn't until the turn of the century that the struggle began in earnest. The Napoleonic Wars brought hunger and misery to the people of Britain along with its slaughter. Resistance brought repression – the banning of trade unions in 1799, and the 'Gag Acts' of 1817 and 1819. These tried to succeed where the Combination Acts were failing - to stamp out independent working class ideas and organisation. Public meetings were banned, habeus corpus suspended, penalties for sedition increased.

Workers' reading rooms were closed, and taxes imposed on all publications to take them beyond the pocket of 'the mob'. Further to this, 'Prosecution Societies', financed lavishly by landlords and capitalists, paid stooges to take papers to court for blasphemy and sedition. The military, as at Peterloo, and the law were brought together to crush the growth of independent working class thought and organisation.

Richard Carlile, a tinplate worker suffered nine years of prison for his publication of 'The Republican'. His supporters including wife and sister collected between them 200 years of incarceration for selling it. Families like that of Joseph Swann, a Macclesfield hatter, were left to starve when the breadwinner was imprisoned for hawking papers like 'The Poor Man's Guardian'. But their spirit was unbroken. In place of the tax-stamp, the illegal 'Guardian' printed:"Knowledge is Power. Published in defiance of the law, to try the power or right against might." Our aim, it said, is to publish "knowledge calculated to make you free", instead of the "namby pamby stuff published to stultify the minds of working people and make them spiritless and unresisting victims of a system of plunder and oppression."

What were these papers demanding? The central demand was for political equality. "The working classes must obtain their rights as men, before they can obtain them as workmen", argued the Metropolitan Trades Council. The corruption of government and taxes on the poor were seen as the main burdens, and parliamentary reform as the means to lift them. In this they were united with many employers who were also, at the same time, disenfranchised.

Some of the papers even welcomed the pro-capitalist 1832 Reform Act because, as one put it: "It conceded to some extent the right of representation on the basis of population, and this concession once made to however a trifling degree, must be carried onwards to full extent."

Prophetic this might have been, but there were some who bitterly opposed this approach. One handloom weaver, who wisely kept himself anonymous, told 'the Guardian' that the rich should not have the right to vote at all, and that the "people who make the goods should have the sole privilege of making the laws." He made a fundamental attack on what was to become the main demand of the Charter – universal suffrage.

"People who live by plunder will always tell you to be submissive to thieves. To talk of representation, in any shape being of any use to the people is sheer nonsense... Those who make the laws now, and are intended by the reform bill, to make them in the future all live by profit of some sort or other. They will therefore, no matter who elect them, or how often they are elected, always make the laws to raise the profits and keep down the price of labour. Representation, therefore, by a different body of people to those represented, or whose interests are opposed to theirs, is a mockery and those who persuade the people to the contrary are either idiots or cheats."

And so, despite continued oppression the papers flourished. The 'Prosecution Societies' began to go bankrupt, and the illegal papers began to sell more in a day than 'The Times' managed in a week. Repressive laws had again, been made unworkable, and in 1834 the 'tax on knowledge' was repealed. Separately and together, 'The Poor Man's Guardian', 'Medusa', 'Gorgon', 'The Republican', 'Sherwin's Political Register', 'Black Dwarf', 'The Trades Journal', 'National Reformer' raised the banner of press liberty in Britain. And they also raised a question in their discussions which remains paramount today. Can working class liberation be achieved through Parliament ?

An artist's impression of the events at Peterloo.

# HISTORIC NOTES The Chartists and the Vote

THE CHARTER, a massive petition presented to Parliament in 1840, 1842 and 1848 had six main demands: universal manhood suffrage, voting by ballot, equal electoral districts, no property qualifications for MPs, MPs to be paid, and annual general elections. Millions of people united behind these demands.

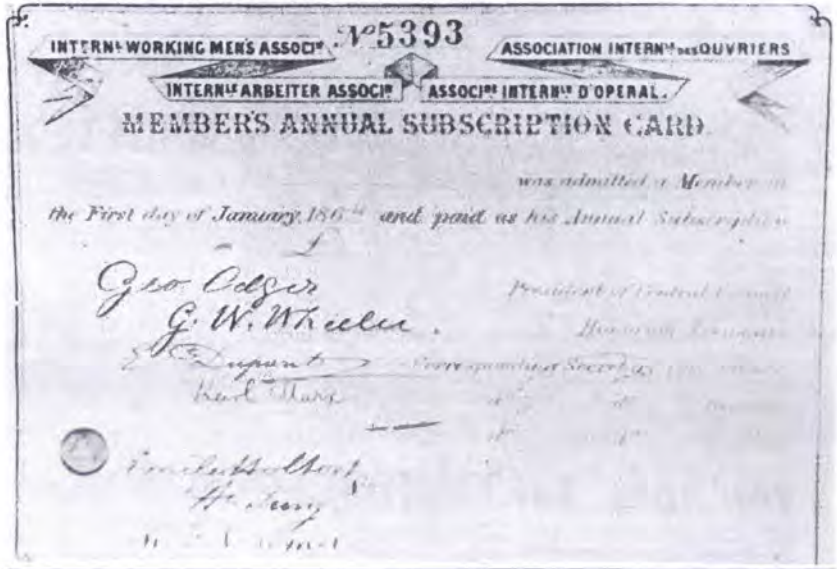
Amidst all the disputes within the movement itself the underlying demand for equality was a driving inspiration. The Chartist Sheffield Workingmen's Association, for instance, formed itself: "because the members despair of ever obtaining social and political equality, except by their own exertions. The working classes of this Kingdom produce the wealth which is at the disposal of the capitalists, and the glory that belongs to the nation, and yet they are oppressed by unjust and unequal laws, and injured by the degrading forms and customs of society."

But as early as this the quest for the vote was used as a red herring. Trade unions tended to stay aloof from the Charter, and in 1842 workers in the Stalybridge Mills, ignoring the Charter, came out on strike for more money. Their slogan became famous. "They that perish by the sword are better than they that perish by hunger."

Brutally treated by the authorities, the men and women stayed united but not passive. They marched instead. Not to Westminster or to the top of the hill as they would be advised today. No. They marched to other mills all round Lancashire, winning their support one by one. As each new factory stopped work the plugs of its boilers were pulled out – to ensure no scabbing. Some 50,000 workers were soon involved in the 'Plug Plot' as it spread to Yorkshire and the West Riding. Parliament sent troops to crush the strike, and on top of this the workers had to suffer the haranguing of the Chartists telling them to go back to work and wait for the Charter to be granted.

Two years later, Marx, who had payed close attention to the struggles of the Chartists wrote about the vote. Pointing out that government only arose because society was divided by class antagonisms, he decided that "all struggles within the State, the struggle between democracy, aristocracy and monarchy, the struggle for franchise etc, etc., are nothing but illusory forms in which real struggles of different classes are carried out among one another." Every problem, conflict or evil created by capitalism would be mirrored by the state in a law – a law to regulate, a law to ameliorate the effects, but always a law based on the assumption that the cause (capitalism) would continue. And so, he went on, as the role of law and government increases, the illusion arises that the state is the fount of social progress. Those who get involved in trying to run the capitalist state, he went on, suffer from this illusion, and see the solution of social ills in overcoming "accidental or intentional defects of administration." In doing this they fail to "grasp the general principle of social ills in the existing organisation of society", i.e. the continued exploitation of workers by capitalism. All laws, he pointed out, assume that this exploitation will continue. The more acute, the more vigorous the thinking is within these assumptions, "the more it is incapable of comprehending social ills."

Marx, basing himself on the experience of the Chartists and other struggles in Europe had analysed the strength and fundamental weakness of the way of thinking that became 'social democracy.'



# HISTORIC NOTES

# Bristol fights for the vote

THROUGHOUT the summer of 1831, one issue above all others was in the forefront of working class political activity. A Reform Bill was to go before Parliament which would, for the first time, enfranchise a section of the working class. A small proportion, certainly, but the significance of the Bill went beyond the numbers involved. It represented the first recognition that the workers of Britain were an important political force. This was not, of course, the reason for the Bill being proposed by bourgeois parliamentarians. They wished to establish the political supremacy of the manufacturing bourgeoisie over the landed aristocracy in Parliament; but in order to do this, they had to disenfranchise the old rotten boroughs, and give the vote to some workers in the new industrial cities. The significance of the Bill was not lost upon the working class.

As with all reforms passed by parliament, the workers had to fight to wring it out of them. As the anti-reform lobby mobilised, so too did the working class. Tension grew, and disturbances in support of the Bill occurred in London, Nottingham, and Derby. The Government became alarmed; and on October 7th, 1831, the House of Lords rejected the Reform Bill.

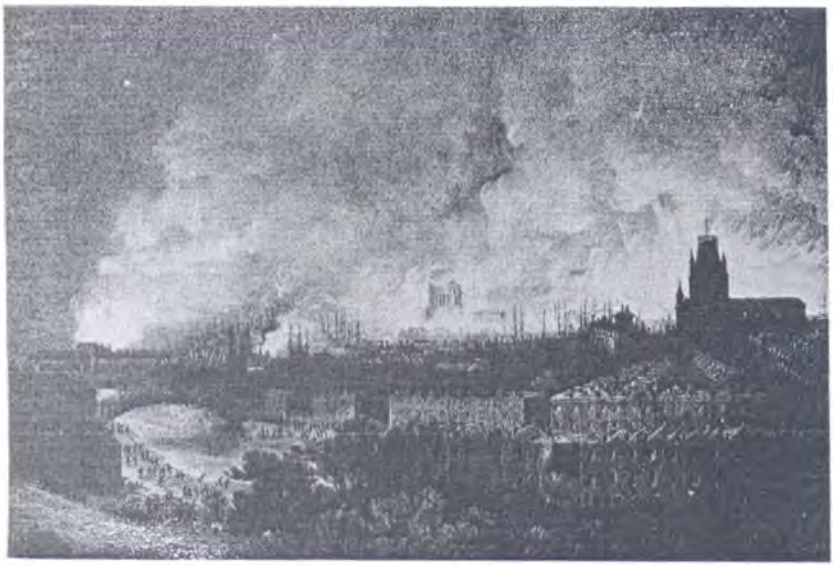
On October 29th, Sir Charles Wetherall, recorder of Bristol, and a leading opponent of the Bill, returned to the city to open the Assizes. The workers of Bristol, strongly favouring reform, decided to make their feelings known, and several thousand gathered to stone his coach as it entered the city. He survived the gauntlet, and having opened (and immediately adjourned) the Assizes, he retreated to the Mansion House in Queen Square. A crowd of angry workers soon gathered outside. "Specials" moved in to break up the crowd, and a running fight commenced. The Mayor emerged, and appealed for an end to the violence; he was met with a barrage of missiles. Wetherall, observing that the crowd wanted blood, and his for preference, disguised himself as a servant, and escaped over the rooftops.

That evening, the crowd attacked the Council house; troops opened fire, and one man was killed. The next day, the crowd, by now good and angry, broke into and looted the Mansion House, and then moved onto the Bridewell to release their arrested brothers. The New Gaol was next, swiftly followed by the County gaol. By the evening of the 30th, the riot was well under way. The toll houses were burnt, as was the Bishops Palace. (The Bishop of Bristol had voted against the Bill in the House of Lords). Back in Queen Square, the Mansion House was the next to go up in flames, followed by the Customs House, the Excise House, and the methodical firing of some forty Corporation owned properties. Charles Kingsley described the scene: "by ten o'clock that night, one seemed to be looking down on Dante's inferno ... higher and higher the fog was shrivelled upwards by the fierce heat below, glowing through and through with reflected glare ... miles away, I could see the lovely tower of Dundry shining red – the symbol of the old faith looking down in stately wonder and sorrow upon the fearful birth throes of a new age".

Finally, on the 31st reinforcements arrived, and troops cleared the streets, arresting over 100, and causing deaths variously estimated as between twelve and five hundred. Five of the leading figures in the rioting were sentenced to death.

Of all the agitation in support of the Reform Bill, the Bristol Riots were the most spirited example. The events certainly attracted the attention of, and worried, the Government; the enthusiasm with which the administration forced the Bill through was in no small part due to their fear of the consequences if they did not. The Bill became law eight months after the riots.

There was a footnote. Bourgeois reformers in Bristol decided to throw a party to celebrate, for the 'respectable' pro-reform faction. The workers also wanted to celebrate, however, and thirty thousand of them showed up at the open air banquet. They seized the food and devoured it, and stole the fireworks prepared for the evening's fun.



October 30th 1831: Bristol toll and customs buildings on fire as workers fight for electoral reform.

HISTORIC NOTES

# Workers win the vote but 'equality' proves inadequate

In 1867, to the horror of many, workers "entered the pale of the constitution." Well some of them at least. There had been Reform Bills before - in 1852, 1854, 1860 and 1866 - but the first to be passed was passed hurriedly after workers for the first time showed their displeasure at being treated as second class citizens and joined mammoth demonstrations in Hyde Park.

Even so, only a small proportion of workers gained the vote and this concession was used to split them("respectable artisans") from other sections of the class. This first major concession was followed in 1884, and 1918 when women over thirty were first given the vote. Universal suffrage did not fully arrive until 1928 - resisted by capitalism along every inch.

How then did workers use their first vote? They used it not to turn their back on trade union activity but to defend it. The results of the 1874 general election were a shock to British politics. The Tories - who had become a traditional 'silly' party, not taken seriously as a possible government - swept in, on the vote of the 'intelligent artisans'.

Natural conservatives? Nothing of the sort. The years from 1866 had been years of sustained legal attack on trade unions. The TUC of 1873 after much debate had passed a motion which decided "to organise the voting power of the working classes with a view to opposing vigorously and determinedly every candidate for parliament who does not pledge himself to vote for the abolition or alteration of any law affecting injuriously the character and freedom of Trade Unions, especially the Masters and Servants Act, The Criminal Law amendment Act, and the law of conspiracy as applied to trade societies, under which the gas strikers have been convicted."

The Liberals, the majority of whom were employers, refused any such pledge. But many landowning Tories did not - and by 1875 the trade union victory in law was decided. It is significant that a similar attack one hundred years later, the Industrial Relations Act, was defeated without any such recourse to parliament.

The TUC of 1875 did give a vote of thanks to the Tory Home Secretary, but they were by no means enamoured with parliament, which was referred to as "that legislative chamber - more notorious for its massive golden bar, than its intellectual calibre." In this, they were, perhaps, ahead of their time.

The granting of the vote, moreover, was used by some unions to advance their aims. 'If we have a right to vote in the administration, we have in consequence a right to a great deal more in other directions. We are no more masters and servants but equals, having the right, as those above us have, to regulate as we think proper, when we shall work, how long we shall work, and to put our own value upon what we sell.' So argued the Scottish Typographical Society.

Twenty years later, the demand for independent labour representation within parliament began to grow - not because of any political strategy had been accepted by the mass of workers, but because the problems they faced, unemployment, sickness, poverty in old age, low wages etc. had not been solved in any way by the achievement of "political equality."

# Historic Notes: Women hold up half the Sky

TODAY Iranian women are demonstrating against the edict that they must wear the chador, a black tent covering a woman from head to toe, a symbol of the degradation of women, the main aim of any religion, and exercised with ferocity by the disgusting Moslem religion.

Members of the Suffragette movement would have understood the importance of such a demand: they would have packed valises and enquired at Victoria Station for the time of the next boat train.

Foolish people have and will sneer at the Iranian and British women as 'middle' or 'upper' class. The critics are misguided. Both Iranian and British women had the same aim, the freeing of women from a prejudiced society, from fathers, brothers, even sons. At the beginning of the twentieth century British women, like any today in a moslem country, had no rights over their bodies, their children or their possessions. All belonged to the husband. In fighting for the right to have a profession, to be educated, comfortably-off women assisted their working class sisters who were struggling for bread.

Today we would hardly consider it worth fighting for a vote. The suffragettes, some with naive innocence and some with a healthy cynicism declared that with the vote and in the long term women in the House of Commons, legislation would be passed that would remove the myriad abuses that all women, rich and poor, suffered.

From 1850, the women's movement, formerly fragmented, became organised, partly as an upsurge of radicalism and trade union battles, the writings of philosophers such as John Stuart Mill, but also because of such women as Florence Nightingale or Elizabeth Garret Anderson, the nurse and the doctor. In 1867 the London National Society for Women's Suffrage was established, others in Manchester, Edinburgh, Birmingham, Bristol. One of their first tasks was to organise higher education for women, assisted by sympathetic men. Ribald rhymes were chanted about Miss Buss and Miss Beale but their excellent schools remain to this day.

Imperial Britain was a land of misery, hunger and degradation for a large part of its population. The suffragettes fought against the abuses of women and children economically and sexually by the 'nobs'. They battled with the police on the assertion that prostitutes were human beings. Their reward was vituperation and obscenity from the press, 'gentlemen' of the clubs and government, the clergy and even some women - Queen Victoria was not amused. The aim was to pass a Suffrage Bill through parliament with the help of some Liberal MPs. They were defeated and by 1870 the bill was blocked.

In 1903, Mrs. Pankhurst, who had been working with Manchester factory women and obviously listened to them founded the Women's Social and Political Union. The aim now was direct action. As one speaker put it, "Sisters forget we are ladies". At a Liberal Party meeting with Sir Edward Grey about to form a new government, Annie Kenney asked a question and receiving no answer, stood on a chair to repeat it. Men rushed from all sides of the hall and hit and scratched her, then dragged her out where she was promptly arrested by the police.

Peaceful means had brought little success so from then every method of annoying the government, smashing ministry windows, chaining themselves to the railings at number 10, Downing Street, showering theatres, plush restaurants with leaflets and sadly, Emily Davidson flinging herself in front of the king's horse, killing the horse and herself.


The Liberal government retaliated in the most vicious way. Women were given sentences of three years hard labour, and when they went on hunger strike were force fed. When they were arriving at death's door, they were released on tickets-of-leave to regain their strength to return to prison. This was the infamous 'Cat and Mouse' Act.

The 1914-18 war started. The Women's Suffrage Movement ceased as an organisation, and many members used the same energy to help win the war. The battle was now taken up by working class women in the munitions factories, who joined trade unions, fought for a decent wage and conditions. Their struggle could have more success, there were more of them, they were needed for the war effort, and working class men usually showed sympathetic support.

In 1917 a Bill was passed extending the franchise to women over 30, occupiers or wives of occupiers of land or premises of not less than £5 annual value.

The fight has not ceased. In Britain the average of women's pay is half that of men. Women can have professions but the jobs of responsibility in trade, profession or government are kept for men. This is so in every country in the world. The little group who seized power in China were particularly brutal to comrade Chang-Chiang because she is a woman and one who speaks her mind.

*Books on women's suffrage published by Virago Press available from: Bellman Bookshop 155 Fortess Road LondonNW5*

# How the Vote was won, after a long struggle

MOST People were outsiders where political power and influence were conderned, in the early 19th Century. Those who felt themselves inadequately represented in Parliament included industrialists, shop-keepers and small traders, as well as artisans and industrial workers. In agitating for change various groups, sometimes antagonistic, formed shifting alliances in order to advance, establish even, basic rights.

The 1832 Reform Act was a landmark in the advance of democracy. It was won by middle class leadership – as it would have been called then- with masses of workers as infantry in the struggle. The middle classes, having won their objectives, betrayed their working class allies.

The working classes had doubts about the integrity of their middle class allies, given their experiences in the period 1793-1815, when Britain's war with revolutionary France had brought down charges of Jacobinism on those who struggled at home for basic rights.

## 'Iron Duke'

After 1832, workers stand out against all other classes as an independent force for political power. The growth of Chartism, for instance, reflects this thinking and organisation then. More important had been the survival of embryonic trade unionism in the face of the punitive Combination Acts which had imprisoned nad even hanged those who would not obey. These various Acts operated 1799-1824 but were defeated.

The Birmingham Political Union was an organisation established in 1830 with industrialists and other middle class elements leading, and workers as rank and file, a coming together which alarmed the "Iron Duke" Wellington, the victor of Waterloo and one of Britain's most reactionary Prime Ministers.

Soon, the country was covered in Political Unions, but in the towns of the industrial north they were more working class in character, or there would be two Political Unions. There was unity against the corruption of the House of Commons, an unrepresentative assembly.

Enclosures had swept away the old 40 shilling freeholders in whom voting rights were vested; county seats were "fixed" by great landowners in groups; places like Leeds, Sheffield and Birmingham had no MP at all; there were the "pocket boroughs" and the self-appointing town corporations; there was open voting that landowners could observe, and there was the corrupt buying of votes.

## Corruption rife

There was much corruption as a matter of fact. It featured in the Law, the Church, the Court,the Civil Service, the Army and the Navy. But the Radicals aimed first at, concentrated their fire on, Parliament as the centre of corruption.

The National Union of the Working Classes was formed in 1831, with a distrust of Whigs in government and capitalists. From London artisans it spread to become a national network. In Manchester, for example, it had 27 branches and 5000 members, and wielded considerable influence.

In March 1831 the Reform Bill was introduced. It aimed to abolish rotten boroughs and redistribute seats to where the population was. It wanted to extend the franchise to include the middle classes in the boroughs and the tenant and leasehold farmers in the counties. It fell a long way short of manhood suffrage, annual parliaments and vote by ballot: old Radical demands. It secured a second reading by one vote, but the government was defeated in committee and a new general election was called. Whigs won a 136 majority.

This time the Bill passed al all stages, but was rejected by a majority of 41 in the Lords (mainly bishops and war profiteers created peers).

Huge demonstrations followed, often ending in riots: Derby Prison was stormed, Nottingham Castle was set on fire, Bristol was taken for days, while in London, crowds attacked bishops and Tory peers in the streets.

The Bill was painted as the only alternative to revolution by middle class leaders as mass pressure was maintained. The Lords and the Tory Party gave up, and the Bill was passed on June 7, 1832.

The 1867 Reform Act marked a victory for the organised working class. In 1854, 1858 and 1860 Reform Bills were presented to parliament but each failed and all were diluted anyway. Little working class enthusiasm accompanied the presentation of these failed Bills.

## Fortunes revive

But from the late 1850s, trade unionism began to revive among the miners, several years after the setbacks for Chartism.

Various industries saw the Nine Hour Movements organise in regions, aiming to reduce the length of the working day. Trades councils formed in Glasgow, Sheffield, Liverpool and Edinburgh.

The London Trades Council had been formed in May 1860, a key semi-official body eight years before the TUC first met. The strike of building workers in the capital caused the formation of the trades council. The Amalgamated Society of Carpenters and Joiners was set up in 1860, and was to grow rich and powerful among craftsmen in the building trade.

Internationally, the American Civil War divided this country along class lines, with slaves and slaveowners having support here. The Polish insurrection in 1863 against Tsarism found sympathy here where many hated the reactionary regime.

In 1864 Garibaldi, 'the man in the red shirt', arrived from Italy, which he sought to unite, and organised workers gave hime a tumultuous welcome in London.

## First International

Also in 1864, the International Working Men's Association (the First International) was founded. Howell, Applegarth, Odger and Cremer, all leading English trade unionists, were executive members. All Liberals, they sat with Karl Marx on that committee.

"The great importance of the International was that it brought together considerable bodies of workers at many levels of political development on the basis of a struggle for fundamental democratic and trade union rights." (A Morton, G Tate, 'The British Labour Movement')

All such factors encouraged the fight for political democracy.

Members of the International played a leading part in the formation of the National Reform League in 1865 and the struggle up to the 1867 Act. The League and associated bodies soon had a big following in Lancashire, West Riding, Tyneside and Birmingham, and London especially where Chartist traditions has survived.

## Obstacles overcome

Russell and fellow Liberal, Gladstone, brought forward a Reform Bill in 1866 because of the popular clamour for it. It was defeated by Tories and right wing Whigs, who brought down the government.

That July the Home Secretary banned a Hyde Park rally, but 200,000 gathered outside while the Reform League marched to Trafalgar Square. Pressure was kept up during the autumn and winter. Authorities were alarmed, there was the influence of the International, and Fenians were organised in America, Ireland and Britain.

## Concessions won

The Tories were forced to produce their own Bill. Mass pressure then forced a number of concessions – more than the original Whig Bill- which enfranchised the lower middle classes and the better off section of workers.

The 1867 Reform Act had extended the franchise only to the town artisans, leaving the poorer town workers and miners and agricultural workers of the villages without votes.

What gains were made always seemed to come in bits and pieces, reluctantly conceded.

## Glaring omissions

Some of these groups gained from the Third Reform Act 1884, passed by the Liberal government, which increased the electorate (excluding Ireland) from under 3 million to almost 5 million.

Over 25 years later, in 1911, out of a 40 million population in the same territory, only 7.2 million had the vote; in 1955 there were over 34 million electors out of 51 million people.

1867-84 was the heyday of middle class political management in towns. Enfranchised workers were outvoted; 80% of voting power was possessed by their social superiors.

The 1885 redistribution of seats weakened MPs who had represented whole urban areas; eg Liverpool went from three to nine MPs, which reduced their standing. But it was the presence of the masses which was felt. The ratio of adult males able to vote rose from 1 in 6 to 1 in 3 after the 1867 Act. It rose to 2 in 3 with the 1884 Act. But by 1910 about 4¼ million men remained disenfranchised.

# How women got the vote

WOMEN first got the vote in 1918, provided they were aged 30 or over. Even winning that had taken quite a struggle. Only in 1928 were women placed on a virtually equal footing with men, having the vote if they were at least 21 years old.

In 1900 there had been just 6.7 million names on the parliamentary electoral roll (about 58% of the male population over 21).

"Will the Liberal Government give women the vote?" was a question first put at the Free Trade Hall in Manchester, following which interrruption the questioners were ejected and arrested. Christabel Pankhurst and Oldham textile worker Annie Kenny were imprisoned but released as martyrs, and the agitation went on.

The Women's Social and Political Union had been set up in 1904. The Independent Labour Party had then backed the Women's Enfranchisement Bill, as had the Women's Cooperative Guild, but it had been laughed out by the male legislators. After that it was direct action that was used to advance the cause.

Direct action frightened off the political parties, concerned as they were with their 'respectability'. Further to that some of the women were anti-socialist in a way that angered working class people. Nevertheless, there was a principle at stake.

Windows of department stores were broken, along Kensington High Street, for example. Letter boxes were burned, and churches went up in flames. Imprisoned women were force-fed, a brutal act as food entering the lungs led to disease and sometimes death.

Middle class? Yes, but a number of Lancashire and Yorkshire textile workers also got involved, and there was the East London Federation.

## General election

If many men were opposed or indifferent, not all were by any means. A manufacturer in Newcastle in September 1908, reported to Prime Minister Asquith that the suffragettes were "influencing wavering elements". Of engineers he said, "I have been present at several meetings addressed by various branches of the Engineers' Society by members of the Women's Social and Political Union, and in many cases spontaneous resolutions were put forward in their favour and enthusiastically adopted, and also what is more important pledges were given to support the Women's franchise by voting against the government."

Even before World War One, the agitation had had an effect. In wartime their leverage increased and the government was forced to give in. But what a struggle to win a basic right. Rights are not given, they are won through struggle.

1987 IS ELECTION YEAR! KICK HER OUT!

## FOR THE RECORD...

### • THE BITTER LEGACY OF THE THATCHER YEARS •

**CAPITALISM in Britain is 200 years old, but incomplete parliamentary democracy goes back only a century. There's nothing innately democratic about this system; what we've got we won.**

**The winning of the vote by workers encroached on territory that capitalism had treated as its own. We brought democracy to this country as part of a fight for basic rights.**

**This 7 June marks the 155th anniversary of the Great Reform Act, the first achievement by workers who sought the right to vote. It broke the ranks of the old order, and the working class learnt to rely on its own efforts in future.**

**You can't change the system by voting for another one, but you can change the government. Such an opportunity will soon arise, and votes provide a means of removing the Thatcher government from office. A victory for Labour would break the mould of Thatcherism, and it would indicate a renewed interest by citizens in the future of Britain.**

**Today there is quiet anger at what Thatcherism has done to this country. But also there is unimaginative acceptance, by others, of what they see as inevitable decay. Defeatism of that type aids Thatcher and diminishes the efforts of those who resist her destructive role.**

**We do have organisation, we are many, and we have a golden opportunity. While Thatcher faces an imminent election she is vulnerable to citizens with votes. That for us is a strength, but it will become a weakness if workers lose the election. So our organisation for victory must be enhanced by extra effort to ensure her defeat. Resting in the general sentiment 'I hope Labour win', but doing nothing for that win, falls short of requirements. Out of nothing, nothing comes.**

**Rights our ancestors won, can be lost. Still we are treated like outsiders in our own country. Today there is a renewed attack on workers and unions. In the name of 'democracy', democracy is attacked. The rights to assemble, demonstrate or strike are fenced about with qualifications. When metropolitan authorities were abolished last year, 18 million workers lost those votes. Now local government is similarly threatened, along with the Welfare State it was set up to oversee.**

**We need to focus on what is to be done. We have to rally our forces, and challenge Thatcherites to defend her record in office. Tell others what effect her government has had on your work prospects, your industry, your service, your living standards. It's a funny kind of 'boom' that throws up a Credit Card Election.**

When landowners found that using the poor rate to supplement employers' below-subsistence wages too expensive, they found another solution...

# 1834: The way to the workhouse

**WORKERS, APR 2014 ISSUE**

At the end of the Napoleonic Wars in 1815 there was a massive increase in unemployment. With the introduction of the Corn Laws that set high tariffs on imported corn and led to **huge price rises, the numbers claiming "outdoor poor relief"** (see Workers March 2014) soared. This caused growing criticism from landed ratepayers who contributed the poor rate. So our rulers changed course.

Wanting to curtail "outdoor relief" (payments to workers outside the workhouse), the 1834 Poor Law Amendment Act centred on intensifying the system of workhouses, aiming for fewer claimants. There had been workhouses before 1834 but they were not the sole method of "poor relief". Poor Law Commissioners, who ran the new scheme, divided the country up into groups of parishes (known as poor law unions), and required them to set up workhouses providing only the most basic level of comfort. Workhouses were intended to be forbidding in order to deter both would-be inmates and outside workers. Ratepayers in each poor law union elected a Board of Guardians to manage their workhouse.

New workhouses were usually erected towards the edge of the union's main town. Early union workhouses were deliberately plain as a deterrent, though as time passed more decoration appeared. They varied greatly in size, from tiny ones of 30 up to one in Liverpool that housed over 3,000.

Buildings were specifically designed to separate the different categories of inmate (known as "classes") – male and female, infirm and able-bodied, boys and girls under 16, children under seven. Buildings, doors and staircases were arranged to prevent contact between these classes.

Apart from concessions made for some contact between mothers and children, the different categories lived in separate sections and had separate exercise yards divided by high walls. The one communal area was the dining-hall. But segregation still operated with different seating areas and sometimes there was a central screen dividing men and women.

You were not "sent" to the workhouse. Theoretically entry was voluntary – you were only impelled by the prospect of starvation, homelessness and general misery. Before the social provisions introduced much later, many elderly, chronic sick, unmarried mothers-to-be, abandoned wives or orphaned children had no other option. However, it was viewed as a last resort because of the social stigma attached and the general fear of never getting out. Particularly for the elderly, it was a place you never came out of, only concluded by burial in an unmarked pauper's grave, often without mourners. Workhouses were not prisons; inmates could leave at any time after giving a brief period of notice. As with entry, however, families had to leave together.

Harsh

It was a harsh regime. On arrival people's clothes were taken away and a workhouse uniform issued. Daily life was strict with early rising from 6am and early bedtimes at 8pm. Sleeping was in dormitories with beds packed together. In London's Whitechapel workhouse in 1838, 104 girls were sleeping four or more to a bed in a room 88 feet long, 16 and a half feet wide and 7 feet high. Life was governed by rules with penalties for those who broke them.

## Poor laws

Unable to generate universal affluence, capitalism consigns many to poverty. "Poor laws" under capitalism are never designed to remove poverty ,considered the inevitable lot for some, but rather to manage the extremes of pauperism while intimidating the entire working class. The question for capitalism is always how best to institutionalise poverty alongside profit. Capitalists want poverty to act as an

overall threat over labour, thereby guaranteeing the continued flow of riches and wealth to themselves. ■

In return for board and lodging, adult workhouse inmates were required to do unpaid work in the workhouse and its grounds six days a week. Women were employed either in workhouse domestic chores such as cleaning, preparing food, laundry work, making and maintaining uniforms, or nursing and supervising young children. Able-bodied men were employed in manual labour, often strenuous but with little practical value such as stone-breaking, corn grinding, oakum picking or bone-crushing. Rural workhouses cultivated surrounding land. For older or less physically able inmates a common task was the chopping and bundling of wood for sale. Some poor law unions sent destitute children to British colonies such as Canada or Australia. Food was very basic and intended to make life outside seem an attractive option: bread was a staple, porridge or gruel for breakfast, meals were often cheese or broth.

There was resistance to the new poor law in northern manufacturing districts of East Lancashire and West Yorkshire and parts of Wales, where workhouses were often viewed as ineffective, either standing empty in good times or overwhelmed by claimants in periods of downturn. Employers preferred to give short-term handouts (dole) allowing families to stay in their houses until conditions improved. Towns such as Bradford and Huddersfield saw opposition with attacks on poor law officials and running battles with army troops.

According to an 1861 parliamentary report, 14,000 of the total adult workhouse population of 67,800 had been there for more than five years. By 1901, 5 per cent of the nation's over-65s were living in a workhouse. In rural areas, workhouse populations generally rose in winter and fell in the summer.

In later decades various campaigns including one by the Workhouse Visiting Society brought some improvements. Workhouse responsibilities were transferred to local councils and then abolished in 1929 and 1930. Memories of workhouse indignities were so loathed they were passed on to succeeding generations. ■

The Tolpuddle Martyrs were transported for resisting starvation wages and forming a trade union...

# 1833 – 1838: The Tolpuddle Martyrs

**WORKERS, SEPT 2012 ISSUE**

In 1833 farm labourers in the Dorset village of Tolpuddle suffered severe reductions in their wages, prompting forty men to form a trade union. In February 1834 six of them were arrested: James Brine, James Hammett, George Loveless, James Loveless, Thomas Standfield and John Standfield. Convicted of swearing a secret oath, they were transported to Australia, triggering widespread agitation for their release and return.

Photo: Workers

Progressing alongside the Industrial Revolution was a parallel agrarian revolution, and poorly paid agricultural workers were a significantly large though often overlooked group. The long process of enclosure, whose high point came between 1770 and 1830, saw land carved up by act of parliament and given to bigger landowners. Lands

once held in common and villagers' small strips of land for food production were expropriated. If you remained in the countryside and wanted to put food in your belly, you had no choice but to work for large landowners who dictated the rate of pay.

With no land of their own, the Tolpuddle labourers earned a weekly wage on the farm of George Frampton, a major local landowner. At the beginning of the 1830s the going rate in Tolpuddle was 9 shillings a week. This would have been sufficient to buy bread but not enough to pay rent and purchase other foods. Yet, in 1833, the landowners cut the rate from 9 shillings to 8, then later to 7 and were considering a further reduction to 6.

## Starvation wages

These were starvation wages. How did the rural poor respond to such desperate conditions? Some suffered in silence, others moved to work in the growing cities. Some fought back: in the Captain Swing uprisings across East Anglia in 1830, labourers set fire to hayricks: 644 were imprisoned, 481 transported, 19 hanged.

A different approach was taken in Tolpuddle. Farmworkers there met with delegates from the Grand National Consolidated Trades Union (GNCTU) and then founded the Friendly Society of Agricultural Labourers in order to overturn the wage reductions, which were an acute problem in remote parts of southern England, where farmers did not have to compete with the higher wages paid to workers in London or the northern industrial towns. The introduction of mechanisation and a surplus of labour made the situation worse.

The Tolpuddle farm labourers were prepared to stand firm and push Frampton for a living rate of 10 shillings a week. They presented their "perfectly reasonable demands" believing the landowner would have to agree, as they represented a substantial part of the village workforce. The landowners and local magistrates took fright and wrote in 1834 to the Home Secretary, Lord Melbourne, to complain about the union. As there was no law against forming a union (the Combination Acts having been repealed in 1825), the six were arrested and tried at Dorchester Court for breaking an obscure 1797 law, the Mutiny Act, which prohibited the swearing of oaths to stop mutiny at sea. A jury was selected from those most unfriendly to the farm labourers' cause – landowners and land-renters.

Their stated "crime" was that each had made an oath promising not to reveal the content of their meeting. In fact the martyrs were punished for having the audacity to form a union. Secret oaths undertaken by freemasons in their lodges were common, but secret oaths by workers smacked of revolution to the rulers of the day.

**Rally commemorates martyrs' struggle**

Every year workers gather in Tolpuddle to remember the martyrs' struggle. Here's a report on this year's march from one participant.

"My coach from the Isle of Wight had 18 trade unionists of various political persuasions on board. I sold a number of copies of Workers and handed out leaflets on the '10 reasons to leave the EU.'

When I got to the Tolpuddle memorial site, I started to hand out the leaflets to everyone who walked near me. Most took the leaflet, but a small number, maybe, about three, people, gave them back, horrified at the thought of leaving the EU!

Most people took the leaflet and after glancing at it, some people said, "Only ten reasons to leave the EU. You must be joking". It would appear that most of the trade unionists who took the leaflet couldn't wait for a referendum on leaving the EU. After a number of lively debates on the topic and running out of leaflets, I got myself geared up to carry the Isle of Wight Trades Council banner.

There were banners from as far afield as South Wales, Bristol, Southampton, Portsmouth, London and all places in-between. It was quite a festive event, with bands playing various types of music, with everyone jigging about as they walked through the village of Tolpuddle.

While I was having a pint in the beer tent, I met a number of fellow Unite members. One, a young shop steward for the binmen in Southampton, had been involved in the industrial action with the City Council, which secured a restoration of his wages after they had been cut by the previous council administration.

I had a number of discussions with trade unionists about growing the union to fight for wages and conditions, and saving Britain from destruction by capitalism. I felt, as I boarded my coach back to the Island, it had been a good day." ■

George Loveless observed in their defence, "We have injured no man's reputation, person or character. We were uniting to preserve ourselves, our wives and our children from utter degradation and starvation." Summing up, the judge remarked, "If such societies were allowed to exist it would ruin masters, cause a stagnation in trade and destroy property" and "The object of all legal punishment is not altogether with a view of operating on the offenders themselves, it is also for the sake of offering an example and warning." The Martyrs were sentenced to a maximum sentence of seven years' transportation. Their convict ship took four months to reach Australia,

where they worked like serfs in penal settlements, on chain gangs and farms in New South Wales and Tasmania.

## Grand Meeting

The treatment of the Tolpuddle Martyrs triggered huge opposition. In March 1834 over 10,000 people attended a Grand Meeting of the Working Classes called by the Grand National Consolidated Trade Union. On 21 April a vast demonstration assembled near King's Cross in Copenhagen Fields. 800,000 signatures were collected for their release. Because families of the transported men and other members of the Tolpuddle union were refused parish relief by farm-owning local magistrates, the trade unionist London Dorchester Committee (LDC) collected financial support for the families.

A campaign to take legal action against the Duke of Cumberland (the King's brother) on the grounds that he took a secret oath as head of the Orange Lodges of Freemasons led to a full pardon from the King in 1836, though they only returned to Britain in 1837. James Hammett returned in 1839. Until 1845 the men leased two tenant farms in Essex out of LDC funds. Only Hammett returned to Tolpuddle working in the building trade. He died in the Dorchester workhouse in 1891. ■

# Tolpuddle Martyrs' celebrated fight for trade unions

## HISTORIC NOTES

THE Tolpuddle Martyrs were not 'canonised' until the centenary of their imprisonment in 1934, but their effect on the working class was immediate and far-reaching.

The Combination Acts had been repealed ten years earlier, apparently making unions legal. The ruling class, however, still begrudged that legality and sought to hedge it round.

Rural wage rates were low, in particular those in the Tolpuddle area which were lower than the rest of Dorset. In 1832 several farm workers including George Loveless, later to be the leader of the Martyrs, made a deputation to the landowners in protest at a cut in wages. They were unorganised and did not succeed. About a year later Loveless and other workers organised the Tolpuddle Friendly Society, deciding that the only way to defend themselves was to act together.

In February, 1834, six of the leaders of the new Union were arrested. The charge was of administering unlawful oaths, although their initiation ceremony was no different from that of other unions. The legality of this charge was extremely doubtful and relied on stitching together bits and pieces from three Acts of Parliament.

The evidence was provided by two farm labourers who had joined the Society and it was neither consistent nor convincing. Nevertheless the six were

found guilty and sentenced to seven years transportation. Slavery would have been a more accurate description.

It was a rude awakening for the working class. The right to organise had been won after much struggle, but obviously, without their perpetual vigilance and willingness to guard it at all times, it could be lost again.

Lord Melbourne, the Home Secretary, sensed this mood and thought that by imposing the maximum sentence and denying poor relief to the families of those transported, the working class could be scared into submission. He miscalculated. The immediate response was to organise for the release of the prisoners and to collect for their families.

The high point was a giant demonstration in London within a month of the sentences. The agitation continued right up to the time the men were eventually returned to Britian several years later.

Although the Martyrs for the most part ceased being active in the labour movement, the effect of their imprisonment and the fight against it had given a big boost to the movement. The right of the working class to organise had been protected and their organisations were to develop, culminating in the New Model unions of the 1850's.

Many of those active in the defence of the Martyrs followed George Loveless and his brother into the Chartist Movement.

# Historic Notes: The Written Word in Miners' Struggle

IN THE LAST issue we saw how the miners won their first struggle in 1831 and how their literature reflected and developed this struggle. However, in April 1832, following their recent success they struck again. The main issue in their strike was union recognition. But the miners went into battle with seriously depleted union funds.

The pit owners had learnt new tactics in the 1831 dispute, and now they had stockpiled coal. The owners were organized. Blacklegs and truncheons did their damage. The strike brought chaos and failure.

Hepburn, the union leader, was attacked by the miners, and lost his job. But even so he spoke confidently of a brighter future:

"If we have not been successful, at least we, as a body of miners, have been able to bring our grievancies before the public and the time will come when the golden chain which binds the tyrants together, will be snapped, when men will have to sigh for the days gone by. It only needs time to bring this about."

The defeat of 1832 temporarily destroyed all efforts to form a miners' union in the North East. But by the late 1830's several followers of Hepburn were forming friendly societies. Owners blacklisted these men but they still sang:

"Never let it be said that we are afraid to join the union".

Conditions for miners deteriorated rapidly between 1837 and 1842, and many more risked building the union. By late 1842 individual unions were strong enough to amalgamate and the first national miners union was formed. This union went into battle first in 1844. Again propagandist art was an important product of their struggle. 'Union is strength/Knowledge is power', was the motto of their campaign in 1842.

In their paper a miner wrote that if only the'sons of toil' were true to their own interests, and felt confidence in each other and in themselves, 'no earthly power could prevent them from raising themselves to that position in society, to which by their industry and usefulness they so justly deserve to be risen.'

Through their newspaper, 'The Miners Advance', edited by a Scots carpet weaver, William Daniells, (who had at one stage to print the paper from the Isle of Man because of prosecution), branches were able to communicate and were strengthened.

'The Miners Advocate' encouraged learning and the miners were asked to contribute their poems, songs, grievances and thoughts. But so great was the response that the editor found he was swamped with too much excellent material. This paper was a forthright educational tool, vigorously and clearly defending miners' rights. Everything was explained clearly and often artistically. One editorial discussed the relationship between miner and boss in terms of a popular fable:

"The moral and physical consequences of a contentious warfare between capital and labour does appear to us to be fully illustrated by the fable of two noble animals combatting or fighting for a piece of prey, and while the combat is going on, another animal of dimunitive size and strength came and carted off the prize; while neither of the two, such was their exhaustion, could prevent him".

Seasoned in struggle, by the mid-1840's the miners sent their delegates to Chartist and Working Mens' associations. Delegates who travelled all the way down to London published a tract calling for working class unity:

"And why have the sons of Labour not come more nobly forward, to support their own causes? See you not that the Miners' cause is your cause? If they are crushed, you must follow and that soon. Awake from your slumbers, rise and look to your own interests, ere it be too late. Capital is rampant and unless it is met in a spirit of determination by the sons of toil united, it will assuredly sink lower every class of labour's sons.

The language of this is significant. The cadence and prophetic urgency is like the Bible. But it is a thin line. In fact the language of religious battle had become, through the experience of association and struggle, the language of class war.

# HISTORIC NOTES 1848 Communist Manifesto

## "A spectre is haunting Europe - the spectre of Communism"

1848 WAS a year of revolution. Uprisings against feudalism swept Europe - from France to Hungary, Prussia to Italy. In Britain, where a revolution against feudalism had taken place two centuries earlier, 2 million signatures were appended to the Charter calling for universal suffrage. And from London there appeared the first edition of the Communist Manifesto.

The story of the Manifesto begins properly in 1848. At that time there existed no Communist parties in the world; all there was, was concentrated in an organisation called the Communist League. This was composed mainly of French, German and Belgian communists and in England communist members of the Chartist movement.

### only provisional

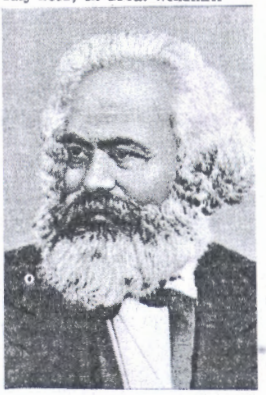
But although it was called the Communist League, it lacked a proper definition of what communism was or what a communist does. It had a constitution: "The aim of the League is the overthrow of the bourgeoisie, the rule of the proletariat, the abolition of the old bourgeois society based on class antagonisms, and the establishment of a new society without either classes or private property." It had a slogan: "Workers of the World, Unite!" Yet all this was only provisional.

A Congress of the League took place in London in June, 1847, and out of it came a call for a proper manifesto or declaration of communist principles. They called it a "catechism of faith". The Congress called on all sections of the League to consider the problem and bring forward suggestions to a further Congress to be held in November of the same year.

By this time, Marx and Engels had been in lengthy correspondence and exchanged their ideas. They had discussed Engel's "Principles of Communism" and Marx had been working on his own ideas. They were ready for November.

### four-day debate

The November Congress was duly held, in Great Windmill Street, Soho. As with all the League's activities, it was held in secret. It was a long meeting and it took Marx four days to convince the delegates that his ideas were correct. In the end, agreement was reached and the Congress charged Marx, along with Engels, with the job of writing the Manifesto.



Karl Marx.

### manifesto ultimatum

Marx returned to Brussels, where he was living at the time, and got down to work. No one knows how long he thought it would take him, but the League certainly had its ideas. We know from a remarkable letter sent by the League to Brussels:

"...if the Manifesto of the Communist Party, which he (Marx) consented, at the last Congress, to draw up, does not reach London before Tuesday February 1, further measures will be taken against him. In case Citizen Marx does not write the Manifesto, the Central Committee requests the immediate return of the documents which were turned over to him by the congress."

### political whirlwind

In the event, no such measures were needed. The manuscript was sent to London at the end of January and was printed in German. Even as the last copies of that first edition were coming off the press the February revolution in France had already begun, signalling a year of political ferment. Marx and Engels plunged themselves into this whirlwind.

Manifest
der
Kommunistischen Partei.

Veröffentlicht im Februar 1848.

Proletarier aller Länder vereinigt euch.

London.

The title page of the first edition of the Manifesto.

It was to be two years before an English edition was printed. It appeared in the columns of "The Red Republican", the Chartist newspaper, then edited by Ernest Jones. Over 20 years were to pass before a Russian edition appeared. Now there is hardly a language or dialect into which it has not been translated, hardly a worker in the world who has not heard of it.

● The Communist Manifesto is available from the Bellman Bookshop, price 25p inc. p&p.

Historic Notes

# Crimean War showed rottenness of government

"WE ARE not now engaged in the Eastern Question but in the battle of civilization against barbarism for the independence of Europe" appeared in The Times in 1854. Except for a small group of Manchester School Radicals, apostles of peace and free trade who called the Crimean War a crime and who, for their pains, were burnt in effigy by crowds in Manchester, most British people welcomed it.

As in the Afghan and Boer Wars, war-fever burned in Britain from Conservatives to Radicals. The three wars had many things in common: they were all technical victories for the British but, in reality, all defeats. They all showed up the gross inefficiency as well as greed of the ruling class, and, in the end, the British people came to understand the squalor, the oppression not only of the troops but of civilians, and the twin lies of patriotism and religion that were used to cloak the hellish truth.

Once again the war fever, like the tutonic plague, attacked the British people. In 1914 trench warfare ended all that. There was no war fever in 1939 and today British workers laugh at the bleating old ewe Thatcher.

No two historians will agree on why the Crimean War started, perhaps something to do with the safety of Constantinople at risk because of the weakness of Turkey or the guarding of Jerusalem itself! It is often claimed that it grew out of a squabble between Roman Catholics and Greek Orthodox monks for the control of the holy places in Jerusalem.

Napoleon III of France was protector of the Catholics; Czar Nicholas demanded that the Turks recognise his authority over the monks and all Greek Orthodox Christians in the Turkish Empire, which included large parts of Europe. He marched into the Danubian provinces to ensure acceptance.

The Turks refused and declared war on Russia in 1853. When the Russians defeated a Turkish squadron at Sinope on the Black Sea, the French and British ordered their fleets into the Black Sea, and in 1854 a British frigate appeared before the walls of Sebastopol.

The war lasted until the Treaty of Paris in 1856 which admitted Turkey into the "Concert of Europe", declared the Black Sea a neutral zone and ordered that the Dardanelles and Bosphorus be closed to all warships except Turkish ones. Everyone knows of the greatness of Florence Nightingale and the incredible silliness (or bravery according to the point of view) of the Charge of the Light Brigade; the names of Sebastopol, Balaclava, Inkerman were known to all from the famous Times correspondent Russell.

Slower were they to learn of the usual story of British armies in the reign of Victoria: scurvy, cholera, hunger, bad communications, incompetent generals and a government administration that could only be described as lunatic. Only one third of the casualties resulted from battle, the rest from disease: journalists wrote and the people back home read of the criminal negligence and stupidity of the government.

The bravery of the British forces was never in doubt though the French claimed that they had more intelligent commanders. The fighting prowess of the Russians, their grey uniforms almost invisible in the snow, was again demonstrated. For Russians, in spite of the despotic Czar, fought and died with the indomitable heroism that they showed later against the Nazis.

The war had many results large and small. The newspaper correspondents became important people (today some of them think that they make events not just report them). The War Office was swept cleaner; even by the end of the war soldiers were being reasonably fed and clothed and, thanks to the genius of Nightingale and her War Office friend Herbert, the wounded were being treated humanely.

The recurring scandals of maladministration led to the lessoning of patronage; from then on examinations were instituted for all grades of the civil service. But one change did not occur. The fear and hatred of Russia, its immense size, the indomitable character of its people caused terror in the leaders of the Great Powers.

Russia, whether led by a Czar, a Communist or a Revisionist, was regarded as the enemy of all. The American General who is reported as having said during the Second World War, "All along we have been fighting the wrong guys" spoke for every capitalist in Europe and America and now in China.

The Indian revolt of 1857 was violent, though nowhere near as bloody as its suppression. Ninety years later, India won its freedom...

# 1857: not a mutiny, but a fight for independence

**WORKERS, APR 2007 ISSUE**

**One hundred-and-fifty years ago, the people of India fought for their national sovereignty and for independence from the British Empire.**

The revolt was called a "mutiny", to define it as illegitimate. But it was the foreign rule that was illegitimate, because it denied India democracy and self-rule. As G. B. Malleson, Adjutant-General of the Bengal Army and the revolt's first historian, wrote, what was "at first apparently a military mutiny ... speedily changed its character and became a national insurrection." Hindus, Muslims and Sikhs all played a full part.

Imperialist imagery: a contemporary imagined scene of sepoys dividing up loot

**Despotic**

The Raj was a despotic regime dependent on military power. General Henry Rawlinson, India's Commander-in-Chief, said in 1920, "You may say what you like about not holding India by the sword, but you have held it by the sword for 100 years and when you give up the sword you will be turned out. You must keep the sword ready to hand and in case of trouble or rebellion use it relentlessly. Montagu calls it terrorism, so it is and in dealing with natives of all classes you have to use terrorism whether you like it or not."

In 1793, the Empire's rulers had imposed a 'Permanent Settlement' on India which privatised the land and dispossessed the peasants. The Empire took 50-60% of the peasants' income in tax, more than the Mughal Emperors had taken, forcing the peasants into debt and then to sell their land. India's wealth was pillaged and her agriculture starved, in order to rack up profit and rent. The profits went to British investors, the rents to the Empire's allies, the landlords and princes.

The Empire's rule was vicious. Governor-General Lord Dalhousie wrote in 1855, "torture in one shape or other is practised by the lower subordinates in every British province."

Charles Ball, a historian of the revolt, wrote, "in Bengal an amount of suffering and debasement existed which probably was not equalled and certainly not exceeded, in the slave-states of America." The Report of the Commission for the Investigation of Alleged Cases of Torture at Madras, 1855, admitted "the general existence of torture for revenue purposes". Torture was also normal police practice.

The revolt of 1857 was violent, though nowhere near as bloody as its suppression. A British officer's wife justified killing all rebels, "Serve you right for killing our poor women and children who had never injured you." As if every single rebel was personally responsible for the very worst atrocities. Marx noted of Britain's newspapers, "while the cruelties of the English are related as acts of martial vigour, told simply, rapidly, without dwelling on disgusting details, the outrages of the natives, shocking as they are, are still deliberately exaggerated."

**Vengeance**
A British officer said, "We hold court-martials on horseback, and every nigger we meet with we either string up or shoot." Sir John Kaye wrote, "mothers and women and children ... fell miserable victims to the first swoop of English vengeance."

In a five-week rampage, Brigadier James Neill's Madras Fusiliers hanged every person they caught, some 6,000 people. Sir George Campbell wrote, "Neill did things almost worse than massacre, putting to death with deliberate torture in a way that has never been proved against the natives."

Major Renaud of the Madras Fusiliers "was rather inclined to hang all black creation." A recent historian writes, "volunteer hanging parties were roaming the Benares area with one gentleman executioner boasting of the 'artistic manner' in which he had strung up his victims in 'the form of a figure of eight'." Major Anson of the 9th Lancers admitted that in Fatehgarh, "There were fourteen men hung, or rather tortured to death (some of them), in the town here yesterday afternoon." On one occasion, British officers stood and watched while their Sikh soldiers slowly burnt a prisoner to death. At Peshawar, 785 captives were executed. At Lahore, Frederick Cooper, the Deputy Commissioner of the Punjab, ordered 500 unarmed soldiers, the entire 26th Native Infantry, to be killed. At Basaund, British forces killed all 180 adult males. The Magistrate of Meerut justified the massacre – "A severe example was essential and the slightest mawkish pusillanimity in such a cause would have spread the flame of revolt throughout the district."

**'Drunk with plunder'**
The sacking of Delhi, Jhansi and Lucknow was barbaric: The Times described the British soldiers as "drunk with plunder".

Although the revolt was defeated, it did overthrow the East India Company's rule and its regime of robbery and corruption; the Company was wound up in 1874. After suppressing the revolt, India's British rulers used the old tactic of divide and rule to crush India's strivings for democracy and self-rule. The British state promoted Muslim separatism and set up separate electorates, a sure way to tear people apart politically.

In the Punjab, the British won over the Sikhs by reminding them of the injuries and insults they had suffered under the Mughal Emperors. Sir Henry Lawrence, Chief Commissioner of Oudh, spread false rumours that Muslim rebels had desecrated Hindu temples.

**Justification for continued rule**
The Empire then used the revolt's failure to justify continued rule. If Indians could not revolt successfully, they could not rule themselves. Besides, as an MP said, "if we were to leave...we should leave it to anarchy."

A century later, Winston Churchill said in Cabinet in 1940 that the Hindu-Moslem division had long been "a bulwark of British rule in India". The Times agreed: "The divisions exist and British rule is certain as long as they do." John Colville reported that in Cabinet, "Winston rejoiced in the quarrel which had broken out afresh between Hindus and Moslems, said he hoped it would remain bitter and bloody."

After the revolt, the Indian people continued to oppose foreign rule, winning their independence in 1947.

# Historic Notes

# Champion of Labour

ROBERT APPLEGARTH was one of those who built British trade unions as we know them. Never scared of a fight, he bargained until nothing but a strike would settle the dispute "I regard strikes in the social world as I do wars in the political world. Both are crimes unless justified by absolute necessity."

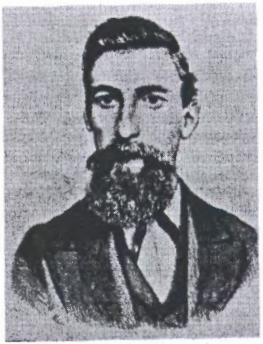
He was born at Hull in 1834. When he joined the Sheffield carpenters in 1857 he found a trade split among many local unions. But the great London building workers' strike of 1859 demonstrated the need for national unity, and in 1860 the Amalgamated Society of Carpenters and Joiners was formed, on the model of the Amalgamated Engineers.

In 1862, Applegarth aged 28, was elected General Secretary. By the time of his resignation in 1871 he had built the union from 900 members in 38 branches to 10,000 members in 236 branches. In 1867 he introduced an 'open column' for members in the Society's magazine. Allan of the Engineers told him, "Ah, they will lash you". Applegarth replied, "If I cannot stand all the lashing they can give I'm not fit for my position."

In 1868 Applegarth got the Society, through the International to send £20 each to striking Geneva building workers and Rouen cotton spinners. He encouraged the union to become involved in political action, "against laws which keep the workman down, and to provide laws to lift him up." Applegarth did his best to encourage this kind of outlook and opposed any ideas that trade unions were non-political.

Applegarth believed education was the key to improving the position of the working class. In 1869 he became a founding member of the National Education League, to secure free, compulsory and secular education for every child. He denounced the provisions of the 1870 Education Act for means-tested grants; "the children of the poorest parents are to have pauper tickets pinned upon their backs."

He thanked MPs like Mundella who supported the campaign, but insisted 'it is more important that the workers should take the question into their own hands.' Attending a strike meeting of Glasgow carpenters he won their support for the struggle of English and Welsh workers for education.



Robert Applegarth

He rejected the notion that craft had no right to speak for the unskilled on the matter of compulsory education. "No one knows better than the artisan that the poor are taxed to keep them poorer still; and they claim the right to demand that their taxes shall be expended on schools instead of on prisons and workhouses."

In the 1860s, as today, the bourgeoisie carried on a relentless propaganda against trade unions. Applegarth never allowed one hostile criticism in the press to go unanswered. Arguing that, "in but few instances has an advantage been conceded without recourse to a strike," he proved statistically that in a single year, 1865, his members were £6 14s per man better off due to strike action. "My experience has taught me that combinations result in the increase of wages and decrease of hours." He had nothing but contempt for the bourgeois champions of 'free' (i.e. non unionised) labour, whose victims ended up in the workhouse.

When in 1867 the law decided that the Boilermakers' funds were not entitled to legal protection, Applegarth called a conference of Amalgamated Trades which played a big part in winning the Trade Union Act of 1871 which provided security for union funds. Applegarth was also at the centre of agitation to remove the old Master and Servants Act, successful in 1867. In the same year he was appointed by the Amalgamated unions as their representative to the Commission on trade unions set up as a result of the Sheffield 'Outrages'.

In his evidence to the Commission, Applegarth solidly defended the unions' right to make their policy by majority decision binding on all members, their right to enforce a closed shop, and to prevent the introduction of new machinery which threatened jobs. When the Commission's majority Report proposed that no union be given official registration unless it refused to assist another union in sympathetic action, Applegarth commented: "If this be the price trade unions have to pay for protection, then they will prefer to go unprotected till Doomsday." His fellow trade unionists had no doubt they had made a wise decision in choosing this 33 year old General Secretary to be their spokesman.

# Historic Notes

# Chairman of the International

LAST WEEK we saw how Robert Applegarth rapidly won wide respect as a leading member of the famous 'Junta'. But his activities as General Secretary of the carpenters was only one side of his work.

In 1863 Russia intervened to suppress Polish independence. British workers were hot with indignation, and Applegarth helped found the Polish League, a purely working class organisation pledged to support the Poles, and to fight war and militarism. Out of this grew the International Working Men's Association, the first International. Applegarth got the carpenters to affiliate as a union, and in 1868 at the Basle Congress he was elected chairman of the general council.

Applegarth rejoiced that workmen of different countries could at last meet 'to exchange ideas and express their common wants'. 'The International has done more than stop the importation of foreign labour during strikes. It has enlarged the views of the English trade unionists' and helped spread the example of effective trade unionism to the Continent.

At the Basle Congress Applegarth put forward proposals he had drawn up with Marx, urging the formation of trade unions in all countries 'until the system of wage labour shall be replaced by a system of associated free labour ... Trade unions are the best means of imparting that knowledge of order and discipline, and that strict regard for the interests of the whole, which are inseparable conditions to the success of cooperative production,' which Applegarth was convinced, must replace capitalism.

Holidaying on the Continent in late 1870, Applegarth was signed up by the NEW YORK WORLD as a front line correspondent to the Franco- Prussian war. His experiences there deeply affected him. 'The working men of all countries,' he wrote to the paper, 'should clearly understand the miseries inflicted by war on themselves as a class. I am convinced that if the working men but knew their strength, and were wise enough to use it, we should have no more of the working men of one country being led, sword in hand, to slaughter their fellow workers of other countries, with whom they have no quarrel. The power of preventing war rests with the working class.'

When the workers of Paris siezed power in their Commune the following year, Applegarth gave them his full support, and later smuggled Communards out of France on his own passport, to save them from their bourgeois butchers, who murdered upwards of 25,000 Communards when Paris fell.

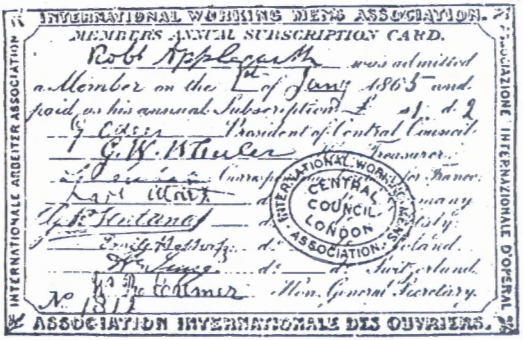
In 1870 Applegarth was re-elected General Secretary of the ASCJ by 2370 votes to 515 for his three opponents combined. But in September he accepted appointment to the Royal Commission on the workings of the Contagious Diseases Act. Applegarth considered it essential that trade unionists be involved in areas outside their own craft affairs, especially in this campaign to abolish the police right to stop any woman and subject her to physical examination. But some of his union branches found venereal disease a 'distasteful issue' for their General Secretary to be involved in, and forced his resignation. So ended Applegarth's brief but very signifioant union career.

His later years were spent testing safety equipment for miners and divers, inventing a submarine lamp and smoke-preventer, and introducing the first public electric lighting and the first refrigerator into England. In 1892 he wrote to the Royal Commission on Labour that 'most of the sacrifice of health and life is easily preventable,' and he had no sympathy for workers who refused to wear and use safety gear.

In 1911, at the age of 75, he rallied to the support of workers striking all over Britain. Finding that the 'public' had collected a benefit for 'loyal' workers of the London and Brighton railway, Applegarth organised a much bigger subscription for the strikers. He also went to speak to meetings of striking hotel workers. His advice: 'Sit tight!'

Until 'production for use replaced production for profit', he said, strikes would be inevitable. 'Men do not deliberately throw up their bread and go on strike without some cause. If people will read more of the sufferings of the workers of the past and of how they still suffer they will see the cause of this great industrial upheaval.'

A deep and thoughtful man, Applegarth never rejoiced in struggle for its own sake. Some have pictured him as a compromised 'aristocrat of labour'. The truth is that this companion of Marx knew that the class struggle is war: a deadly and serious affair in which the stakes are too high for play. He had implicit faith in his fellow workers, and never doubted who would be the eventual winner in the class war.



Despite having no representation in parliament, the British working class were able to restrain the pro-slavery leanings of the ruling class...

# 1861–1865: British workers and the American civil war

**WORKERS, JUNE 2012 ISSUE**

In December 1860, 11 slave-owning states broke away from the United States of America to form the Confederacy. When Abraham Lincoln became President in March 1861, he denounced the secession as unconstitutional. April saw a Union blockade of Confederate ports and the onset of a bitter civil war.

Between 1840 and 1860 the United States provided 80 per cent of Britain's cotton. The Confederacy thought "cotton famine" caused by the blockade would cut off Lancashire's textile industry from its supplies of raw materials and propel Britain into conflict against the Union to end the blockade. But matters did not develop in that way.

Great distress overwhelmed the British cotton industry. Between 1861 and 1865 the Lancashire textile industry suffered a period of severe unemployment with over 320,000 workers unemployed out of 533,950 by November 1862; there were still 190,000 fewer jobs in December 1864.

Fairly ample stocks of cotton had been stored in British factories and warehouses. It was the speculative bidding up of the price for raw cotton that did damage, particularly hitting smaller manufacturers who could not withstand the strains of the high price. The crisis in the textile industry also gave British manufacturers the opportunity to extend the working day, depress wages and equip factories with labour-saving machinery.

The civil war acutely divided British opinion. Friends of the Confederacy in Britain came largely from the aristocracy (who had social and political ties with American slave-owners) and the commercial classes (who had business links and wanted to escape Union tariffs). These upper classes dominated parliament. Their newspapers − such as The Times − openly advocated aiding the Confederacy.

British workers transcended narrow economic self-interest to support the Union cause.

But British workers, driven by a deep hatred of slavery and striving for a more democratic government at home, restrained the pro-confederate leanings of the government class. Though not represented in parliament, the working class was the preponderant part of society and therefore not without political influence, able to pressure the government into adopting a policy of non-intervention in the civil war and thwarting assistance to the Confederate States.

At the beginning, northern US leaders asserted the main object of war was to preserve the Union and not to touch slavery. Lincoln's Emancipation of the Slaves Proclamation strengthened British workers' support for the Union cause. The spinners and weavers of Lancashire transcended their economic self-interest and took the lead in upholding the Union blockade. They realised that helping the slave-owners win would defeat the cause of freedom represented by the North and set back their own struggle for political reform in Britain.

## Massive meetings

Throughout 1862 and 1863, massive pro-Union meetings were held by workers in Ashton-under-Lyne, Blackburn, Bury, Stalybridge, Liverpool, Rochdale, Leeds, London and Edinburgh, calling on the government to not depart from strict neutrality in the conflict. On 31

December 1862, thousands of working men in the Manchester Free Trade Hall expressed sympathy with the North and called for Lincoln to eradicate slavery.

The efforts of those seeking to glorify the slave power and corrupt the minds of working people were utterly in vain. Working-class newspapers not only printed the Manchester meeting's Address to Lincoln but also President Lincoln's reply recognising British workers' sacrifice.

In order to ascertain the effects of the "cotton famine", The New York Times sent a reporter to Lancashire in September 1862 who reported on the acute distress of the cotton manufacturing workers and came up with a practical suggestion – launching a campaign to send food aid supplies to Lancashire workers.

Meetings were held and money raised throughout the Union. On 9 January 1863, the George Griswold relief ship, loaded with gifts of food, left New York to the cheers of spectators. Her cargo consisted of flour, bacon, pork, corn, bread, wheat and rice. American stevedores loaded the ship without charge. Additional ships were soon sent: the Achilles and the Hope.

When the Griswold docked at Liverpool, all the dock workers refused payment for their services and the railways offered free transport. On 23 February 1863, 6,000 working men were at the Free Trade Hall (inside and out) to greet the arrival of the George Griswold. One speaker observed, "If the North succeeded, liberty would be stimulated and encouraged in every country on the face of the earth; if they failed, despotism, like a great pall, would envelop our social and political institutions."

## 'The cause of labour is one'

On 26 March 1863, 3,000 skilled workers at St James Hall assembled in a pro-Union gathering organised by the London Trades Council to hear trade union speakers including a bricklayer, engineer, shoemaker, compositor, mason and joiner. Two contributors noted: "The cause of labour is one, all over the world" and "We are met here ... not merely as friends of Emancipation, but as friends of Reform." With the North's victory, a working class newspaper wrote "No nation is really strong where the majority of its citizens are deprived of a voice in the management of public affairs."

As a result of working-class resistance, Britain neither recognised the Confederacy nor intervened to break the blockade. Despite terrible hardships, particularly in the northwest, workers refused to allow their sufferings to be exploited by pro-Confederate sympathisers.

As Marx said, "It was not the wisdom of the ruling classes but the heroic resistance to their criminal folly by the working classes of

England that saved the West of Europe from plunging headlong into an infamous crusade for the perpetuation of slavery on the other side of the Atlantic."

The American Civil War generated a broadening of horizons among British workers that blossomed even further in the First International. ■

A hundred and fifty years on, the accident at the Hester Pit, Hartley, which killed 204 men and boys is not forgotten...

# 1862: The Hartley Calamity – a pit disaster remembered

**WORKERS, JULY 2012 ISSUE**

The Hartley Pit Calamity is still remembered in the North East as one of the worst mining disasters in England: 204 men and boys lost their lives. A beam on the pumping engine failed, killing five miners on their way to the surface. The debris blocked the lift shaft, trapping those still underground.

As the first mining disaster of the Victorian period on such a scale, the Hartley Calamity continues to resonate, despite the widespread calamity enacted by the Thatcher government on mine workers. Pits can be closed, but memories remain open.

This newly made banner will get its first outing at the Durham Miners' Gala this month.
Photo: Workers

The Hester Pit, to give it its proper name, had only a single shaft, as was usual at the time. That served not only as the entrance and exit, but also for the pumping out of water by a beam engine next to the shaft.

At 10 am on Thursday 16 January 1862 a shift change was taking place underground when the heavy cast iron beam snapped without warning. A considerable tonnage dropped into the shaft as it killed those in the cage. A section of beam lodged like a bone in the throat of the mine, trapping the rest of the two shifts underground.

## No escape

With no other exit, there was no means of escape. Despite frantic rescue attempts involving workers from other mines, it took six days

to reach the trapped miners. All 199, some as young as 10, had by then succumbed to the gas which had held up the rescuers.

It was well-known by 1862 that cast iron was brittle and prone to sudden breakage. But the great extent of the disaster was not directly due to the broken beam. Nearly all the dead perished for want of a second exit. A memorial in the grounds of the local church, St Alban's, Earsdon, provides a record in stone of each of their names.

The 150th anniversary of the Calamity has been marked by the community in a variety of ways. An evening of music and songs was held in the Memorial Hall and there was a dedicated church service at which "The Hartley Calamity" – a ballad poem by the pitman poet Joseph Skipsey (1832 to 1903) was read. And a book entitled Still the Sea Rolls On – The Hartley Pit Calamity of 1862 has been compiled.

The village of New Hartley has produced two banners bearing the name of the Hester Pit to be carried in this year's procession at the Durham Miners' Gala in July. Until then, the banners have a place of honour in the Memorial Hall along with a series of cross-stitch pennants, hung proudly along the wall, recording the names of those who died.

Local school children have made their contribution by producing fine fabric collages portraying scenes then and now with, in total, over two hundred birds in flight, one for each victim.

This is not just an event that happened 150 years ago, but a community still active on its own behalf, aware of its history and traditions while still fully engaged with the present world. Contained within the commemorations are thoughts about the 2010 Chilean miners, trapped so long underground though ultimately rescued, and the Greymouth tragedy in New Zealand in the same year but with a different outcome.

A speaker at one of the events made mention that mining accidents continue to claim the lives of miners, only today it is in China rather than Northumberland.

Much is made in the media and by politicians about the need to reward entrepreneurs with bonuses – otherwise they are unwilling to do their jobs. But the working class will give of their creativity and labour freely for their community, as the commemorative book and all the other events demonstrate. No one here has earned a penny for themselves.

This book contains Skipsey's "The Hartley Calamity", which is doubly appropriate, this being the 180th anniversary of his birth in Percy Main North Shields where he became a colliery worker at the age of seven. A self-taught man, he demonstrated the potential within

members of the working class by going on to become a librarian, custodian of Shakespeare's birthplace, and gain a Civil List pension for his literary work.

Still the Sea Rolls On – The Hartley Pit Calamity of 1862 compiled by Keith Armstrong and Peter Dixon, 2012. Northern Voices Community Projects supported by North Tyneside Council. ISBN 978-1-871536-20-1

This publication combines a history of the event, illustrated with drawings, photographs and documentary evidence of the time, with present day poetry, stories, photographs and drawings by local people. The contents are varied, with each a fitting tribute to those being commemorated, their lives, however short, celebrated.

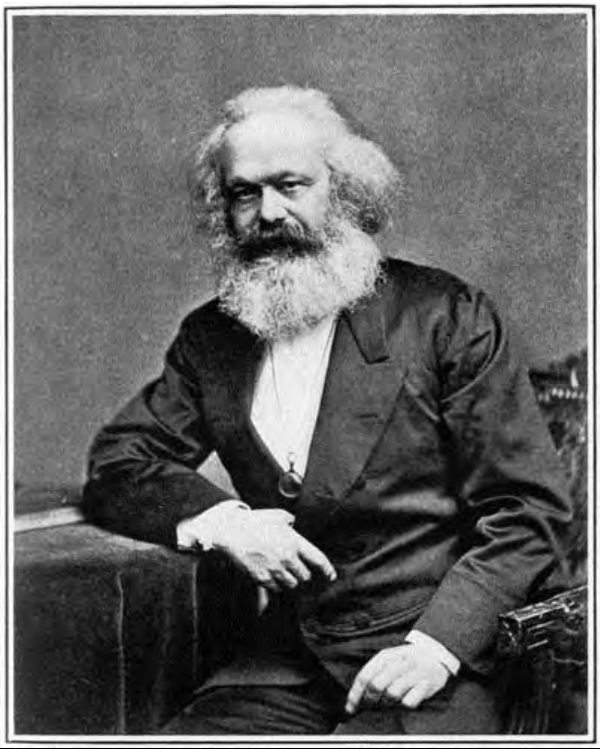
■

In 1864 delegates from across Europe met to create an international workers' movement…

# 1863: The First International

**WORKERS, FEB 2011 ISSUE**

In the second half of the nineteenth century, the International Workingmen's Association (IWA) – sometimes called The First International – united a variety of different political groups and trade union organisations to further the prospects of the working class, initially across Europe, then America. It is probably the best (or only) example of genuine international working class cooperation organised by the workers themselves and guided by a revolutionary socialist outlook that world history has yet produced, and it has relevance for us today, particularly because of the key role English trade unionists played in it.



Karl Marx, one of the founders of the First International

Following the widespread Revolutions of 1848, a period of harsh reaction had set in over Europe, before the next major upswing of activity arose, presaged by the founding of the IWA in 1864. The great change came in July 1863, when at a historic meeting held in London at St. James' Hall, French and British workers discussed developing a closer working relationship and declared the need for an international organisation. This was not only to prevent the import of foreign workers to break strikes, but also to forge continuing economic and political cooperation, invite representatives of other continental nations to join them and work to end the prevailing economic system, replacing it with some form of collective ownership.

## Unanimous

In September 1864, a meeting took place in St. Martin's Hall, with Britons, Germans, French, Poles and Italians represented in large numbers, which unanimously decided to found an international organisation of workers. Among others, George Odger (Secretary, London General Trades Council) read a speech calling for

international co-operation. Karl Marx sensed the importance of this gathering and joined it, participating as a representative of German artisans residing in London. The gathering heralded a new era in the workers' movement.

In October, a General Council − with additional coopted national repre-sentatives − was formed, meeting weekly at 18 Greek Street. Most of the British council members were trade union leaders. On the initial Council were tailors, carpenters, weavers, shoemakers, furniture makers, watchmakers, instrument makers and a hairdresser. Marx attended regularly, becoming a constant leading figure and one of the few to be regularly elected over many years, only relinquishing his position in 1872.

Difficulties arose immediately and the new organisation could easily have foundered, but Marx played a vital role in ensuring the International remained true to its founding purpose. Mazzini's Italian delegates proposed a political programme that was against class struggle and drew up very centralised rules, fit only for a secret political society. This approach would have hamstrung the very basis of an international workers' association, conceived not to create a movement but only to unite and weld together already existing and dispersed class movements in various countries. So instead Marx set about writing his rallying Address to the Working Classes and wrote a simplified set of rules, which were adopted.

## Trade union basis

The IWA was established essentially on the basis of trade unions in a number of nations, together with a motley crew of diverse political groups with differing philosophies (including Mutualists, Blanquists, Proudhonists, English Owenites, Italian republicans, anarchists, radical democrats, and other socialists of various hues). However, over its short life, at the prompting of Marx and supported by English trade unionists, it grew into a powerful movement that coordinated support for major class actions and inspired genuine fear in the defenders of the bourgeois status quo. Many national local federations developed strong working class bases and movements. At its peak, the IWA is estimated to have had between 5 to 8 million members.

For nigh on ten years Marx provided leadership and devoted a major part of his energies to the affairs of the International, ensuring it pursued a class direction. Only the publication of Das Kapital in 1867 competed for his attention. Throughout he strove to fashion what had started as a loose alliance with divergent ideologies into a united class movement informed by revolutionary, class-based ideology. To such good effect that the "Spectre of Communism" Marx had seen haunting Europe in his and Frederick Engels' 1848 Communist Manifesto seemed much more real to the capitalist establishment of the late 1860s than it had 20 years earlier. As political and

organisational head of the International and author of the book that sought to lay bare "the economic law of motion of modern society", Marx finally seemed close to achieving the union of socialist theory and revolutionary practice that he had always aimed for.

By the time the Geneva Congress (1866) convened, the Association could already claim credit for having successfully counteracted the intrigues of capitalists who were always ready to misuse the foreign worker as a tool against the native worker in the event of strikes. One of its great purposes was "to make the workmen of different countries not only feel but act as brethren and comrades in the army of emancipation". This Congress's most significant decision was the adoption of the 8-hour working day as one of the Association's fundamental demands, "a preliminary condition, without which all further attempts at improvement and emancipation are bound to founder", which had an immediate impact in America.

## Solidarity

Nowhere did the Association initiate any strikes, confining itself merely to intervening where the character of the local conflicts required supportive measures and solidarity. The International intervened significantly in several important cases.

For instance, where previously the standard threat of British/English capitalists when their workmen would not tamely submit to their arbitrary dictation had been to supplant them by an importation of foreigners, the General Council often frustrated the plans of the capitalists. When a strike or a lock-out occurred concerning any of the affiliated trades, the continental correspondents of the Association were instructed to warn the workmen in their respective localities not to enter into any engagements with the agents of the capitalists of the place where the dispute was. Consequently, the manoeuvres of the English capitalists were frustrated during the strikes and lock-outs of railway excavators, conductors and engine drivers, zinc workers, wire-workers, wood-cutters, and so on. In a few cases, such as the strike of the London basket-makers, the capitalists had secretly smuggled in labourers from Belgium and Holland. But after an appeal from the General Council, the Belgian and Dutch workers made common cause with the English workers.

## French lock-out

Also in France, where trade unions had only just been legalised, the bronze-workers (a body of approximately 5,000 people) were the first to re-form a union in 1866. In February 1867, a coalition of 87 employers demanded of their workers that they resign from the union, which culminated in a lock-out of 1,500 bronze-workers.

Paris, 1871: Communards about to destroy the Tour Vendôme in Paris, a symbol of imperial rule and militarism. This and other photographs were used to identify Communards who were seized and executed for their part in this act.

With their union fund being depleted, the International organised loans from the English trades unions and support from other French unions, which enabled the workers to win. Moreover, in the spring of 1868 in Geneva, building workers (whose unions were strong supporters of the International) declared a strike of block-cutters, bricklayers, plasterers and house-painters. Strikebreakers from Ticino and Piedmont were won over to the side of the workers. The masters responded by closing down the workshops in those branches of the building trade that had not yet joined in the strike and slurred the International as a foreign plot.

A number of unions, which had previously stood aloof from the International, formed sections and asked for admission. Geneva's jewellery trade workers (goldsmiths, watchmakers, bowl-makers and engravers) then offered material aid to the building workers. The International organised support across the continent and donations flowed in.

The masters' plan of starving out the workers failed. An agreement was reached with the masters that conceded the workers a reduction of the working time by one, and in some cases, two hours, and a wage increase of 10 per cent. The conflict resulted in a mass adherence of workmen in Switzerland to the IWA. In Belgium, the International mobilised considerable support in 1867 for the coalminers of Charleroi in Belgium who faced wage reductions and lockouts.

## Paris Commune

The Paris Commune of 1871 was the first instance of the working class achieving power for itself, running Paris for over two months. Marx rose to its defence in an eloquent address published under the title, The Civil War in France. But soon after the Commune was drowned in blood, latent dissensions in the ranks of the International came to a head. The English trade unionists grew frightened, fearing association with the dramatic events in Paris; the French movement was shattered. To prevent anarchists grasping control of the IWA, the organisation was relocated to New York City in 1872, before it disbanded in 1876.

Despite the lean budgets of the General Council, all the governments of continental Europe took fright at "the powerful and formidable organisation of the International Workingmen's Association, and the rapid development it had attained in a few years", as the Spanish Foreign Minister of the day admitted. The IWA remains worthy of deep respect and further study. It was an authentic product of workers searching for ways to make progress; we should cherish its achievements and mimic its aim of practical cooperation.

Historic Notes

# The First International 1869

THE INTERNATIONAL Workingmen's Association, to become known as the First International, was founded at a meeting in London's St. Martin's Hall, one hundred and fifteen years ago, on September 28, 1869.

It was fitting that the foundation of an international body of the working class should take place in the birthplace of capitalism and of the working class. The British trade union movement, the most advanced in Europe, took its proper role in this historic event and those who served on the General Council of the Association included some of the leaders of the British labour movement.

The International came at a time when workers across the world followed the pioneering steps of the British to form trade unions. In Britain, the struggle for a shorter working week gathered momentum. The Trades Councils were being formed in the major urban centres. 1868 was to see the foundation of the Trade Union Congress.

British workers were also keenly interested in the international scene. Marx commented that it was only the action of the British working class that prevented the capitalists from intervening in the American Civil War on the side of the slave-owners.

When Garibaldi, the Italian patriot, was invited to Britain by bourgeois liberals, the celebrations were swamped by the workers, which embarrassed capitalism so much that Garibaldi's visit was cut short. The occupation and partition of Poland aroused deep sympathy. And Ireland was discussed, the International declaring its support for the fight for Irish independence and freedom.

The International had to cope, as we do now, with the continuous threat of war between the different capitalist powers. War came to Europe in 1870 between Prussia and France. After the defeat of France, the world saw the red flag raised in the Paris Commune. In an address of the General Council to the Association, Marx pointed out that only the working class could end war, that at the same time as the French and German governments rushed headlong to destruction "the workmen of France and Germany send each other messages of peace and goodwill... this great fact opens the vista of a brighter future.

In the Commune of Paris, though it lasted but a few weeks, Marx saw the future of the world, the dictatorship of the working class and socialism. He stated: "Workingmen's Paris, with its Commune, will forever be celebrated as the glorious harbinger of a new society..."

The First International differed from those that followed, for it was based not on political parties but trade unions. Its ideas were to boomerang around the world, to revolutionary Paris, to the Soviet Union, to China, Vietnam and Albania. But a boomerang always returns to the thrower. Revolution in Britain, the birthplace of proletarian internationalism, will provide the guarantee for further advance of workers the world over.

**Historic Notes**

# TUC unity forged in centuries of struggle

LONG before national trade unions came into being during the latter half of the 19th century, workers organised themselves locally in societies for their mutual protection. As long ago as 1696 the Journeymen Feltmakers were organised in a semi-permanent combination to raise wages.

Almost all of these combinations were based around a single skill, group of skills or industry. Attempts were often made to expand the geographical influence of these unions, frequently without success as they buckled under the legal and often physical assaults of the employers. Some, however, were successful, such as the Stonemasons, Boilermakers, and the General Union of Carpenters and Joiners which was formed in 1827 from the many local trade clubs that had long been in existence.

During the 24 year period of the 1799-1800 Combination Act, under which there were provisions for the summary trial of unionists, combinations grew innumerably. Trade unionists were attacked legally, not through anti-combination laws alone, but also by such as the Unlawful Oathe Act of 1797, under which six farm labourers from Tolpuddle were prosecuted in 1834. The national influence, if not organisation of trade unions was demonstrated by the fact that an enormous demonstration of trade unionsts took place in London against the prosecution.

In 1834 there was an attempt to create a national general union with the formation of the Grand National Consolidated Trades Union. The 'Grand National' grew rapidly in size, with perhaps as many as half a million members at its height, but by 1837 it was effectively dead. The demise of the 'Grand National' was due to the same weaknesses which led to the failure of future attempts on this model, such as in 1845. The 'Grand National' fell apart primarily because such an amorphous organisation was intrinsically weak, endeavouring to base its strength solely on sheer numbers rather than on a commonality of interest, whether it be a common industry or skill. Hence there was little feeling of cohesion or unity among its members, most of whom in fact seldom, if ever, paid any dues.

By the 1850's unionism was coming to maturity with workers, particularly skilled workers, organising themselves nationally; but these combinations were qualitatively different from those that had gone before, in that they had a well developed organisational structure. A good example of a 'new model' union was the Amalgamated Society of Enginsers, founded in 1850-51. Although its district committees were permitted a considerable degree of autonomy, the bulk of funds were centralised at the headquarters in London, under a full time general secretary, who was supervised by an Executive Council elected from the branches. This type of organisation formed the model for many of the new unions subsequently formed.

The 1860's was a period of intense struggle when all unions were coming together in the course of the fight both for better wages and conditions, and indeed for the very existence of trade unions which were again under legal attack. Also in 1867, the Government appointed a Royal Commission of Inquiry into Trade Unions, whose eventual findings, it was feared, might put the clock back to 1824, when all trade combinations quite simply had been illegal.

In 1864 trade unions started a concerted campaign against the growing attack on their existence. A Trade Union Conference called by the Glasgow Trades Council had delegates from most of the big unions present. In 1866, following a lock out in the Sheffield file trade, the Sheffield Association of Organised Trades sent out an invitation to all national "trades" in the country to attend a conference with the object of creating "a national organisation among the trades of the United Kingdom, for the purpose of effectively resisting all lock-outs".

Soon after, in February 1867, the Royal Commission was announced and plans were made, led by the Manchester and Salford Trades Council, to hold a Congress of Trades Councils, Federations of Trade Societies and individual trade unions. The Congress was to discuss, amongst other matters, the "probability" of an attempt made by the Legislature... to introduce a measure detrimental to the interests of such Societies".

The Congress was held from 2-6 June 1868 in Manchester, with 34 delegates representing 118,000 trade union members.

It is a great pity that there are very few records of what went on at the Congress, but we are left with the resolutions which included: support for action to amend the law on trade union activities such as picketing, their "suspicion and disfavour" regarding the Royal Commission, and the aiding of the London Conference of Amalgamated Trades in their endeavours to secure the legal protection of union funds. It was further agreed that annual congresses be held "for the purpose of bringing the trades into closer alliance."

And so the annual Trades Union Congress was born, intended as a meeting place where independent trade unions could debate issues of concern; its strength derived from the individual strength of its participants with the Congress to be an effective barometer of feeling in the trade union movement.

## PROPOSED CONGRESS OF TRADES COUNCILS

AND OTHER

## Federations of Trades Societies.

MANCHESTER, FEBRUARY 31st, 1868.

FELLOW-DENIZENS,

The Manchester and Salford Trades Council having recently taken into their serious consideration the present aspect of Trades Unions, and the profound ignorance which prevails in the public mind with reference to their operations and principles, together with the probability of an attempt being made by the Legislature, during the present session of Parliament, to introduce a measure detrimental to the interests of such Societies, beg most respectfully to suggest the propriety of holding in Manchester, as the main centre of industry in the provinces, a Congress of the Representatives of Trades Councils and other similar Federations of Trades Societies. By confining the Congress to such bodies it is conceived that a deal of expense will be saved as Trades will thus be represented collectively; whilst there will be a better opportunity afforded of selecting the most intelligent and efficient exponents of our principles.

It is proposed that the Congress shall assume the character of the annual meetings of the British Association for the Advancement of Science and the Social Science Association, in the transactions of which Societies the artizan class are almost entirely excluded; and that papers, previously carefully prepared, shall be laid before the Congress on the various subjects which at the present time affect Trades Societies, each paper to be followed by discussion upon the points advanced, with a view of the merits and demerits of each question being thoroughly ventilated through the medium of the public press. It is further suggested that the subjects treated upon shall include the following :—

1.—Trades Unions an absolute necessity.
2.—Trades Unions and Political Economy.
3.—The Effect of Trades Unions on Foreign Competition.
4.—Regulation of the Hours of Labour.
5.—Limitation of Apprentices.
6.—Technical Education.
7.—Arbitration and Courts of Conciliation.
8.—Co-operation.
9.—The present Inequality of the Law in regard to Conspiracy, Intimidation, Picketing, Coercion, &c.
10.—Factory Acts Extension Bill, 1867: the necessity of Compulsory Inspection, and its application to all places where Women and Children are employed.
11.—The present Royal Commission on Trades Unions: how far worthy of the confidence of the Trades Union interest.
12.—The necessity of an Annual Congress of Trade Representatives from the various centres of industry.

All Trades Councils and other Federations of Trades are respectfully solicited to intimate their adhesion to this project on or before the 6th of April next, together with a notification of the subject of the paper that each body will undertake to prepare; after which date all information as to place of meeting, &c., will be supplied.

It is also proposed that the Congress be held on the 4th of May next, and that all liabilities in connection therewith shall not extend beyond its sittings.

Communications to be addressed to MR. W. H. WOOD, Typographical Institute, 29, Water Street, Manchester.

By order of the Manchester and Salford Trades Council,

S. C. NICHOLSON, PRESIDENT.
W. H. WOOD, SECRETARY.

**Historic Notes**

# Fight for the shorter working week

IN THE LIGHT of the present actions involving the Confederation of Shipbuilding and Engineering Unions we have decided to reprint the following article on the shorter working week first published in THE WORKER in 1973 when a similar campaign was being pursued.

## *Economics and politics*

The relationship between economics and politics, and the trade unions and the Party was a question which Marx regarded with the utmost concern. Writing in 1871 of one aspect of the economic struggle - the fight for the working day - he stated:

'The attempt to obtain forcibly from individual capitalists a shortening of working hours in some individual factory or some individual trade by means of a strike etc is a purely economic movement. On the other hand, a movement forcibly to obtain an eight hour law etc is a political movement. And in this way a political movement grows everywhere out of the individual economic movement.'

## *The working class*

For over 30 years the working class fought a bitter struggle for the Ten Hour Day. Demands for Parliamentary Reform were the outcome of demands for shorter hours, higher wages, better conditions and the abolition of child labour. Victory in 1847 was secured, therefore, under the political pressure of Chartism, but this victory represented something even more significant than the immediate benefits. Eminent economists, such as Nassau Senior, had 'proved' that 'all profits are made in the last hour' and if there were any legal restriction of hours it would ruin British industry. Needless to say, this did not happen, and the working class refuted this economic nonsense in practice.

Two different conceptions of economics and politics were involved: one, the blind rule of capital, and the laws of supply and demand, and the other, social, against redundancy, speed-up, and lengthening of hours, in every resistance against the laws of capital, there appears the contrary law of balanced, planned, development of the productive forces.

## *Organisation*

But there is another aspect of the economic struggle which also has revolutionary implications; the capacity for organisation and discipline.

In 1858 the carpenters and joiners of London presented a demand for a nine-hour day. They were joined by masons, bricklayers, painters, and plasterers the following year, whereupon the masters provoked a lockout and made non-unionism a condition of re-employment. After six months a compromise was reached whereby this condition was withdrawn and the men returned to work on the old conditions.

This attempt to destroy trade unionism illustrated the weakness of the old-fashioned loosely-organised unions with small resources. To the skilled carpenters came the realisation of the need to organise. They founded an Amalgamated Society with a constitution closely modelled on that of the engineers.

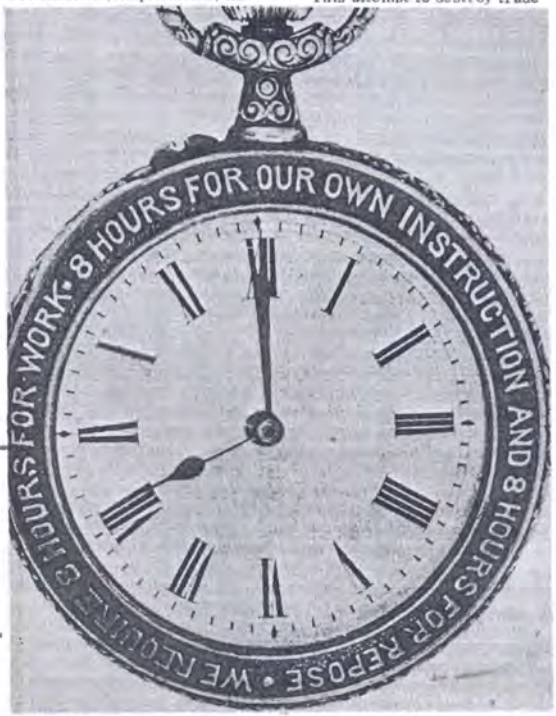
In 1871 the engineers on the north east coast won the nine hour day after a five month strike. They were successful in forming a Nine Hours League which succeeded in uniting both society and non-society men, and became an impetus for other areas. Around this economic demand, organisation of the various trades, unionists and non-unionists, was achieved from a very low level of organisation previously.

## *Conclusion*

Only the united strength and determination of workers will stop the ruling class from intensifying exploitation. Having been forced to concede a shorter working day the employers began to use overtime to bump it up again. Beginning as a marginal way for workers to supplement their normal pay, overtime became in time part of the basic wage structure and a condition for the running of many industrial concerns. But also banning overtime became part of the guerrilla tactics of workers.

In current conflicts, too, all attempts by reformists and opportunists to separate economic and political struggles will be exposed as completely contrary to working class interests - just as Marx exposed such efforts in the last century when he wrote:

'The coalition of the forces of the working class, already achieved by the economic struggle must also serve, in the hands of this class, as a lever in its struggle against the political power of its exploiters.'




One of the twelve watch cases struck in the 1860's to mark the meeting in London of the International Association of Working Men (the first International) when the eight hour working day had been proclaimed as the Association's objective.

# Historic Notes – Nine Hour League 1871

A SUCCESSFUL 5 week strike of engineers in Sunderland for a reduction of the 59 hour week led to the formation of the Nine Hour League in Newcastle in 1871. This resulted in a bitter 3 month conflict between workers and employers on the Tyne. There were aspects of the strike that made it one of the most interesting in British industrial history.

It was a period of prosperity for the employers, trade was good and new British machines had put Britain ahead of European competitors. Both sides were led by clever indomitable men. Burnet the workers' leader, an engineering worker from Palmers, Jarrow, was described by contemporaries as genial, quiet, with immense reserves of mental energy and strength of character, and a very high sense of the abilities and rights of British workers. He was described as preferring negotiation to conflict, but as a strike leader he proved adamant, no return till victory achieved. The leader of the employers, Sir William Armstrong, an engineer of prestige, equally adamant and as good an organiser of employers.

The next interesting point was that the strikers were all highly skilled men, proud of their craft, true aristocrats of labour. And they were supported financially at first by other skilled men, especially the miners of Northumberland, then by all kinds of workers in every town from Aberdeen to Southampton. And last, but of great importance, the strike had the whole-hearted support of the First International.

Armstrong, when he could not break the men, brought workers from Durham and London. They were not tradesmen, could not do the work and the hostility of the Newcastle people, especially to the 'pasty-faced cockneys' soon drove them away. Men were then brought from Belgium, but the First International sent its own secretary Cohn, a Dane to pursuade the Belgians not to strike-break.

He was successful until he was expelled from the country. Now Germans were brought in. There was hostility but the League frowned on fisticuffs; instead they argued with the blacklegs and offered them fares home. The Germans earned grudging praise because they were skilled and because of the phenomenal amount of beer smuggled to them up the Tyne, annoying the Rachabite teetotallers and the revenue men. Moreover, the Prussians insisted on smoking while working, this at a period when workers were allowed only one visit a day to the lavatory and then were timed. Finally some of them started their own strike inside for a nine hour day. To be a blackleg on the Tyne was not a happy situation not least because of the mordant humour of the British workers.

By now other employers were denouncing Armstrong, as were 'The Times' and 'The Newcastle Chronicle' which had supported the League from the beginning. Trade was being lost and the employers were suffering. They gave in. A great procession of 25 000 workers marched on Newcastle Town Moor with banners displaying quotations from Shakespeare, Burns and Byron, along with the slogans of the factories.

The terms of the agreement were 54 hours a week, no reduction in pay, agreement for 12 months to start January 1 1872. It was total success for the Nine Hour League of the Tyne and the way forward for all the industrial workers of Europe.

Plate commemorating the engineers' victory.

# HISTORIC NOTES The Eight Hours Movement

THE 1880's were not easy years for workers. True, prices were falling because of the 'great depression' but the employers' attack was all the more vicious. Numbers out of work soared; trade union membership fell and those remaining found it difficult enough to resist rounds of wage cuts never mind fight for improvements. Bloody riots of unemployed workers which shook London in 1886 were not an expression of strength but of desdespair.

The gas workers' struggle for an eight hour day was one of those struggles which lifts the pall of demoralisation and inspires others to get organised. On the 31st March 1889 a dozen workers came off an 18 hour shift at the Beckton Gas Works, and met at a temperance bar, 144 Barking Road. They had had enough of their average 12 hour day. They decided to form a union and demand 8 hours instead. This was unthinkable! Not only were their demands totally 'unrealisable' but it was common knowledge that the unskilled, unorganised could do nothing in the face of the employer. Their bold call and their determination however were an inspiration.

In August, the newly-formed 'Gasworkers and General Labourers Union' (Now the G&MWU) put its demand for an 8 hour day to their employers... who caved in within a few days! The shock waves spread far and wide, not least to the equally disorganised and oppressed dockers, who that month struck as one man for their 'tanner'.

The success of the gas workers struggle did not come from a new whizz-kid organiser, clever tactics or whatever - it came from the ideas that lay behind the demand. For the first time in a number of years the specific aim was that of improving the workers' lot, and not merely defending it. Gone was any hint of a defensive, cap-in-hand approach which sought to 'justify' itself in the employers' eye (like the cry today, just recently heard- 'but we need more money to get to work', how servile can you get!) It was a straightforward, honest demand for a better life - not for mere survival, 'to make ends meet' in a life of non-stop drudgery - but life, worth living.

As one pamphlet of the time put it, "The demand we, as workmen, now make is for LEISURE, NOT IDLENESS." With low wages and long hours it pointed out the workers "must vegetate like the plants. At times he yearns for concerts theatres, for light-hearted joviality: would be delighted to be well dressed and have his wife and children well dressed, would even like a fortnight's holiday....ah! but he has no money and might as well wish himself Lord of Manor as wish to ever gratify his simple, legitimate tastes."

Perhaps those who fought then understood better than we do today that it is only capitalism that reduces all such issues - education culture, music, even life itself - down to a question of 'economics', how much money? Equally, if we wish to attain such crucially important parts of a dignified, fulfilling life, we must pursue the basic economic struggle to the end. This basic message of the 8-hour-day movement was its source of strength - as it is in our struggle today.



# HISTORIC NOTES The fight for the 8 hour day

BY THE LAST decades of the nineteenth century workers were getting weary of their position. It was increasingly irksome to vote Liberal, the 'left' of the two parties, when the boss was Liberal and often sent police and troops to break strikes. People were increasingly angered by the 'theory' that poverty was caused by laziness or 'lack of character' Unemployment was on the increase, housing conditions showed no signs of improvement, and still sickness or old age meant destitution. Neither Liberals nor Tories would do anything - for 'state interference' they said, was agains against good economic sense. Winning the vote had brought few real gains.

New socialist groupings grew demanding far reaching reforms, blaming the system not the individual for poverty, and demanding 'independent labour representation' to push reforms through parliament. Until this, the TUC had concentrated on removing anti-working class legislation and had generally opposed anything more. But as the President told the TUC of 1887: "Gentlemen, we can do with state interference if the homes of the people can be improved, or work to the unemployed be given, or bread to the hungry, or hope and succour to the uncared for of our large towns. Let it be used to help the poor, the down trodden and ill paid, and overworked toilers... Gentlemen, we recognise our most serious evils in the unrestrained, unscrupulous and remorseless forces of capitalism."

But many were opposed to this new approach, and it was the demand for a legally enforced 8 hour day that brought the debate to a head. Should such social progress be won via parliament or by trade union action? The socialists insisted that it was the responsibility of the state.

The Cleveland Miners, however, argued "that if an eight hour day were given by law, instead of by organized efforts, the workers would not be pursuaded to organize at all." Broadhurst of the Stonemasons pleaded, "...for God's sake, let them do this work for themselves and no grovelling to the doors of parliament like paupers seeking a weekly dole. "The iron workers and carpenters opposed the idea on the grounds that parliament was a capitalist institution. And finally the TUC of 1890 decided against the move on the grounds that "to relegate this important question to the Imperial Parliament, which is necessarily from its position antagonistic to thr rights of labour, will only indefintely delay this much needed reform."

'Socialists', argued Frederick Rogers of the Vellum Binders a year later, "are teaching us that the functions of the State can be enlarged, that Government is omnipotent to protect. But they make the common mistake of all enthusiasts, when they say there is one remedy for all social diseases, and that remedy is theirs ...There must be independent life within the State to prevent the Government becoming tyranny, and the Trade Unions will be chief among those who shall call this independent life into being."

The 8 hour day debate was the first major impetus to the demand for 'independent labour representation' and a party with a new attitude towards the workers role within the state. The desire was truly for social progress and proved in many instances to be a practical way forward. But today we should remember also the warnings of those who bitterly opposed the new direction.

"Self-help and self-reliance are extended and strengthened by combination...but with these lessons others have been inculcated which would render nugatory the power of the Unions, namely reliance upon State aid, State regulation and State control. The two systems cannot co-exist; they are contradictory and opposed.

Historic Notes

# Afghanistan under the British

THE VICTORIAN British ruling class regarded India as the jewel in the crown of the Empire, to be guarded at all costs. The dangerous rival was Russia and the weak frontier was Afghanistan. Subjection of the Afghans was therefore a prime objective of the British government in India. Friendship with them proved difficult, however, as they were a group of fighting tribes who had lived for centuries despoiling the traders through the Khyber Pass.

At the beginning of the eighteenth century the English and Russian frontiers were separated by 4,000 miles, reduced to 2,000 in the nineteenth by the British annexation of Bengal. When the Russians in their turn began to advance the frontier, the British started the First Afghan War. An army led by General Elphinstone, at the demand of the East India Co., occupied Kabul in 1837. In 1841 there was an uprising so the General agreed with the Afghans to evacuate the town and go back to British India under safe conduct. The Afghans proved treacherous, attacked the British force of 4,500 men and killed or captured everyone except a doctor who escaped to the fort of Jellalabad near the entrance to the Khyber Pass in January 1842. After a diaplay of great bravery by Indian and British troops defending Jellalabad, a fresh British force under General Pollock advanced into Afghanistan, defeated the Afghans and occupied Kabul. The historian Mowatt wrote "After thus indicating the prestige of the British Empire, the East India Co. recognized the independence of Afghanistan and evacuated the country." The nightmare of the British always was that the Russians would make friends with the Afghans because it was believed almost impossible for them to scale the great mountain wall of the Hindu Kush if the Afghans were hostile to them.

In 1878 the nightmare came true when the Amir invited a mission of Russian officers to reside in Kabul. The British Government in India demanded the same right and that the Amir should conduct his foreign relations only through the Government of India. War followed and the Amir was compelled to accept these terms in 1879. An officer of the Political Department was sent to Kabul and on September 3rd he and his escort of 75 Indian soldiers were killed. For the second time the Afghans had shown their contempt for the British so now a lesson had to be taught. (Is that where Hua learnt the phrase?) General Roberts, later of Boer War fame, marched at the head of 7000 Indian and British troops through the Kuram valley to Kabul but meanwhile Governor Burrows had been defeated by the Afghans at Kandahar. At all costs the legend of British invincibility had to be retained in order to hold down India so Roberts was despatched with thousands of troops, horses, mules, camels and guns to march to Kandahar 313 miles away. They did this very quickly, met Ayub Khan and routed his Afghan army. A new Amir was chosen by Britain and the original terms were imposed on him. With a minimum of internal authority; all external authority belonged to the British. British power had been vindicated, Russian influence expelled and rifles and money were given to the ruler Abdurrahman to keep down the people or as the British expressed it "to keep law and order". One of the most repulsive aspects of these invasions was the war fever in Britain and particularly amongst the radicals in the industrial towns.

A similar phenomenon can be observed today in the Amalgamated Union of Engineering Workers and the National Union of Mineworkers. It is marvellous to behold how belligerent men past calling-up age become.

# HISTORIC NOTES Paris Commune

"AFTER WHIT Sunday 1871 there can be neither peace nor truce possible between the working men of France and the appropriators of their produce." So ended Karl Marx's address to the International Working Men's Association delivered just two days after the final suppression of the Paris Commune on May 28th by the soldiers of the French bourgeoisie.

## The beginning

The story of the Paris Commune began almost a year earlier. In June 1870 the French bourgeoisie declared war, ostensibly against Germany. In fact, it was a war for the decimation of the French people, and was opposed by the working class. The bourgeoisie then declared peace in May 1871 with the country under Prussian military control, and with a pledge to extort from the people a horrifying burden of taxation to compensate the invaders: the object of the bourgeoisie was now apparently achieved.

Except for Paris.

On September 4th, 1870, the workers had taken matters into their own hands, overthrown the Empire and demanded a Republic. Yet this new bourgeois government, headed by Thiers, was more interested in alliance with Prussia than with the defence of Paris and its people: it only narrowly escaped overthrow in October.

After the capitulation of the city in January 1871, this cowardly government fled to Versailles, leaving the workers' National Guard successfully to secure Paris. The bourgeoisie then pressed Bismarck to use the Prussian occupation forces to suppress the city.

Unwilling to involve his troops in street-fighting, Bismarck declined the offer. The bourgeoisie, forced to take matters into its unwilling hands, entered Paris with their army in an attempt to gain possession of the weapons of the National Guard.

They failed miserably, and their repulsion on March 18th was the birth of the Commune. So they returned to Bismarck, shelling the city the meanwhile. Even harsher compensation terms were agreed for the May "peace", so desperate were the bourgeoisie for the release of French prisoners of war held by the Prussians. Thus was an army hastily assembled for the butchery of the men, women and children of Paris.

The hideous revenge exacted on the Paris workers was the doing not just of the French bourgeoisie, but also of international capitalism. The British and Tsarist governments gave their wholehearted backing to the Thiers government. And the principal condition for the suppression of Paris, the continued occupation of France by Prussia, was continued at the request of the French bourgeoisie.

The common estimate is of 100,000 men, women and children slaughtered.

Their only crime was to seek to govern themselves. "Paris was no longer the rendezvous of British landlords, Russian ex-serf owners Irish absentees, American ex-shareholders and shoddymen and Wallachian boyards." "We," said a member of the Commune, "hear no longer of assassination, theft and personal assault: it seems as if the police (who had fled) had dragged with it to Versailles all its Conservative friends."

Working hours were reduced, production organised under a co-operative plan, the standing army abolished and replaced by armed workers, all officials elected and subject to recall: in short there was a dismembering of the militaristic and bureaucratic mess of bourgeois government.

## Hideous

The Parisians had survived months of famine when, in the words of Victor Hugo, "the potato was Queen, and the onion God." They had made peace, not with their bourgeoisie, but with the Prussian soldiery, who in awe at the armed people would not or could not enter the city. The bourgeoisie could not forgive the workers of Paris.

The Commune is the first living example of proletarian dictatorship. But its lesson is bitter. For their courage in refusing to submit to the bourgeoisie's conduct of war, and in turning their weapons against their rulers, the Parisian workers paid a terrifying price. After the Paris Commune, no one can wait for the outbreak of war as an opportune moment for revolution. Our task, like that of the French working class, is to strike at the warmongers at home and prevent war, which now as a hundred years ago has as its only object the carnage of the working class.

Fighters of the Paris Commune manning one of their street barricades.

The first jolt to the ruling classes' arrogant belief that only they are fit to govern came in 1871 with the uprising of the Paris Commune…

# 1871: The 72 days of the Paris Commune

**WORKERS, MAR 2011 ISSUE**

It grew out of a war and a siege. In the summer of 1870, Emperor Napoleon III of France waged an unnecessary war with Prussia. The Prussians soon proved to be a superior military force and invaded France. By September 1870, the French troops had surrendered and the Emperor, taken prisoner, abdicated.

The Parisian crowds − in disgust − proclaimed a republic. Civilians were called up to serve in the National Guard, a part-time citizens' militia set up in the great revolution of 1789. By October 1870 Prussian armies encircled Paris, then a city of over a million and a half people.

Fortified walls and a chain of forts were strengthened. Together with the remnants of the regular army, the National Guard comprised 350,000 men and women, grouped in neighbourhood battalions with a great mistrust of the military authorities. Guard units elected their own officers and formed a central committee.

The Prussians laid siege. By December food and fuel were running out. Then came the onset of one of the coldest winters within living memory. People began to die from hunger and cold. In the middle of January 1871, ration cards were issued for the daily bread allowance.

On top of the recently widened gap between rich and poor in the capital, the food shortages, military failures, and, finally, a Prussian bombardment of the city contributed to widespread discontent. Also, the temporary government began secret negotiations and agreed an armistice with the Germans, allowing them into Paris for two days to celebrate their victory. Paris felt betrayed and outraged.

## The Commune

In the early hours of 18 March, government soldiers moved quietly to take over the 250 cannon held by the National Guard in the hilly areas of Montmartre, overlooking the city. Quickly, Parisians emerged from their homes to surround them. The government soldiers following Head of State Adolphe Thiers were ordered to fire on the citizens of Paris. They refused to obey the order, and joined the crowd.

Crowds and barricades emerged all over the city. Regular soldiers retired to their barracks and the government withdrew to Versailles in disorder. A red flag flew from the Hotel de Ville (City Hall). The Central Committee of the National Guard was now the only effective government in Paris: it arranged elections for a Commune, to be held on 26 March.

## Elected

On 28 March the Commune was proclaimed. 92 members of the "Communal Council" were elected including a high proportion of skilled workers and several professionals (such as doctors and journalists). Nearly a third of Commune members were working class. It was the first time workers had been elected freely to make policies instead of enduring them. A member of the Commune wrote, "After the poetry of triumph, the prose of work."

Other cities in France also set up Communes: Lyons, Marseilles, Toulouse, Narbonne, St Etienne, Le Creusot and Limoges. However, all of these were crushed quickly by the Versailles government.

1871: Cannon and rifles outside the City Hall in Paris.

The Commune was a new kind of government. There were no organised political parties. The work of the Commune was done by committees, which elected delegates as leaders of government departments. By the middle of May, 90 trades unions were openly flourishing. Some 43 workers' cooperatives sprang up, and the Commune attempted to provide money to invest.

Women, who then had few rights, threw themselves into the commune, working alongside men on public committees, an innovation. Day nurseries were set up and an industrial training centre for girls planned.

Everyone in public service had to be elected by popular vote. The Commune only had time to issue and implement a few decrees – including the separation of church and state; the remission of rents owed for the period of the siege; the abolition of night work in the hundreds of Paris bakeries; the granting of pensions to the unmarried companions and children of National Guards killed on active service; and the right of employees to take over and run an enterprise if it were deserted by its owner.

On 21 May, the Versailles troops were allowed through the German lines, to enter the city of Paris. The toughest resistance came in the

more working-class eastern districts, where fighting was vicious. 20,000 Parisians were killed in one week.

## Ruling class brutality

The ruling class brutality was severe and draconian. The German army, partly surrounding Paris, colluded with the French army to destroy the Commune. People fought tenaciously in their local communities until the 28 May . After the slaughter, Thiers said, "The ground is strewn with their corpses. May this terrible sight serve as a lesson."

Obviously, the Commune made mistakes. Probably the people of Paris were so caught up in planning social reforms that they did not get to grips with the threat of the Thiers government. And if the Commune had taken control of the Bank of France in Paris (which held the country's gold reserves), then it would have had something powerful to counter with. The Commune was never fully prepared for civil war – it did not train the National Guard nor prepare the defences of Paris very efficiently. People were left locally to fight behind barricades that the enemy outflanked.

But the events in the French capital city ushered in the prospect of a new type of society. To ruling classes everywhere, it was a fleeting alarm, as the Paris Commune was the first brief glimpse of the bounty of revolutionary power, and of what it might bring to the people. Marx championed the Commune writing of "these Parisians storming heaven." It was short-lived, lasting only 72 days in only one city, but it happened and its example can never be erased from history. It is still an inspiration.

**Historic Notes**

# Samuel Plimsoll and the 'Sea-Villains'

"1032 seamen were drowned in 1873, from causes other than shipwrecks, due mainly to unscrupulous shipowners who sent overloaded ships to sea. I am calling for a minute survey of all unclassed vessels in the Shipping Survey Bill I am bringing before Parliament this very week". This was said by Samuel Plimsoll, regarded as a madman by some, when, in the House of Commons he described the shipowners as murderers: "There are shipowners in this country who have never either built a ship or bought a new one, but are simply what are called "ship-knackers". The shouting of members and rebuke of the Speaker could not stop him as be went on to name the ships lost at sea and their owners' names, and to express his determination to "unmask the villains who send these sailors to death and destruction". This dialogue followed:-

Speaker. "The Honourable Member made use of the word 'villain'. I trust he did not mean it to apply to any member of the House"

Plimsoll. "I did sir, and I do not mean to withdraw it".

Angry cries of "Order" and "Withdraw" came from Members.

Sailors had always been the worst treated of workers and suffered bad food, long seperation from home, a host of parasites from those chandlers who provided rotten meat and weavilly biscuit to the bumboat – men who infested every port, and discipline that ensured prison or worse for disobeying an order even from a mad captain.

The arrival of steam ships brought greater safety from the hazards of the sea and shorter journeys but as usual with all discoveries, greedy men degraded and made worse the situation of the work slaves. The new Insurance of Ships which should have benefited all was used as a further source of profit by a large number of shipowners, big and small. Rotten ships were bought up cheaply, heavily insured and sent to sea where the loss of life in these 'coffin ships' was of no importance because of the large insurance paid out to the owners. Other owners, less daring or less evil, just overloaded seaworthy ships so that they were dangerous.

Samuel Plimsoll MP became a thorn in the flesh of both Liberal and Tory Prime Mininster, Gladstone and Disraeli· he was called "rude and tactless" while his moods of impatience irritated both Prime Ministers. He continued to make scenes in Parliament but won the support of the engineers and miners as well as the seamen, the TUC and the general populace, as shown in packed meetings everywhere in the country. Citizens of Derby and Liverpool collected £600 for what he had done for the seamen, which he used for a new lifeboat.

The workers of Laird Bros. photographed during the building of the "Royal Oak" at Birkenhead in 1890. Safety was accounted for. (From John Gorman's 'To Build Jerusalem' Scorpion Pubn.)

In 1876, the passing of "The Merchant Shipping Act", Plimsoll's crowning achievement, confirmed the necessity for a Load-Line, the Plimsoll line, but he had to fight another 14 years to put the responsibility into the hands of the Board of Trade rather than individual shipowners. The National Amalgamated Sailors and Firemens' Union of Great Britain and Ireland was formed in 1887 by J. Havelock Wilson, a young seaman from Sunderland and Plimsoll presided at their first Convention. In 1928 Wilson, now President, ashamed that Plimsoll had been almost forgotten, had his Union install, in Victoria Park Embankment Gardens, a bronze bust on a granite column with the inscription, "Samuel Plimsoll born 1824 died 1898. Erected by the National Union of Seamen in grateful recognition of his services to the men of the sea of all nations".

He was also long remembered in another way. Inspired by the courage of Plimsoll, Sir John Lubbock, saddened by the fact that workers of all trades worked all the hours of daylight, never seeing the sun and having no holidays because Britain did not celebrate Saints' Days as did Europe, secured the passing of a modest little Bill, The Bank Holiday Bill in 1871, knowing that other workers would wait to go "to see the buttercups" and the holiday would become general. An enterprising manufacturer made shoes for the new holidaymakers and called them "Plimsolls".

Samuel Plimsoll, the failed coal merchant and eccentric MP, had no connection with the sea, except, as a child he was rowed out by his father, an exciseman, to see the ship imprisoning Napoleon who, said his father, had killed more people on earth than any previous tyrant.

# HISTORIC NOTES Joseph Arch and the birth of agricultural unions

IN the early 1970s agriculture was still employing more male workers than any other industry in Britain, despite a reduction of its labour force by nearly 200,000 since 1851.

It was not surprising that so many farmworkers were forced to abandon the miserable conditions of rural life. Wages were at least 45 per cent below those of manufacturing industry, employment was irregular especially during winter. Cottages were cramped and insecure, while hunger and malnutrition were common due to a basic diet of bread - meat being a rare luxury. On top of all this obedience of a feudal nature was expected from the local landowner.

Despite a timid exterior, the impoverished and often illiterate farmworkers learnt that conditions in other industries were gradually improving while their lot remained miserably stagnant. It was with this background that there was a growing movement to form agricultural trade unions. In the village of Harpbury in South Warwickshire, farmworkers met to consider forming a union. Rather than approach a sympathetic urban trade unionist to help with leadership and organisation, the farmworkers of Harpbury sought one of their own ranks who would understand the problems of organising the rural workforce and would be trusted by them. The man they chose was Joseph Arch, a farmworker well known locally for his plain speaking, and renowned in several counties for skilled hedging and ditching. He was also fortunate in owning his own cottage so he could not be evicted by an anti-union landlord.

So it was on Wednesday 7th. February 1872 that Joseph Arch walked the few miles from his home in Barford to the village of Wellesbourne where a meeting was to be held. There were far too many people to meet in the local pub, so the crowd of over 500 farmworkers assembled under the branches of a huge chestnut tree. Opponents of the meeting ensured that the gas lamps round the village green were turned off, so it was by the light of flickering lanterns suspended from the chestnut tree that the meeting commenced. Standing on an old pig-killing stool, Joseph Arch urged the formation of a union in order to fight for better wages, conditions and housing. He suggested an increase of 6d a day on the present rate of 2s, and a reduction in hours from 12 to 9 per day. This speech from a fellow farm worker aroused the enthusiasm of the crowd, and a decision was reached to form a Union. From this bold start, many more local unions were formed with the help of Arch's newly fired enthusiasm. The various village unions soon amalgamated into a County Union, then only four months after the first meeting at Wellesbourne the National Agricultural Labourers' Union was founded, Joseph Arch being elected President.

There had been Agricultural Trade Unions before and indeed were to be others later, but it was Joseph Arch, the hedger and ditcher, who first inspired farmworkers to unite and take militant action. Indeed the bitterly fought struggles of Arch's time are a reminder to British farmworkers today, with their claim for a 50 per cent wage rise, that it is only by using their collective strength to bargain with that any real improvements will be made.

Historic Notes

# The Kent and Sussex Lockout of 1878

WHEN the harvest was safely gathered in in October 1878, farmers in Kent and Sussex announced that daily wages were to be reduced from 2/6 to 2/2 or 2/3d. Naturally the farmworkers resisted this repressive move and before long the farmers began a lockout. The farmworkers in this area all belonged to the Kent and Sussex Agricultural and General Labourers Union, one of several local Agricultural Unions formed around that time, but which had not affiliated to Joseph Arch's National Union. By 1878 the Kent and Sussex Union was 15 000 strong.

While the farmworkers faced a winter of even greater hardship than usual, after-dinner speakers at farmers' clubs praised the farmers' moderation, one such speaker told the Sevenoaks farmers' club that they must look on labour as a commodity, and should not permit 'flesh and blood' considerations to influence their dealings with the men.

The Union fought bravely but funds were badly depleted by payments to the locked out men and in December the Farmers began to evict the workers from their cottages. In despair the Union assisted about 500 of their members to emigrate to New Zealand, while those remaining had to accept the employers' terms, although some farmers refused to reinstate Union men.

Farmers today still talk of the 'special relationship' they have with their employees, but in reality farmworkers are still treated as a commodity, just as farmers were urged to do in 1878. As in any any other branch of Capitalism, employers pay as little as possible for the commodity of labour power.

In 1878 farmers could easily afford to shed a large part of the agricultural labour force, but the situation in Britain today is very different. As the General Secretary of the NUAAW stated recently: "... The old assumptions are crumbling fast. In the highly mechanised agriculture today and tomorrow the skilled farmworker is not so keen to accept conditions that his father did. There are areas of agriculture which can be particularly vulnerable to a well organised workforce and it is to these areas that the Union may be looking for a lead in the unending struggle to achieve the financial rewards for the efforts which dedication to the job has not produced."

Harvest time has always meant long hours for agricultural workers; their reward, low wages and bad conditions.

Historic Notes

# The truth behind the Boer War

AS A YOUNG child I listened to my grandfather's story of the relief of Mafeking. It was the greatest period of his life; only chosen British soldiers were sent to the relief and he had a medal to prove it. He talked of the splendours of the British army and the wonderful "Bobs", General Roberts. A majority of the citizens shared his view, so that the wild rejoicings of Mafeking night gave the language a new word.

My grandmother said it was a nasty, cruel war and we robbed the brave Boers. When grandfather died, my aunt threw his medal into the fire - "back to hell where it came from" - and cut up his scarlet coat for a rag rug in the kitchen, where we would walk across it every day.

When I was given 'The Boer War" by Thomas Pakenham I was prepared to be hostile because of the author's name so looked first at his account of Mafeking. He agreed with my aunt's opinion of 60 years ago. The book is an excellent piece of historical writing and only the price of £10 would deter any serious person from buying it.

The author searches for the truth about the "longest, costliest and one of the most humiliating of British imperialist wars". In Kipling's phrase the war declared by the Boers in 1899 gave the British "no end of a lesson". What was the background?

In 1652 the Dutch East India Co. founded a colony at the Cape of Good Hope. The settlers were mostly Dutch Calvinists, with some German Protestants and French Huguenots, all of whom had unpleasant memories of Europe. The poorest of them were 'trekboers', a wandering farming group. They had a common language, Afrikaans.

In 1806 , during the Napoleonic War, the British stole the colony as a naval base. Most of these white colonists accepted British rule, though few British had settled. When in 1834 Britain ordered the emancipation of all slaves in the British Empire, the Boers, with 5000 "Coloured Servants' set off on their great trek across the Orange and Vaal Rivers. They were united in one aim, "to give no rights to coloured people".

Then in 1843 the British annexed Natal and in 1877 the Transvaal. This was reversed by Kruger in the first Boer War, defeating the British at Majuba. In 1859 two multi-millionaires, Cecil Rhodes and Alfred Beit, conspired to take over the Transvaal for the Empire.

Above: this contemporary French cartoon portrays British soldiers brutalising Boer Civilians.

Why the conspiracy for an arid land that did not tempt British settlers? The answer was the diamond-rush to Kimberley in 1870 and in 1886 the gold-rush to the Witwatersrand in the Transvaal, which made the second fortunes of Rhodes and Beit. It also exacerbated the relations between the Boers and the Uitlanders, mostly new British immigrants attracted by gold and denied all political rights like the black people.

The account of the war is superb; not just the set pieces of battles but the bravery on both sides, both of whom believed they were fighting for God. The Boers treated black men with the cruelty and indifference they would not have used to mules; the British generals allowed their own soldiers to live in rags with broken shoes, insufficient food, lack of pay and conditions as bad as that of the Crimean War. They also set up the first concentration camps for the 'safety' of the wives and children of the Boers after burning their farms. Thousands died of disease in these camps,

The reputations of many Victorian heroes suffer. The "saintly" Baden-Powell, who is always given credit for the success of the Mafeking garrison. This consisted of 2000 whites with women and children (one woman was Winston Churchill's aunt escaping from the ennui of the London season) and 7000 blacks: Baden-Powell used rations of the blacks for the white defenders. Kitchener was as cruel.

We read, too, of the ambitions and rivalry of the generals."Good old Bobs" had endeared himself to his men by giving them food and new boots but he had the same soaring ambitions as his rivals. The incredible incompetance and barbarianism of the British ruling class of that period is only matched by the crowd we have today.

Pakenham, in his admirable preface, states the aims of his research; "the fine golden thread woven by the Rand millionaires"; the feud between the Roberts Ring and the Wolseley Buller Ring, in order to explain the inexplicable military actions of the Natal campaign; the fact that far from being a gentleman's war, a white man's war, sadly, Africans were involved. By the end, 10,000 Africans were under arms in the British Army and black non-combatants were flogged or shot by the Boers.

Finally the author studied the concentration camps, where more than 20,000 Boer civilians died, and the burning and looting of Boer farms. "The conscience of Britain was stirred by the holocaust in the camps." Some credit for this must be given to Emily Hobhouse, who toured the camps, asked for improvements and wrote long reports to MP's and the Liberal Party. "If the guerrillas in South Africa lost the war they won the peace."

The last two sentences of the book are worth remembering: "Beit's successors in South Africa have maintained rewarding relationships with successive South African Governments. The gold assets of South Africa are now valued at 100 times the value estimated in 1899."

The Worker #2 January 10th 1980

# Historical notes 1888 The Matchgirls' Strike

"ROUGH, hard and saucy" was how one of the Commissioners who wrote the 'Inquiries concerning female labour in London' described London factory girls. But what most impressed him was that "among no other class of young women does there appear to be so much camaraderie, such a strong instinct that all must pull together, such a commune of food, clothes and halfpence as among the factory girls of the Metropolis."

It was precisely this kind of solidarity which was so significant for the events of July 1888 when 1400 match girls downed their tools and walked out over the attempted victimisation of one of their number at the Bryant and May factory in Bromley, East London.

And it was precisely this solidarity which Annie Besant, self-appointed champion of their cause, failed to recognise when she wrote in her paper (The Link): "We must help these because they cannot help themselves."

The conditions which Besant highlighted in an article entitled "White Slavery in London" were appalling. (But they were by no means exceptional for factory workers at that time.)

Bryant and May had built up a virtual monopoly in the match trade by buying up other companies. At the same time, they had reduced wages from 16-20s. a week down to 4-13s.

There was an illegal system of fines for petty misdemeanors (dirty feet, talking!) and many deductions from their wages.

The workers were subject to all manner of hazards. Physically violent foremen, injury from machinery, spinal damage and premature baldness from carrying heavy boxes on their heads, and the ever-present danger of phosphorus poisoning (they had to eat in the work rooms) causing a horrible disease known as 'phossy jaw' - all these added to the misery of their working lives.

In 1888 one 16-year-old reported taking home 4s. a week of which 2s. paid her rent while she survived on a steady diet of bread, butter and tea. Meanwhile down at the Stockmarket, Bryant and May's shares soared in value from £5 to over £18 and in 1887 they paid out a 23 per cent dividend.

Having exposed this running sore of capitalist exploitation, Mrs Besant and her fellow Fabians called for ... a boycott of B & M's matches!

Theodore Bryant was renowned among his workforce for his unprecedented generosity; he had allowed them to contribute to a statue of his favourite statesman (Gladstone) by docking 1s. out of their wages and giving them a wage-free half day for the unveiling ceremony. His first response to Mrs Besant's article was to threaten to sue her. Then he made the same mistake as she had done. Foolishly underestimating his workforce, he attempted to victimise some of them for giving the information to outsiders. The response was a shock to both Mr B and Mrs B. As one girl later stated: "It just went like tinder. One girl began, and the rest said 'yes', so we all went." the factory emptied.

Threats of importing scab labour from Scotland or moving the factory to Norway were to no avail. While money poured in for the strike fund shares plummeted in value. The London Trades Council, much impressed by the action of this group of unorganised women, gave full support.

Within two weeks the management were forced to concede to all the girls' demands and the strike ended in victory.

The matchworkers subsequently formed their own union and their example provided the stimulus for thousands of other unorganised workers to follow. It was the spark which lit the fire of the so-called "New Unionism" and the following year saw a massive outbreak of struggles to secure decent wages and conditions among dockers, gas workers, railwaymen and many others.

That Mrs Besant provided much help and publicity for this cause is undeniable. It is significant however that she and her fellow 'socialists' chose to take full credit for the whole affair and subsequent historians have mainly chosen to compound the distortion. The idea that it takes great men and women to make history while the mindless, helpless masses provide a suitable backdrop to their stage is an insult to brave struggles such as this and to those who dared to take a step forward for their class.

# HISTORIC NOTES

# A day for the working class

MAY DAY is a day of celebration. From time immemorial the British people have celebrated their deliverance from the harsh struggles of winter to the new life of Spring by a day of rest, dancing and joy.

In the nineteenth century this rite was transformed into something quite new. On May 1st, 1886, strikers from the McCormack Reaper Works in Chicago were brutally attacked by the police. In the ensuing struggle, 10 workers and seven police were killed. Four of the workers' leaders were later arrested and hanged.

July 4th, 1889, is an important date in the history of May Day. It was on this day that the International Association of Working Men met in Paris and adopted the following resolution:

"Congress decides to organise a great international demonstration so that in all countries and all cities on one appointed day, the toiling masses shall demand of the State Authorities the legal reduction of the working day to eight hours."
May 1st was the day chosen in honour of the American workers' struggle.

In 1890, the first organised May Day marches took place in Paris, Berlin and Chicago, as well as in other cities. The demonstration in London was held on May 4th in Hyde Park. A massive turnout was recorded with all sections of the working class represented.

Three years later, the International, in keeping with the rising tide of revolutionary feeling, passed a resolution calling on all workers to celebrate May 1st not only in connection with the eight hour day campaign but also as an expression of determination to change the old order of things.

The 1890's saw the Russian workers rising and beginning to assert themselves. All forms of working class activity and organisation were illegal; but in spite of killings, tortures and deportations by the Tsarist police, workers were becoming organised, and often expressed their solidarity in massive May Day marches in the principal cities.

London's May Day celebration in 1900 took place at the Crystal Palace, and speeches denouncing the imperialist aims of the British Government in South Africa were in stark contrast to the Boer War jingoism of the time.

The twentieth century came in on the tide of working class activity throughout the world. In 1905 the Russian workers, with the aid of sections of the Tsarist navy, who mutinied, attempted to overthrow the reactionary regime and transfer power into their own hands. The attempt failed but the lessons paved the way for future success.

With the First World War of the imperialist powers came the world-shattering breakthrough of the great October Russian Revolution of 1917. Throughout the period of the war the Clydeside workers had struggled against the imperialist war and the attack on their living standards. The first Sunday in May, 1917, was a big demonstration in Glasgow. Between 70,000 and 80,000 people marched to Glasgow Green where they passed resolutions expressing solidarity with the Soviets, the organisations which were to lead the people of the Soviet Union to power later that same year.

By 1920, the rallying call was "Hands Off Russia". The May Day demonstrations in London not only included a thousand strong contingent of ex-servicemen but also sacked members of the Metropolitan Police who had been on strike for better wages and conditions!

On the first Sunday in May, 1926, at the very time the demonstrations were being held, the TUC Executive was meeting in Kingsway Hall to discuss the General Strike which began at midnight.

The first great hunger march was in 1930. On May 1st, a thousand marchers representing the unemployed in various parts of the country arrived in London. They marched to Fulham Work House where they were refused entry by a large force of police. The whole of the London May Day gathering of workers then marched to the Work House in support. In the face of this show of strength, the hunger marchers were allowed in, and promptly hoisted the red flag over the building.

The 1930's witnessed the rise of fascism and the struggle against Franco in Spain. The main theme of the 1937 May Day march in London was support for the Spanish Republicans and the International Brigade.

In 1945, the fascist axis powers were defeated. The Labour Party refused to participate in the traditional May Day celebration because Julie Jacobs, Secretary of the London Trades Council and a member of the 'C'PGB, was to be one of the speakers. This was the beginning of separate May Day marches by 'Labour' and 'Communist' parties, which was to become traditional.

Oswald Mosley, the British fascist who had been in prison during the war, announced his intention of marching on May Day, 1949. The Labour Government was forced by public protest to ban the march. They then banned the May Day march of the labour movement as well! Just as today when the present Labour Government bans workers' demonstrations along with National Front marches. Workers needed no urging to march to Trafalgar Square for the usual rally. Thousands of demonstrators converged on the Square, in spite of mounted police charges and dozens of arrests. The following year, when the Government again banned the march, workers demonstrated with the same militancy.

May Day, the traditional celebration of new life, has now become the main ceremonial expression of the working class's international solidarity and aspirations for a new world from which exploitation has been eliminated.

May strike of McCormick Reaper Works, Chicago, 1886, which the International Working Men's Association later made the date for the annual occasion where workers celebrate solidarity against capitalism.

# HISTORIC NOTES 1889
# The Dockers' Tanner

THERE is a myth, still widespread today, that trade unionism is merely about getting more money for less work. 'Greed' capitalist propaganda calls it, in its hypocrisy. A moment's thought leads you to the opposite conclusion. In a society where everything - from food to culture, even health, life and death is reduced to a question of 'how much money', the fight for wages is the fight for our humanity.

## 1889 strike

This was the lesson of the dock strike of 1889. The dockers were the lowest of the low. The manager of the Millwall docks told a Lords Committee on Sweating in 1888 about their conditions: "(they) come to work without a farthing in their pockets; they have not anything to eat in the middle of the day ...and by four o'clock their strength is utterly gone; they pay themselves off; it is necessity which compels them to pay themselves off...". Often they had to fight each other at the dock gates merely for the job ticket. And yet it was from the fight of these same men, and their spirited example, that trade unionism made great advances.

When some walked out over a minor dispute very few people noticed. When, inspired by the success of the gas workers, demands were formulated (the most famous being for the 'dockers tanner') and dock after dock pulled out. The employers were quite unconcerned. Starvation would force the men back to work. It did not. They had stood up for their rights - and for weeks held out against all odds, and in doing so won the admiration and support of workers the world over. (In fact, it was financial contributions from Australia in the last weeks which kept them going to victory).

## More than a penny

When they went back they had won far more than a penny on the wages. As a history of the newly formed dockers union put it: "We had established a new spirit; the bully and the thief, for a time at least were squelched; no more would the old man be driven and cursed by the younger man... The whole tone and conduct of work, of management of the men was altered for the best.

"The goad of the sack was not so fearful... (the men) grew in self-respect. The docker had in fact become a man. The man became greater in the happiness of a better supplied larder and home; the women folk, with the children, shared in the sense of security and peace the victory at the docks had wrought."

## Setting an example

Hundreds and thousands of other unskilled and previously unorganised workers followed the example of the dockers. True, many of these new unions collapsed in the face of a vicious counter attack by the employers. But the real advance in ideas and attitude had already been made. "Economic ignorance has in times past caused us to believe that our duty lay in the direction of producing much and consuming little; this is a fatal error. Those who consume least are the most ignorant, most useless, the most animal like of all. A large consuming capacity on the part of every section of workers is fully justified by sound economics" one of the leaders argued.

The dockers strike was neither defensive, nor apologetic, but was an honest fight for an improved life. "Unionism is social salvation. All workers should recognise it and act upon it" was the message of the Leith dockers, as they joined the new union.

Ben Tillett, leader of the 1889 Dockers' Strike, seen here addressing a mass meeting of the Transport Workers' Federation in 1912.

# Historic Notes: Poverty and 'morality'

"PEOPLE do not live to work, they work to live, and I would rather not live than live a drudge and a clod. Our new religion (of Socialism) tells us that e body must be nourished that the soul may thrive, and that nothing which is got at the soul's expense is cheap."

So Robert Blatchford replied to the sordid reality of capitalism in the 1890s. Right from the inception of capitalism, in fact, the attempt has been made to restrict the lives of people, their "souls", to slavery to the profit ethic. Anything more has been condemned as "wasteful" and therefore immoral.

In 1724 a pamphlet entitled "the Great Law of Subordination, or the Insolence and Insufferable Behaviour of the Servants of England duly enquir'd into" appeared, penned by Daniel Defoe.

"Husbandmen are ruin'd, the Farmers disabled, Manufacturers and Artificers plung'd to the Destruction of Trade... No men who, in the course of Business employ Numbers of the Poor, can depend upon any Contracts they make... Under a stop of trade and a general want of Work, they (the poor) are clamorous and mutinous... load the Parishe with their Wives and Children and grow ripe for all manner of mischief... In a glut of trade they grow saucy, idle and debauch'd... they will Work but two or three days in the Week."

He ended with the following little ditty:

"The Lab'ring Poor, in
spight of double pay,
Are Saucy, Mutinous and
Beggarly."

The basic attitudes of employers have remained - true often modified and disguised - through the vicious New Poor Laws and their 'Bastille' workhouses to the 1890s when a new organisation, the 'Charity Organisation Society' became one of the dominant institutions dealing with the problem of poverty. If the poor had been reasonably industrious, sober, thrifty, honest and dutiful, the COS, argued, they would not be poor. Before a desperate man could be provided with food or warmth he had to accept these moral lessons from his 'betters' - otherwise 'loafing' would be encouraged.


In this contemporary drawing, the sick man looks longingly at the writing on the wall. Reality was to turn out otherwise...

This argument about 'scroungers' certainly isn't new. Even in conceding welfare measures in the face of increasing working class rebellion against this 'morality' the attempt was made to undermine any humane and social concern, and turn them into a weapon to be used against the poor.

The very fact we pay contributory pensions etc., stems from the fact that legislators were afraid that otherwise we would not be forced back to work. Without such contributions John Burns, ex-socialist and President of the Board of Trade argued, "I cannot see how malingering can be staved off",..."the one moral advantage of insurance was its voluntary character; when that is superceded by compulsory contributions all the moral characteristics vanish, and you are left with a provision which is provocative of immoral motives" agreed Beatrice Webb, Fabian 'socialist' and Poor Law Commissioner.

Today our welfare state is still wrought with this contradiction, and every action we take, for wages, working conditions or against unemployment is slandered on the same grounds. In or out of work, we are greedy and lazy. This is capitalist morality, ironic as it is. It is time a truly socialist, humane and working class morality - which values and develops the feelings and talents of the people in and out of work - was truly victorious in this country of ours.


...while the good angel here still has clipped wings.

# Historic Notes: Pioneering work of 'The Lancet'

'THE LANCET' was founded by by Thomas Wakley, a young doctor who had become interested in medical journalism, in 1823. His life-long concern ests was the exposure of medical abuses and the promotion of good practices.

At that time the Royal College of Surgeons was run by the surgeons of a few London teaching hospitals. To become a member of the college a student had to attend two courses of lectures for which he had to pay a high fee. The lectures were given by the same surgeons who made the rules. Lectureships were, of course, passed on by nepotism. 'The Lancet' began to publish weekly verbatim reports of some of these lectures to make them available to all students without fee. It also reported cases from hospitals, including examples of surgical incompetence. Although he was sued several times, Wakley never paid more than nominal damages. 'The Lancet' became increasingly respected for its fearless advocacy of reform and good practice.

In 1855 Wakely was elected to parliament as an independent member for Finsbury. His first major speech, two and a half hours long, was a closely argued and impassioned statement on behalf of the Tolpuddle martyrs. This advocacy was a turning point in the movement for their release.

Wakley played a major part in setting up the Committee of Enquiry into the State of the Medical Profession in 1834. The evidence, all reported in 'The Lancet', included the constitution of the medical colleges, the training of doctors, the treatment of the sick poor, the management of institutions including workhouses and asylums, both public and private, the army and navy medical services, the sale, use and abuse of drugs. The major legacy of his work was the Medical Act of 1858, which set up the General Medical Council, through which, even today, doctors are recognised as qualified in their profession.

He loathed the new Poor Law Acts which made poor relief solely obtainable in workhouses, and 'The Lancet' published statistics which showed that the poor and elderly survived longer in their own homes than in institutions, and he exposed fearlessly the terrible conditions in workhouses and the rottenness of the care of the sick poor. That battle was finally won in 1948.

In 1851 'The Lancet' began to publish a series of analyses of food adulteration, which was rife and unregulated. His unremitting campaign, where coffee, sugar, flour, vinegar, butter and a host of other commodities came under scrutiny, finally led to a series of Food and Drug Acts. Wakley exposed medical quacks, sometimes challenging them to a public exhibition in which he could control the conditions. Not one of them accepted.

One of the major reforms Wakley fought for was that the post of coroner should be open only to medically qualified men. He had long been disturbed by the gross errors in decisions made by coroners mainly due to their complete medical ignorance. A liberal reformer of the best kind Wakley was always anxious that food should be taxed as little as possible, maintaining that 'material happiness led to moral rectitude'.

'The Lancet' itself continues to flourish, one of the foremost medical journals in the world, and continuing in the traditions of its founder.

## HISTORIC NOTES

# C19th poverty - The myth of 'degeneration' of the race

IN 19th century London, a bourgeois writer said of the casual poor: "...physically, mentally and morally unfit, there is nothing the nation can do for these men except let them die out by leaving them alone..." The threat from the poor, both real and imaginary, to the propertied and wealthy figured constantly in public debate.

The problem of poverty was perennial, but the Industrial Revolution greatly magnified it. Mechanization and external competition disintegrated many traditional industries like silk weaving, or forced small employers mercilessly to exploit their workers in 'sweatshops'.

Other trades like building were seasonal, which, along with considerable immigration of workers from the countryside, and a constant flow of the old and infirm from more skilled trades, led to an increase of the unemployed or semi-employed. A trade depression from the middle of the century reinforced this.

Once reduced to poverty, it was difficult to escape. Even in a good period, many had to repay interest or debts incurred during slack months. To the bourgeois observer, however, this poverty resulted from a lack of virtues befitting a successful businessman - thrift, prudence and hard work.

One solution to this 'demoralization' was to break up the working class 'rookeries', which were regarded as spawning crime, vice and low living, by driving great streets through them. It was reckoned that "the moral condition of these poorer occupants would necessarily be improved by communication with more respectable inhabitants."

During the century, up to 100,000 people were displaced by clearances (for New Oxford St, Farringdon St, etc) as well as the building of the railways and docks. But far from benefitting the poor, these demolitions simply forced them to move to the next parish, which became even more overcrowded.

For this 'solution', a manifest failure, a crude biological "theory" was substituted, which argued that urban life caused "degeneration" of the race, necessitating constant immigration from the countryside. Furthermore, Poor Relief and the Workhouses shielded the unfit, who would normally have been eliminated through "natural" selection, thus allowing them to "contaminate" the fit. This was exacerbated because the "criminal and pauperised classes with low cerebral development renew their race more rapidly than those of higher nervous natures."

To prevent this, sections of the bourgeoisie, including the 'socialist' Fabians, favoured compulsory sterilization; others, the setting up of 'labour colonies' where the inmates would exchange "their half-fed and half-idle and wholly unregulated life for a disciplined existence, with regular meals and fixed hours of work (which would not be short)."

Seen in this light, the struggles of these workers for their basic dignity, which led to the wave of 'New Unionism', take on a new meaning. In fact, these struggles prevented the possible implementation of these vicious schemes.

Ultimately, the First World War transformed the casual labour market, as the demand for workers as cannon-fodder or for war production sucked up the unemployed. Degeneration was proved to be a myth, and the 'residuum' to be as capable as other sections of workers; before, they had simply not had the opportunity to excercise their skills.

Today, when we hear the arguments of those like Eysenck, Jensen or the National Front about the more oppressed of our class, we have only to think of the struggle for dignity of the London poor to see how false they are. Last time a war was one of the 'solutions' to the problem; now only revolution will suffice.

London's poor in the streets of East London

# 1900 - Rail workers use ingenuity and courage to fight bosses' laws

THE TAFF VALE episode is not the most glorious of episodes in the history of the working class. But it was, nevertheless, of crucial importance.

In August 1900 workers on the Taff Vale railway in South Wales, members of the Amalgamated Society of Railway Servants struck for higher pay and union recognition. Like many others of the period, it was a bitter dispute. Two men were imprisoned for 'unlawful damage' of company property, and 400 fined for breaking their contracts. A scab 'free labour association' was brought in to break the strike. And the company sought an injunction against all picketing.

The men fought back. The ingenuity remains an example to the class. They avoided set to confrontations with the police. They used railway signals to confuse the scabs, and to send messages to each other. They greased the lines at the top of the steep Welsh hills, so that those trains running skidded at the top, making it possible to uncouple the wagons and send them hurtling back down again. Even so, the odds were against them and after a month they decided to withdraw without victory.

But the boss wasn't satisfied. It was after the strike had finished that the legal blows began to fall. Already the employers had succeeded in whittling down trade union rights in the years before. Trade Unionism had once again become a 'civil conspiracy', and picketing virtually illegal. As a judge told a leader of the Fancy Leather Workers in 1899, "You cannot make a strike effective without doing more than what is lawful. "And now in July 1901, nearly a year after the strike, the Lords decided that the ASRS should be made financially responsible for any losses incurred by their bos ses during the dispute. The Lords were, they said, totally opposed to the creation of "numerous bodies of men, capable of owning great wealth and of acting by agents with absolutely no responsibility for the wrongs they may do to other persons by the use of that wealth. . . "They were not, of course referring to the capitalist class but to the trade unions!

The Times blamed the unions for Britains ailing competitiveness; and Sidney Webb, the 'cleverer than thou' Fabian 'socialist', advised the TUC that collective bargaining was out of date anyway and that the answer to all future disputes would lie in statutory regulations of wages and conditions.

The immediate response of the unions was weak and faint hearted. The Miners wanted legal clarification. The Engineers wanted the possible fines to be reduced to an agreed maximum. Sexton, of the Clothiers, told the TUC that the Taff Vale judgement was " a blessing in disguise, and will tend to strengthen executive control and minimise, if not kill, irresponsible action in the localities." Bell, of the ASRS, itself agreed.

The Cotton Factory Times, organ of the Spinners and Weavers, blamed 'the ILP and Socialistic men' for unofficial strikes and hoped that now unions would appoint more 'intelligent officials'.

The fruits of this retreat from principle would soon become apparent. Whilst the TUC of 1902 decided not to press for the repeal of the decision despite growing rank and file pressure, the attack was mounting. In the first weeks of 1903 the unions were stunned when damages worth £42,000 were awarded against the ASRS, and similar judgements were pending against weavers in Blackburn and others.

The shock waves still affect us today. Within a year affiliations to the Labour Representation Committee (precursor of the Labour Party) had doubled to just under one million. From now on direct political action by the organised working class, previously the dream of socialists as a means of advancing sectional union interests (like the miners), became a reality. The Cotton Factory Times, so smug before, now shouted, 'justice is slumbering'. The TUC moved from accomadation to outright opposition to the law. Agitation mounted for another two years, but it wasn't until the elections of 1906 when 40 Labour members were elected along with many more Liberals specifically pledged to overturn the Taff Vale decision, that victory was in sight. Despite numerous manoeuvres by the new Liberal Government, it was forced to give in. Trade union rights were, once again, restored, and alongside them a new political party had gelled . . . the Labour Party.

## HISTORIC NOTES

# The 1902 Education Act

IN 1870 W.E. Forster, the Vice-President of the Committee of the Privy Council on Education, told the Commons that "Upon the speedy provision of elementary education depends our industrial prosperity.....if we leave our workfolk any longer unskilled, notwithstanding their strong sinews and determined energy, they will become overmatched in the competition of the world."

This realisation of the need for a better Education System was part of a wider view-point which can be summed up as the quest for "National Efficiency", this developing in the 1890s as a response to the failings of Britain in competition with other nations, economically, socially and politically. Britain's failings were attributed generally to her outdated methods of political economy, laissez-faire, and the complete lack of central organisation.

The solution to the problem was seen as creating a 'National Minimum' in all areas of social organisation, in factory legislation, sanitation, housing, local government and the Poor Law. This 'National Mimimum' was not a philanthropic gesture but was necessary for the creation of a successful and economically sound state. Sidney Webb called for "the formulation and rigid enforcement in all spheres of social activity, of a National Minimum below which the individual, whether he likes it or not, cannot, in the interests of the well-being of the whole, ever be allowed to fall". Their concern always lay with what was best for the country as a whole, a common refrain today, when we are asked to maintain the social contract for just one more year - in the interests of all.

The formulators of the concept of 'National Efficiency', the Fabians under the leadership of Sidney Webb, felt that an organised education system that could both give a limited education to the majority of the working class and yet offer opportunities to the 'gifted' was needed, for the success of Britain, in industry, management and Government. Thus an extended education system was needed. This improved system however would not offer better education for all, the aim was to offer opportunities of improved education for the individual, the exception, while maintaining poorer levels of education for the rest of the working class. The task according to Sidney Webb, was to separate the job "of educating the mass of ordinary average children for the ordinary average life", from the "other (educational) function, that of preparing the exceptionally clever boy or girl for exceptional work."

Thus the Fabians promoted the creation of a system of education which offered the possibility of advanced education to the working class but only through the means of competition and expertise. The failings of this education system, which became a reality with the passing of the 1902 Education Act, were that it did not offer to the working class as a whole the possibility of secondary or advanced schooling, but only to a privileged few. The 1902 Education Act might have broken down some of the barriers which prevented the working class from acquiring an adequate education, and enabled some of them to advance themselves within the social structure, however for the broad majority of the working class the situation was unchanged, the class boundaries were still very clearly outlined and their opportunities for advanced education were still limited to their own endeavour.

# HISTORIC NOTES Social progress and the Great Unrest of 1910-12

"The syndicalists say never mind the law; take no notice of Parliament they will do nothing for you ...What kind of advice is that?" A voice: "Sensible." (Report of a Lancs. miners leader at a mass meeting in March, 1912).

The first sparks of the Great Unrest took place late in 1910, when lock-outs occurred against the cotton workers of Lancashire, boilermakers of the Tyne, miners in South Wales. Eleven months later the miners were starved back to work, but their leaders (many of them syndicalists) remained unbowed. They toured the country, demanding in lodge after lodge the establishment of a national minimum wage - the demand of the first ever national miners' strike a year later.

In August, 1911, the first national railways strike took place. Starting as an unofficial stoppage in Merseyside, it spread to involve 70,000 men within days and soon received official support. They struck not only for higher wages, but to be rid of the conciliation and arbitration boards that had been imposed on the rail-

Dockers, sailors, clay workers, tin miners, builders, engineers were among those to pursue their claims without reference to whim or wish of the Labour Party in the following year.

This unrest was mental as well as industrial. It was in part a revolt against the direction in which the Labour Party had been pulling the labour movement. In their quest for social progress, workers had won places in county councils, education and hospital boards, burial and poor law boards, conciliation boards. They had made their mark on the administration of the capitalist state - but in return they had had to learn to be 'practical'. They had accepted the claims of 'parliamentary democracy'.

Social progress was fast becoming sophistry. "In this country the State is the people - theoretically at least - and when the people turn to the State for an improvement in their condition they are in reality turning to themselves," Keir Hardie argued in defence of the Labour Party's stance. And in keeping with this 'argument' the Labour Party stayed silent as the industrial conflict was violently suppressed.

In Tonypandy one miner was killed by police. In Llannelly six railwaymen and tin-miners were massacred by troops. In Liverpool the shooting of strikers united the previously hostile Catholic and Protestant areas in street fighting against the 3,000 troops sent in. Similar repression followed in the transport strikes in Ireland.

In the first instance, in Tonypandy, only 17 of the 42 Labour MPs could be persuaded to protest. And this set the tone for the following three years.

The old, deep-rooted working class suspicion of the state re-emerged in force. Tom Mann, leader of the legal 8-hour movement twenty years before, renounced his former beliefs, admitting that he had been "among simpletons" who had put parliamentary activity before the "real kernel" - workplace trade union and political organisation.

Victor Grayson, expelled from Parliament, published "The Problem of Parliament", to be followed by Tillett's "Is The Parliamentary Labour Party A Failure?". Blatchford, one of the original founders of the Independent Labour Party in 1893, vowed that he would "give the Labourists a damn good hiding" and called for the establishment of a socialist party.

The anti-parliament Daily Herald was set up following a printers' strike - soon surpassing the Labour Daily Citizen with a circulation of 150,000. Its first article, in April, 1912, demanded "We want thrashed out - and this requires to be done very quickly - the question as to why it is and with what object we send Labour and Socialist members to the House of Commons."

Nationalisation, that old slogan, was attacked as "the mere governmentalisation of certain public services for the convenience of the bureaucracy and its rich employers." "All the so-called 'Socialist' experiments in municipalisation and nationalisation are merely increasing the dependency upon the Capitalist Class...every single experiment is effected by a loan," one pamphlet declared.

Such ideas gained credence. The national conference of the Amalgamated Society of Railways Servants saw just under half its delegates voting for clear anti-parliament resolutions. The attempt to set up a political fund in the ASE was defeated after a vigorous anti-Labour campaign.

The fact that 'parliamentary socialism' necessarily leads directly to corporatism in practice and in thought was seen by leaders of the class as soon as the Parliamentary Labour Party had had time to show its mettle.

The South Wales coalfield was occupied by police during the miners' strike of 1910. The picture shows a typical scene at a Glamorgan colliery in the winter of that year. At Tonypandy the strike led to the death of a miner at the hands of the police.

# HISTORIC NOTES Unemployment and Parliament

THE 1906 General Election increased Labour strength to over 50 MPs. Of these, however, only 5 had been opposed by Liberals, and over 20 were official Lib-Lab candidates. But soon there would be one MP who would not be a tail to the Liberals.

In 1907 the young Victor Grayson stood in the Colne Valley Bye-election as a socialist. He refused to fight the election on issues of wages and hours alone, but on the issue of socialism itself. "We are not divinely destined to be drudges," his manifesto read, "the time for emancipation has come. We must break the rule of the rich and take our destinies into our own hands. A VOTE FOR THE LANDOWNER OR THE CAPITALIST IS TREACHERY TO YOUR CLASS." He was elected, despite the continued official opposition of the Labour Party.

1907 was a year of mounting unemployment and distress. Demonstrations around the country were broken up by the police. Grayson raised the issue with the Labour members and was told that it was not in the 'legislative programme'. So he raised the issue himself. The Labour members were embarrassed - he was disrupting the passage of a Bill to stop the poor drinking too much. Eventually Grayson resorted to 'Irish tactics" and after six weeks was ejected from Parliament shouting to the Labour members, "You are traitors, traitors to your class! I feel that no man who likes his kind would sit here another moment. I leave this house feeling that I gain in dignity in doing so."

His action created a storm. Asked why he did not form a socialist opposition within Parliament, Grayson just laughed and continued his speakers tour of the country. Labour's first real electoral victory had already shown the fundamental weakness of a parliamentary road to socialism. At the Labour Party Conference, Ramsey MacDonald was brought to account for his action against Grayson. His argument was telling. "The opposition between parliamentary procedure and the question of how to deal with the unemployed is a purely fictitious one. The unemployed can never be treated by any parliament except one which has rules of procedure... To protect the conditions and the existence of democratic government is just as essential to the building up of a Socialist State as is the solution of the problem of unemployment. The Party which proposes to strike at the heart of democratic government in order to make a show of earnestness about unemployment will not only not be tolerated by the country but does not deserve to be."

The niceties and practicalities of running a capitalist state had already taken precedence over the needs of the labour movement. As Robert Blatchford stormed, "They have hauled down the Socialist flag to get their men into Parliament... The Socialist movement does not exist solely for the return of Labour members to the House of Commons. The purpose of the Socialist movement is to arouse people, to uplift the souls of the people, to reorganise society, to establish collective ownership of the means of life,... This can never be done until the people understand. You cannot make them understand by silencing your prophets in the interest of political expediency."

Though MacDonald and others had to resign from the executive for a year their 'practical" policies won through. Two years later a Labour Party Bill was passed - not to help solve the problem of unemployment, but to set up Labour exchanges to organise the Labour market better. One disillusioned Labour supporter wrote to Keir Hardie, "Labour exchanges are based upon and cannot exist without unemployment, a condition impossible under socialism and damnable under anything else... Labour exchanges will do more to perpetuate it than to destroy it." Solving unemployment had been dropped.

# The 'crooked Welsh attorney' and the dole

THE GREAT National Insurance Act, copied from Bismarck's Social legislation, was passed by the Liberal Government in 1911. From 1908 the Old Age Pension Act had stipulated that "people who are 70 years of age and whose income does not exceed £31:10:0d a year be paid one shilling a week and persons whose income does not exceed £21:0:0d a year should receive five shillings a week".

The Act had been piloted through the Asquith government by David Lloyd George, Chancellor of the Exchequer and by John Burns, the once-militant socialist trade unionist, now President of the Local Government Board. The Pensions Fund was non-contributory and financed out of general taxation. It would be graceless to enquire how many workers reached the age of 70 in 1908.

The 1911 National Insurance Act borrowed from Bismarck and paid for by workers could not end the misery of unemployment. Only revolution will win the right to work for all.


## Second Orpheus

Lloyd George, described by many as "that crooked little Welsh attorney", had the quality of Orpheus. Ask anyone old enough to have heard him address a public meeting and you will be told of his silver tongue that could hold enthralled even a hard - headed working class audience and who could "tear a passion to tatters", weeping as he described the plight of the sick, the old, the disabled.

The Act of 1911 - by now Lloyd George had recovered his calm - closely followed Bismarck and like the German model was created to keep socialism at bay. The costs of social reform would come not from the rich but from the poor. The rich were not to pay anything but healthy employed workers were to contribute towards the needs of the sick and workless.

## Workers pay twice

Employers were to make weekly contributions, as were workers, into a National Health Insurance Fund to which the State was to give a small subsidy. As Cole and Postgate wrote "nominally the workmen were to pay less than half the cost of the benefits they were to receive but it was not difficult to see that the employers' contribution would tend to come out of wages - for it would form part of the cost of employing labour and would be taken into account when wage bargains were being struck".

## Distrust of scheme

From "THE HISTORY OF THE TUC" comes "opinion inside the Labour movement was sharply divided about the desirability of the National Insurance Bill. The Parliamentary Committee of the TUC approved of it but trade unionists were divided about it and many socialists deplored the contributory basis of the scheme which they insisted should come from taxations. In April 1911 the TUC formed, together with representatives of the General Federation of Trade Unions, a sub committee to nominate men for the provisional insurance committees". The History states approvingly: "This was another early instance of the TUC moving into the field of participation in the administration of government".

One would not expect them to write that the Liberal government did not give away 'life peerages' to useful "heroes" of the labour movement but sold them for party funds or at least, Lloyd George said it was for party funds.

## Dole cuts

Workers, with their gift for exact and pithy language, called the new payments 'the dole'. Since then, successive governments have raided the fund and then say 'we cannot afford to pay people for being idle'.

An interesting footnote to history - Winston Churchill, as President of the Board of Trade in the Asquith Liberal Government, brought in a "Bill to Establish Labour Exchanges". Before and during the passing of the Bill, Churchill constantly consulted the Parliamentary Committee of the TUC. The first Labour Exchanges had grand front entrances for employers (with a stone carved so) and a side entrances for workers. The total costs of buildings and the employees therein came out of the National Insurance Fund.

# Origins of the local government housing service

HOUSING conditions in the 19th century have been well documented. Engels in "The Condition of the Working Class in England in 1844" described horrifying scenes of workers living in insanitary, overcrowded hovels in the expanding industrial towns. It was common for families to live in a single room, perhaps a cellar.

Factory owners put up houses as fast as possible to house their workers. These were back-to-back houses, crowded together, with no proper ventilation or lighting, no drainage or sanitary facilities such as running water and wc's. For these conditions maximum rents were extracted, often directly deducted from workers' wages.

This was the time of 'laissez-faire'; the heyday of free enterprise. State intervention in housing, either to set standards or provide subsidies, was viewed as anathema by the employing class interested in extracting the maximum rents from workers at the least possible expense to themselves.

Although conditions in the countryside were far from idyllic, it was the appalling conditions in the towns which arose during the Industrial Revolution that finally brought about government intervention in housing. This was because conditions in the towns came to represent a two-fold threat to the ruling class.

These appalling nineteenth-century housing conditions gave rise to demands for provision of a public housing service which would respond to those in greatest need.

## Threat of disease

Firstly, there was the immediate threat of disease: cholera did not recognise any class divisions, it spread from the insanitary conditions in the working class areas to the wealthier parts of town, and struck the bourgeoisie down in droves. The Sanitary Reform movement, headed by pioneers such as Edwin Chadwick and Dr Southwood Smith, worked to secure the provision of water and drainage, the cleansing and paving of streets, controls over construction and ventilation of dwellings through enforcement powers given to the then 'local authorities'. All the early legislation to improve housing conditions was on grounds of public health.

The other part of the threat felt by the employing class was the fear that the insufferable housing conditions in which workers had to live would provoke a mass uprising against them. Disraeli later said: "The palace is not safe when the cottage is not happy." Such sentiments were commonly held at the time.

By 1875, against a background of pioneering housing work by such industrial philanthropists as Robert Owen and Titus Salt, local authorities had been given powers to inspect properties, to close, demolish or improve unhealthy dwellings and to provide new accommodation as a public service.

However it was not until 1890 that public money was made available to subsidise housing built by local authorities. During this period the growing trade union movement was beginning to articulate economic demands that effectively forced the government to make much-needed social reforms in various fields, including that of housing. Social surveys at the turn of the century, such as those of Rowntree (1901) and Booth (1903) challenged social attitudes and further publicised the appalling conditions in working class areas.

It was not, however, until the 1st World War that council house building began to really make a significant contribution to the provision of better quality housing in Britain. Up until then local authorities had been slow to use their powers under the housing acts, which were merely enabling and not mandatory.

The 1st World War changed all that. The late 19th century had seen a rapid growth in the membership of trade unions and increasing collective confidence and militancy. The early part of the 20th century was a time of ferment of political ideas - communism, socialism, women's emancipation were all being discussed. And after 1917 there was the shining example of the Russian Revolution.

Workers returning from the horrors of the trenches were not prepared to accept the status quo of the pre-war years. The phrase "Homes fit for heroes" became the slogan of the day.

It was by then reluctantly recognised that private enterprise could not supply houses of the quantity and quality now demanded by the working class at rents that they could afford. The government was forced to intervene. The result was the passing of the Housing Act of 1919 which, for the first time, placed a duty on local authorities to survey housing needs in their areas and to build houses to meet those needs. This Act further established the principle of the permanent local authority ownership of houses for rent. Earlier Acts had required authorities to sell their properties normally after 10 years.

## Rent Act victory

The government still expected private enterprise to resume the main role as the provider of housing for rent after the early post-war years. But statutory controls related to public health and rent levels were already preventing the private landlord from realising his best interests, ie minimal improvement to his stock with the freedom to realise maximum profits through charging high rents. It is worth noting that the decline of the private rented sector stems from the introduction of rent control and security of tenure in 1915. This first Rent Act was forced onto the statute books during the 1st World War by armament workers on Clydeside who staged rent strikes and threatened stoppages of production in protest against exhorbitant increases in rent and profiteering by landlords. Although controls on rent and security from eviction were supposed to be removed at the end of the war, they have been with us ever since in one form or another ever since as necessary controls on the excesses of private landlordism.

The local authority housing service, as it has developed over the years, is far from perfect. Its progress has been impeded by successive governments' stop and go policies on housing. In particular, it has been continually attacked by the Tory party which is forever seeking to return housing into the hands of the entrepreneur and speculator at the expense of working people.

It is fitting that we should reflect on the early part of the history of the local authority housing service that we may better rise to its defence at a time when public housing, and housing conditions generally, have never been under more severe attack.

1907 saw a wave of strikes in Belfast as workers fought attempts to sack union members and lower wages. A century later, Belfast workers remember. An Irish worker writes...

# The Belfast strikes of 1907: unity, not sectarianism

**WORKERS, JUNE 2007 ISSUE**

**In Belfast this year the traditional May Day celebrations took the form of commemorating the wave of strikes which swept through Belfast in the summer of 1907. Led by Jim Larkin, the common threads that linked the wave of strikes that summer were the call for union recognition, better pay and conditions and resistance to the employers' attempts to defeat the growing working class unity of the Belfast strikers by provoking sectarian unrest.**

The strikes began on 26 April when a coal importer called Samuel Kelly dismissed union members among his coal heavers in order to suppress wages. On 6 May, union members working for the Belfast Steamship Company walked off the job rather than work with non-union labour. Faced with this, Kelly backed down and agreed to reinstate the sacked men but the shipping company, seeing the walk-out as an opportunity, rejected all attempts to end the dispute.

The shipping company was owned by Thomas Gallaher, the cigarette manufacturer, and on 16 May over 1,000 women in his tobacco factory struck in support of the National Union of Dock Labourers and a large pay increase. Although the women went back shortly afterwards, the strike demands were widened to include union recognition from all shipping and railway companies and on 26 June all union members in the Belfast port joined the strike.

**Strike-breakers**

The employers responded by sacking all the workers and replaced them with scabs provided with military and police escorts in an effort to break the strike. This in turn led to further escalation when carters joined the strike in support of the demand for union recognition.

In a further attempt to undermine the strike the Belfast Telegraph, at the behest of the Government, gave prominent coverage to rumours that Catholic workers were receiving more strike pay than their Protestant counterparts. Although a Trades Council investigation proved that this was not the case, considerable sectarian tension was stirred up within the trade union movement in the city. Massive demonstrations and marches were organised in support of the workers linking east and west Belfast and this eased the situation somewhat.

Unity in action: Belfast workers enjoying a sunny May Day march this year.

The high point of the strike was reached on 27 July. Between 500 and 800 members of the Royal Irish Constabulary mutinied when a Constable William Barrett refused to sit beside a scab on a cart during escort duty. Escort duties were then taken over by military patrols and huge areas of the city controlled by the army in an effort to force scab labour through the picket lines. The action of the army led to a further escalation of sectarian tension and when rioting broke out on the Lower Falls leading to the death of three civilians it was clear that the strike was losing momentum and a settlement soon followed.

Although union recognition had not been achieved, better pay and conditions were won and the trade union movement emerged intact as a force for worker unity and against sectarianism, and was able to continue the fight for workers' rights into the future.

During the course of the strike it was recognised that the greatest force to have been overcome was not the determination and brutality of the employers and the Government, though that was real enough, but the sectarian tensions that bedevilled the labour movement. Everything was done to combat this, the Catholic Jim Larkin even standing down at one point as strike leader in favour of Alex Boyd of the Municipal Employees, a member of the Independent Orange Order. Indeed the Order played a significant role in the development of the strike providing financial support and assistance to Catholic and Protestant workers alike.

**Vanishing industry**

Much has changed since 1907, not least the fact that a significant part of the industry that was setting for the strike action has all but disappeared from Belfast, in common with the prevailing de-industrialisation of Britain. However, there are some signs that the lessons learned that year are only now beginning to emerge as a potential force in the politics of today.

With the restoration of a devolved Assembly on 8 May this year there is a growing sense that all is not as it was before. For the first time in living memory the election that led to the establishment of the Assembly, was not dominated solely by constitutional matters.

The main concern of voters was the introduction of water charges, the appalling state of the health service, the crisis in local government and education and the growing awareness from both sides of the political divide that Westminster could not provide solutions to any of this.

Sinn Fein and the DUP agreed to form an administration not because of any coming together in love and harmony but simply because the workers in northern Ireland refused to accept any other course of action. They wanted their main concerns addressed by a group of people who were accountable to them.

Whether they are up to the job is, of course, another matter but workers have now firmly set the agenda and should be prepared if necessary to finish the job themselves.

**Historic Notes**

# Dismissal of teachers at Burston arouses the nation

**In the winter of 1911 two schoolteachers, a married couple, T.G. and A.K. Higdon, arrived in Burston. They were confirmed socialists and had been deeply involved in attempts to organise agricultural workers**

The couple had been transferred to Burston on account of their success in organising farm labourers at Wood Dalling. Tom Higdon had been working for several years organising the farm workers of the county into union branches and had captured the Wood Dalling Parish Council for the workers. Because of this a trumped-up charge was brought against Mrs Higdon which resulted in the transfer to Burston.

Undaunted the couple continued their work. Mrs Higdon refused to be subservient to her school managers and helped her husband organise new branches of the Agricultural Labourers' Union. Once again Tom Higdon led the labourers in capturing the Parish Council.

Early in 1914 another charge was brought against Mrs Higdon. It was of unjustly caning two pupils. The charge was unproven but other matters were raised. The Higdons were dismissed.

The villagers were outraged. Both parents and children refused to accept the decision of the Norfolk Education Committee. Pupils, encouraged by their parents, refused to attend the school and instead attended lessons daily on the village green. They were taught by the Higdons.

Fines were imposed on the striking children's parents, but money was raised by sympathisers at meetings in Norfolk and neighbouring Suffolk.

Burston villagers supporting the Higdons were deprived of their glebe land by the local vicar, who was chairman of the managers of the Higdons' former school. Three glebe tenants were evicted from their cottages by the vicar. All this aroused great indignation amongst trade unionists throughout Britain and the issue became a national one.

The Agricultural Labourers' Union and the National Union of Railwaymen gave valuable support to the strikers. The National Union of Teachers eventually came round to giving its wholehearted support to the villagers.

The extent to which the working people of the country rallied to the cause was remarkable. The NUR organised meetings in London which were addressed by the Higdons, some of the pupils and their parents. Trade unionists everywhere knew that the Higdons had been victimised for their trade union work, political beliefs and activities.

The widespread publicity given to the Burston School Strike by the trade union movement enabled enough money to be raised for the construction of a new school on land granted by the Parish Council - which was of course, controlled by Tom Higdon and his supporters. Some money came from abroad.

The School prospered throughout the twenties and became a focal point for British trade unionists. Older pupils at the school, as part of their education, were taken to trade union meetings. This emphasised the unity of the school with the struggles of the exploited everywhere. Meetings were held at the school in support of the Bolshevik Revolution, for Russian Famine Relief and to protest at the execution of Sacco and Vanzetti. There can be no doubt that it inspired rural workers throughout Britain to fight against the injustices imposed upon them.

The school continued to operate into the 30s. It was not closed until Tom Higdon died in 1939. It still stands and is used as a community centre. It serves as a memorial to the courage and determination of the Higdons and the heartening solidarity between the villagers and British trade unionists.

An excellent account of events at Burston is contained in B. Edwards's book "The Burston School Strike", available from Bellman Bookshop - price £2 plus postage.

# Historic Notes

# Farm workers strike–1913

AT THE START of this century, the fertile peat soils of the Ormskirk area in Lancashire were intensively cropped to supply the huge markets of Manchester and Liverpool. Intensive farming demanded a large labour force and the local farmworkers realised that their wages and conditions were poor compared to better organised urban workers, so a large number joined the National Agricultural Labourers and Rural Workers Union.

In may 1913 the farm workers presented their demands: an increase of 4 shillings on the basic wage of £1-00, sixpence an hour overtime and a half day on Saturday from 1 pm. All the farmers conceded was a 2 pm stop on Saturdays.

Confident of their strength a strike was called on June 23 - just as the hay harvest commenced. The timing of their action hit the employers hard and the hay was only harvested by the farmers and clerks from Liverpool. The striking farmworkers were not worried if their picketing was primary or secondary only that it was effective. Groups of pickets were informed by cyclists when hay wagons were on the move, and despite police protection many loads were turned back or simply scattered over the road.

Good timing and effective picketing put the strikers in a strong position and support from industrial unions led to a swift victory. As well as donating money to the strike fund, Liverpool trade unionists gave much practical help. Dockers prevented scab labour arriving by ship, while transport workers blacked non-union goods. The final blow came from Ormskirk NUR, who threatened to black all farm produce. The farmers conceded defeat after only two weeks, the final settlement forced a 2 shillings rise, sixpence an hour overtime and the 2 pm stop on Saturdays.

Present-day farmworkers will no doubt keep such examples of their union's history in mind as they begin to prepare their campaign for the 1980 pay claim. The claim of £100 minimum wage and a 35 hour week was introduced at a May Day rally in Ipswich. It is encouraging that the claim is being considered in good time, indeed action committees all over the country are planning possible industrial action. Strong organisation coupled with solidarity from urban unions will be as effective today, as it was in 1913.

The First World War was not a surprise. The events and forces that led to it had been festering for decades...

# 1914: The road to catastrophe

**WORKERS, FEB 2012 ISSUE**

When the First World War broke out on 4 August 1914, it did so against a background of intensifying conflicts and rivalries between the leading capitalist powers. Rival capitalisms were set on a gradual drift towards world conflagration as the differing interests and alliances locked market competitors into opposition and implacable hostility.

Probably the first impulse to general war can be traced back to the Prussian victory over France in 1870. The resulting unification and creation of the German Empire in 1871 led to a change in the balance of capitalist powers in Europe, with Germany now the strongest military might on the continent, possessing large and expanding industrial resources.

Germany annexed Alsace-Lorraine after 1870, throwing the French state into an alliance with Russia, splitting Europe into two opposing camps and opening up a period of competitive armament and a militaristic environment. Additionally, the war's wake brought about the political re-grouping of Europe on the basis of Franco-German antagonism.

The Australian 6th Division marching to the Somme.

The period prior to the First World War was one of unprecedented economic rivalry and shifting economic strengths. Industrial developments in France, Belgium, Italy, Russia, India, Japan but above all in Germany and America, had put an end to the British capitalist monopoly of the world market that had held sway in the first half of the 19th century.

It was a dangerous mix of rising and declining capitalist powers, emerging and waning imperial forces, strutting the world looking for advantage. As now, the pursuit of profits by finance capital was the chief political dynamic, and the workings of capitalism itself led to war.

The nations of Europe were also competing in their colonial expansion. In the 1880s and 1890s the pace of imperialist competition increased, especially in Africa and the Far East. Those powers possessing no colonies, notably Italy and Germany, thought they should have some.

Colonies were profitable to finance capital. Britain secured control of Egypt and a powerful colonial empire in southern Africa; France took possession of Tunis in north Africa and Tonkin in east Asia; Italy secured a foothold in Abyssinia; Russia accomplished its conquests in central Asia, pushed into Manchuria and extended control across

Siberia to the Pacific with the Trans-Siberian railway; Germany won its first colonies in Africa and in the South Seas; the USA procured the Philippines.

There was a chain of bloody wars and conquests in imperial expectation of economic gain and to safeguard frontiers or exclude rivals from vacant territory. All these colonial developments created new, extra-European antagonisms: between Italy and France in northern Africa, France and Britain in Egypt, Britain and Russia in central Asia, Russia and Japan in eastern Asia, Japan and Britain in China, and the USA and Japan in the Pacific Ocean.

## Rivalries

Imperialist rivalries led to rapid growth of militarisation. By 1897, German military policies underwent radical change moving from Bismarck's strategy of power on land across the continent to challenging for supremacy on the ocean as well. Germany attempted to rival Britain as the world's greatest naval force, a feverish naval race began, with the building of dreadnoughts and battleships on both sides.

Imperial Britain, facing the rise of the new Imperial German High Seas Fleet, committed resources to staying ahead at sea. In 1904, Britain created a North Sea Fleet based at Rosyth on the east coast of Scotland to counter the threat from the large German navy.

Europe divided into rival alliance systems. Often begun as defensive manoeuvring, they became offensive structures escalating the scale of conflict and animosities. Between 1879 and 1902, the German–Austrian and Franco–Russian treaties were made, followed by the Triple Alliance of Germany, Austria and Italy, the England and France entente, the England and Russia entente, and then Britain allied with Japan. In 1914 alliances dragged nations into war.

Crises and flashpoints brought the world to the verge of a general conflict: Morocco, Macedonia, Bosnia, Agadir and Albania. But each time a greater clash was postponed, as the sides were not yet ready with military preparations, though the final conflict was already forming.

## What might have been

The only force that might have prevented the world war – the working classes of the world, particularly Europe – did not do so. In 1907 and 1912 the Second International (of workers' organisations) had declared: "Should war nevertheless break out, it shall be the duty of the social democracy to work for a speedy peace, and to strive with every means in its power to utilise the industrial and political crisis to accomplish the awakening of the people, thus hastening the overthrow of capitalist class rule." But as the German

Communist, Rosa Luxemburg, observed in 1915, "The first thunder of Krupp cannons in Belgium welded Germany into a wonderland of social harmony."

Across Europe there was a working class retreat into "defence of nation, defence of empire". International social democracy capitulated to capitalism's whims and working men killed and destroyed each other in the 'methodical, organised, gigantic murder' of world war. The major social democratic parties of Germany, France and Britain rushed to the 'defence of their fatherlands' and in patriotic frenzy voted for war credits and clamoured about enemies.

It was left to Lenin and the Bolshevik Party in Russia in October 1917 to take workers out of an imperialist war and recognise its real aims – the seeking of territory and spheres of influence, trade advantage, raw materials, control of trade routes, and political, economic or military domination of vulnerable nations.

The inter-imperialist war happened brought the mass slaughter of an estimated 10 million people plus 20 million wounded. History warns. ■

**Historic Notes**

# War and the international working class

EUROPE at the turn of the century was undergoing rapid change. Old empires were falling, new powers and forces arising. The centuries old Turkish empire was disintegrating fast; the Austro-Hungarian empire torn by internal strife. The new German industrial complexes were challenging the supremacy of 'Great' Britain. Secret treaties, diplomatic manoeuvres, dynastic claims for territory, dreams of glory among military castes were all ingredients of the witches brew of inter-imperialist rivalry. Local nationalisms were taken up and exploited for dynastic power struggles. The 'scramble for Africa' was complete - and now the struggle for the redivision of the world, in and outside Europe, was on. The arms race, particularly between Germany and Britain accelerated.

People talked of war easily. Then, as today, the 'balance of power' argument rolled off people's tongues. They did not give much thought to the fact that the whole concept of 'balance' is associated with something which is inherently unstable.

It was in this context that the 2nd International became increasingly alarmed at the prospect of war. Its Congress in August 1907 met in Stuttgart and heard a report on how the labour movements of various countries had acted to try and avert conflicts between France and England at Fashoda, France and Germany over Morocco, Austria and Italy over Albania, between Sweden and Norway, and Russia and Japan. "Wars are part of the very nature of capitalism; they will cease only when the capitalist economic order is abolished", read their resolution. "... the working class, which provides most of the soldiers and makes most of the material sacrifices, is a natural opponent of war, ...".

In November 1912, an Extraordinary Congress met at Basle to discuss the threat of war arising from the Balkan crisis, passing what Lenin called "the most exact and complete, the most solemn and formal exposition of socialist views on war and on tactics in relation to war."

"A war between the three great leading civilised peoples because of the Serbo-Austrian dispute over a port would be criminal madness", it said. "The proletarians consider it a crime to fire at each other for the benefit of the capitalist profits, the ambitions of dynasties, or the greater glory of secret diplomatic treaties. "The proletariat is aware of the fact that at this moment it is the bearer of the entire future of mankind. The proletariat will make use of all its forces to prevent the destruction of the flower of all peoples, threatened with all the horrors of mass murder and starvation".

But as we know too well, the brave and inspiring words remained just that, words. Only a small minority of delegates besides the Bolsheviks from either conference took this message home in a vigorous way. In fact, the passing of such resolutions were more a tribute to the political skills of people like Lenin and Luxembourg than the International itself. A Fabian motion on colonial policy in 1907 that 'The Congress does not in principle and for all time reject colonial policy, which, under a socialist republic, may exercise a civilising influence' was only narrowly defeated (by 127 to 108) as were attempts to justify property qualifications for the right to vote and oppose female suffrage. And even though Lenin's amendment on the anti-militarism pledging 'the use of all the means of organisation of the proletariat' against war, instead of purely parliamentary opposition, was passed unanimously, much of the support was empty.

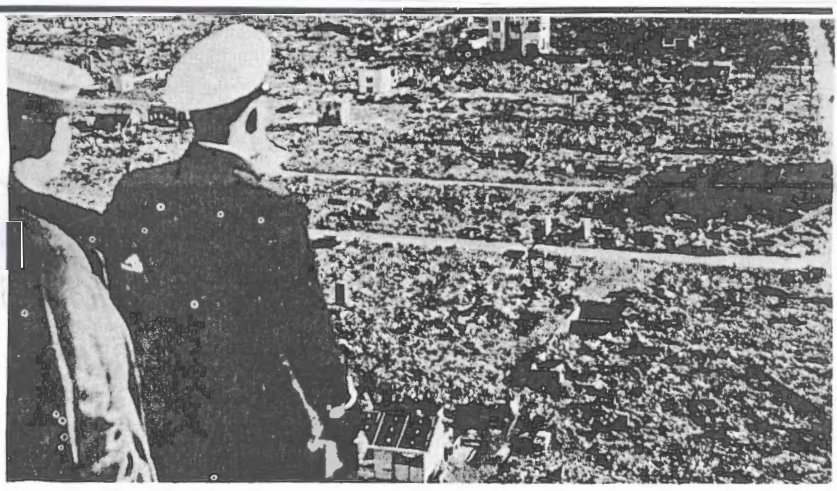
A Bolshevik demonstration in Moscow against the war. 'Workers of the world unite', ' Down with the war'.

Vollmar, from Germany, continued to argue that war was a necessary part of capitalist development and there was no point in opposing it. Jaures, from France, continued to support the new alliance between France, Britain and Russia as a 'guarantee for peace'. And Bebel, from Germany, still stood for 'defence of the fatherland', saying in his speech, "All our love for humanity cannot prevent us from being good Germans." The resolutions were not taken home.

Straight after the Stuttgart conference, Lenin wrote: "...in spite of the obvious importance of the question, in spite of the clear, strikingly manifest harmfulness of militarism, it is difficult for the proletariat to find another question on which there is so much vacillation, so much discord among Western Socialists ...". The results of such vacillation remain as a warning.

**HISTORIC NOTES**

# War to end all wars?



Hiroshima, August 1945. 200,000 were dead within three months. 1000 have died annually since 1945 in Hiroshima from radiation. Yet today's nuclear weapons are far more powerful.

"The hand that signed the treaty
bred a fever,
And famine grew, and locusts
came,
Great is the hand that holds
dominion over
Man by a scribbled name."

WORLD War I was fought in the interests of kings and capitalists, though none of them died in it. (Do they ever?) The sixtieth anniversary of the armistice must make us pause for thought about this, particularly in the context of current sabre-rattling and war-talk.

Despite solemn vows by all parties in the Socialist International that workers would not fight workers in the cause of capitalist rivalry, that spirit was breached resulting in horrendous slaughter. 65 million men were mobilised, of whom 8.5 million were killed, with 21 million being wounded. Of all those mobilised, 57.6 per cent were war casualties.

Krup, the German arms manufacturer, made a fortune out of World War I, as he did out of World War II, and today the family name embraces the same business. The Kaiser, the Fuhrer, the Chancellor - who cares, business is business. Krupp was not alone, however; we too had our merchants of death. But how did it come about?

It was not started by the assassination of an Austrian archduke at Sarajevo, although that incident was used as the pretext for mobilisation. Antagonism between, and alliances among, the empires of Britain, France, Germany, Russia and Turkey, with the Balkans as a focal point of those contradictions, made war a danger years before it ever began. The Turkish empire in decline was easy prey for the others. The Austro-Hungarian empire sought domination over the new Balkan states falling out of Turkey's grasp. Tsarist Russia used the pretext for expansion in this area as 'protector' of the Slavic peoples, or, to cast its net wider, of non-Slavs who were fellow members of the Orthodox church. Any excuse would do.

German intentions to retain Alsace-Lorraine won from the French in 1870-71 meant alliance against France, which alerted British imperial interest to Germany's rivalry. Treaty followed alliance in this den of thieves.

When the war was over two years old, after terrible casualties, and peace was talked about, the conniving still continued on the Allied side. Russia would get Istanbul, Alsace-Lorraine would go to France, the German colonies would go to Britain, while Italy was promised Trieste and the Tirol in Austria, with other portions of the Turkish empire.

The callousness of this wheeler dealing at the end of 1916 is underlined by battlefield results on the Somme. Allied forces attacked German positions on the Somme for four months from July 1916 when stalemate was conceded. The campaigns cost 1 million lives, with no important gains on either side. Or take Verdun, where five months of bloodshed saw a German gain of only 130 square miles for a loss of 300,000 plus French casualties.

Although opposition to the war had been fiercest in Britain, war overtook that opposition. The South Wales Miners Federation was prepared to put an international miners' strike between the belligerent countries and war, receiving support from the National Union of Mineworkers. A Cardiff miners' meeting resolved that no coal would be supplied to the fleet. When the Parliamentary Labour Party backed war, Ramsay Macdonald resigned the leadership in disgust. The Independent Labour Party opposed war for the duration. Engineers in the munitions industry opposed the low pay and dilution of skill that war encouraged, founding the first shop stewards' movement. The tanks were then to be used against workers on Clydeside.

The Bolsheviks, who had opposed war throughout, dealt with Russian absolutism in a way the German army could not. But not before the Russian people suffered 9 million casualties. Only in Russia did the people turn their guns on their rulers. They preferred revolution to war. Land, bread and peace.

The kings departed after the war, but none died on the front for their war.

Mutiny racked the French army in 1917, but there was no revolution. In Germany, the Kaiser's abdication led to no revolution. In Britain, demobbed soldiers returned to a land fit for heroes - mass unemployment.

Russia was the one positive development. In addition to enormous military casualties, we should remember that 28 million civilians died because of the war. A lost generation. Those living scarred by the experience. Progress is not built on a pile of skulls.

# HISTORIC NOTES EASTER 1916

# The proud rebirth of the Irish nation

AT MIDDAY on April 24, Easter Monday, 1916 James Connolly led a company of men from Liberty Hall, the headquarters of the Irish Transport Workers Union in Dublin. Numbers of these men wore the green uniforms of the Irish Citizens' Army and the Irish Volunteers. They marched smartly to Dublin's General Post Office which they proceeded to occupy. Shortly the tricolour of the Irish Republic was flying above the building.

Patrick Pearse came out to address those outside, in his hands the historic proclamation of the Republic. It declared "the right of the people of Ireland to the ownership of Ireland and to the unfettered control of Irish destinies, to be sovereign and indefeasible... Standing on that fundamental right and again asserting it in arms in the eyes of the world we hereby proclaim the Irish Republic as a sovereign Independent State."

The Easter Rising had begun.

In August 1914, immediately after the outbreak of the imperialist war in Europe, the Supreme Council of the Irish Republican Brotherhood (IRB) decided on the necessity of a rising to end British rule in Ireland. It constituted a Military Council to organise this, composed ultimately of seven men, among them Patrick Pearse and James Connolly. These seven men were the signatories to the Proclamation.

The force for the rising was to be Connolly's Irish Citizens' Army and the Irish Volunteers over which the IRB exercised a great measure of control. Arrangements were made through John Devoy and Roger Casement in Germany and the Revolutionary Directory of Clann na-Gael in New York for the shipping of arms and ammunition to Ireland.

On April 8, 1916, Pearse, in his capacity as Director of Organisation of the Irish Volunteers, issued the order for full mobilisation of all units in the country on Easter Sunday. The Chief of Staff of the Volunteers, MacNeil, opposed the rising but the arguments of the IRB prevailed.

Then, the Friday before Easter, the arms ship was captured by British Naval forces, and Roger Casement was arrested after his landing from a submarine. The news of these setbacks caused MacNeil to issue orders cancelling all plans for the mobilisation of the Volunteers.

On Easter Sunday the full Military Council met in Liberty Hall, their carefully laid plans seemingly in ruins, but these men of vision and courage refused to be intimidated. They resolved to bring into action all the forces at their disposal in Dublin and strike against the occupation forces the following day.

Dublin was ringed by British military barracks. Inside that ring the rebel forces, now named the Irish Republic Army, established an inner ring of posts in strong buildings around the heart of the city. Headquarters were at the GPO, where Pearse and Connolly were located. The 1st Battalion seized the Four Courts and buildings around it, the 2nd Battalion occupied Jacobs Biscuit Factory and a number of outposts, the 3rd Battalion took a number of buildings based around Boland's Mills and the 4th Battalion took the South Dublin Union. A combined force of the Citizen's Army took up positions at St. Stephen's Green and the College of Surgeons.

The first Irish casualty was Sean Connolly, killed leading a company of men on Dublin Castle. An attack on the GPO by the British was repulsed. Soon there was fierce fighting throughout Dublin. Faced with the fierce resistance of the Irish forces the British began moving artillery into the city and started shelling the rebel positions.

On the Friday after a five-hour battle the 5th Battalion routed a superior force of Royal Irish Constabulary at Ashbourne Co. Meath. Within the city the British artillery had got within range of the GPO. By evening, after a fierce bombardment, the building was in flames and Irish forces retreated to new positions. The battle continued to rage for two days. Finally at 3.45 pm on Sunday, April 30, Pearse signed an Order for general unconditional surrender.

The Rising ended in military defeat for the Republican forces. But the military failure proved to be less significant than the effect it had upon the minds of the Irish people. It was the expression in action of what had been thought merely a dream, the translation of an old aspiration into living history. In Easter Week 1916 the historic Irish nation was reborn.

## POBLACHT NA H EIREANN.

## THE PROVISIONAL GOVERNMENT OF THE IRISH REPUBLIC TO THE PEOPLE OF IRELAND.

IRISHMEN AND IRISHWOMEN: In the name of God and of the dead generations from which she receives her old tradition of nationhood, Ireland, through us, summons her children to her flag and strikes for her freedom.

Having organised and trained her manhood through her secret revolutionary organisation, the Irish Republican Brotherhood, and through her open military organisations, the Irish Volunteers and the Irish Citizen Army, having patiently perfected her discipline, having resolutely waited for the right moment to reveal itself, she now seizes that moment, and, supported by her exiled children in America and by gallant allies in Europe, but relying in the first on her own strength, she strikes in full confidence of victory.

We declare the right of the people of Ireland to the ownership of Ireland, and to the unfettered control of Irish destinies, to be sovereign and indefeasible. The long usurpation of that right by a foreign people and government has not extinguished the right, nor can it ever be extinguished except by the destruction of the Irish people. In every generation the Irish people have asserted their right to national freedom and sovereignty: six times during the past three hundred years they have asserted it in arms. Standing on that fundamental right and again asserting it in arms in the face of the world, we hereby proclaim the Irish Republic as a Sovereign Independent State, and we pledge our lives and the lives of our comrades-in-arms to the cause of its freedom, of its welfare, and of its exaltation among the nations.

The Irish Republic is entitled to, and hereby claims, the allegiance of every Irishman and Irishwoman. The Republic guarantees religious and civil liberty, equal rights and equal opportunities to all its citizens, and declares its resolve to pursue the happiness and prosperity of the whole nation and of all its parts, cherishing all the children of the nation equally, and oblivious of the differences carefully fostered by an alien government, which have divided a minority from the majority in the past.

Until our arms have brought the opportune moment for the establishment of a permanent National Government, representative of the whole people of Ireland and elected by the suffrages of all her men and women, the Provisional Government, hereby constituted, will administer the civil and military affairs of the Republic in trust for the people.

We place the cause of the Irish Republic under the protection of the Most High God, Whose blessing we invoke upon our arms, and we pray that no one who serves that cause will dishonour it by cowardice, inhumanity, or rapine. In this supreme hour the Irish nation must, by its valour and discipline and by the readiness of its children to sacrifice themselves for the common good, prove itself worthy of the august destiny to which it is called.

Signed on Behalf of the Provisional Government,

THOMAS J. CLARKE.
SEAN Mac DIARMADA. THOMAS MacDONAGH.
P. H. PEARSE. EAMONN CEANNT.
JAMES CONNOLLY. JOSEPH PLUNKETT.

# Historic Notes The struggle by the Irish for self-determination

THE PARTITIONING of Ireland into North and South by British imperialism after World War I remains perhaps the most evil and torturous atrocity committed against the Irish people in their long struggle for nationhood and the right to self-determination. That Ireland is one nation despite all the myths fostered about the special rights and status of 'Northern' Ireland is revealed so clearly in the history of that and partitioning.

Centuries of fierce struggle against Britain's ruthless exploitation and domination of Ireland culminated towards the end of the 19th century in a united national movement, led by the Irish Land League, demanding massive agrarian reform and the end of the landlord system. Alongside this the demand for independence, which gave rise to the Home Rule Party under Parnell, was inspiring a new national consciousness among the mass of the Irish people. But more important, the growth of organised labour, the birth of the Irish TU movement, was uniting catholic and protestant workers in struggle against their common enemy, the exploiting class. The founding of the Irish Republican Socialist Party in 1896 by James Connelly added fuel to this development.

The unity of the Irish working class was, and is, the last thing British capitalism wanted. The distorted development of Ireland's economy served Britain's imperial interests. Industry had been concentrated only in the North East of Ulster where Belfast's strategic position in relation to Liverpool had given rise to a number of industries including shipbuilding, supported by British capital. The agrarian south had been held back so that it continued to play the role of cheap food supplier to Britain.

The general election in 1910 had placed the Irish Nationalist Party in a superb strategic position holding the balance of power between liberal and tory. Home Rule for Ireland, forced unsuccessfully upon a reluctant Gladstone 25 years earlier, now seemed inevitable. The Home Rule Bill passed the House of Commons in 1912.

A series of protestant demonstrations carefully whipped-up by Ulster capitalists resulted in vicious attacks on catholics in which 2,000 workers were driven from the Belfast shipyards. The old Orange Order, the first fascist organisation in the world, was being revitalised. By 1913 the Ulster Volunteers had been formed and armed to defeat Home Rule or 'Rome' rule as it was called in Northern propaganda; to meet this threat the Irish Volunteers were formed and the Citizen Army was reconstituted a year later by Connolly and Larkin. In a bid to solve this dangerous build-up Asquith, following the earlier lead of Lloyd George, introduced an amendment to the Home Rule Bill excluding the Province of Ulster. The following month Britain declared war on Germany and the Bill was postponed pending the settlement of WWI.

James Connolly, disgusted at the concept of the working classes of Europe fighting one another for the greater glory of king and capitalism, urged the Irish people to remain neutral and continue their struggle for an independent socialist republic. Based on the sound principle that "England's trouble is Ireland's opportunity" Connolly argued for an armed insurrection. Supported by the Irish Republican Board, Sinn Fein, the Irish Volunteers and the Citizen Army, the uprising took place on Easter Monday 1916. After a fierce battle the rising was crushingly defeated. The British had been fore-warned by an informer. The ruthless reprisals that followed, including the execution of a badly wounded Connolly, horrified the working class of the world.

### After World War One

The general election that followed the war in 1918 saw a massive victory for the republican Sinn Fein right across Ireland - the 'protestant' North electing a republican majority. Connolly's fight had not died with him. The establishment of the Dail Eireann (Irish Parliament) in January 1919 ratified the 1916 Easter declaration for an Independent Irish Republic. Alarmed by the mass support for the Dail which had received official recognition from the newly born Soviet Union, the British suppressed it as an "illegal assembly". Warrants were issued for all its members and all national movements in Ireland were banned. This was a declaration of war. By September thousands of troops, tanks and arms were pouring into Ireland.

Having introduced a proportional representation system of voting which heavily favoured the pro-English faction, Lloyd George hoped that Sinn Fein would be defeated in the local elections in 1920. But he was to be in for a shock. Of 206 councils, 172 fell to Sinn Fein. In the nine counties of Ulster, despite vicious Orange intimidation, the Republicans gained a majority. It was an overwhelming vote of confidence from the Irish people.

The guerrilla war intensified as the fascist "Black-and-Tans" were introduced. But resistance was widespread and fierce with the ITGWU declaring a general strike against British military occupation.

Demands from the British labour movement for an end to this hideous war forced the government to enter negotiations with the 'illegal' Dail. The result was a truce between the IRA, formally the Volunteers, and English military, signed on 14th July 1921. But the British continued to turn a 'blind eye' to the relentless Orange inspired pogroms against the Belfast catholics.

On December 6th the 'Articles of Agreement' were signed by the Irish delegation under the threat of an 'immediate and terrible war' This treaty gave 26 counties Dominion status in the British commonwealth while the six Northern counties would remain partitioned and part of the UK. The Dail was split between those true to a united independent republic and those whose interests lay with the Irish bourgeoisie. The civil war that ensued was brief and bloody instigated entirely by British imperialism which sought to destroy the republican spirit of Connolly as a requisite of 'Southern' independence. The military defeat of the republicans brought the war to a close with William Cosgrave, the social democrat, as leader of the Dail. By the end of 1922 partition was complete. Ireland had been ruthlessly divided and the continued presence of British troops today is a statement that Ireland will not see peace until partition is torn down and one nation established by the Irish people.

Historic Notes

# Ireland

# Easter uprising of 1916

ON APRIL 24, 1916 at the beginning of Easter week, James Connolly led the Irish Citizen Army and the Irish Volunteers against British Imperialism. They marched through Dublin, took over key buildings and held the city valiantly for seven days, against a strong Dublin militia. In this Easter issue of THE WORKER we pay tribute to those workers and their leader James Connolly who fought to their deaths not for Ireland alone but for the working class of Europe.

The Irish Citizen Army was a proletarian army set up to defend their fellow workers during the 1913 Dublin lock-out. They fought again in 1916 against Imperialism and war. The Bolsheviks and the Russian people did the same the following year, turned war into civil war and made the greatest revolution the world had ever seen.

The idea of turning war into civil war was James Connolly's. As soon as it was evident that the 1914 war could not be prevented, Connolly's programme for Ireland had to be that of stopping it. He trained and drilled the Irish Citizen Army. He lectured them on street fighting and every week his paper carried descriptions of past rebellions and armed struggle. He wrote:
"Starting thus Ireland may yet set the trend to a European conflagration that will not burn out until the last throne and the last capitalist bond and debenture will be shrivelled on the funeral pyre of the last war lord."

In Ireland the revolution to end the war had to take a national form, and for Connolly nationalism meant the rule of Ireland by the Irish working class.

The call to arms came with the words:
"We shall continue, in season and out of season, to teach that the far-flung battle line of England is weakest at the point nearest its heart, that Ireland is in that position of tactical advantage, that a defeat of England in India, Egypt, the Balkans or Flanders would not be so dangerous to the British Empire as any conflict of armed forces in Ireland, that the time for Ireland's battle is NOW, the place for Ireland's battle is HERE. That a strong man may deal lusty blows with his fists against a host of surrounding foes, and conquer, but will succumb if a child sticks a pin in his heart."

The rebellion of 1916 failed but the correctness of such a rebellion at such a time cannot be questioned. It was not the work of romantics or idealists. The battle lines had been drawn, Ireland was on the dissecting table and the war had already killed millions of workers.

Of course the rebellion contained those "nationalists" who were not for the working class; many were romantics, many were bourgeois. But social revolution is not like Armaggedon where two armies face each other in straight lines - the one all good and the other all evil.

The rebellion failed through betrayal and failure to act. There was no party like the Bolshevik party in Ireland and no similar support. A civil war raged until 1921 when again rebellion was defeated and Ireland divided.

Sackville Street, Dublin, 1916, scene of fierce fighting

Much has happened since 1916. The British Government sent troops and 'black and tans' to murder 'rebels' in their beds in the years immediately following, and fifty years later sent them again but pretended they were something different.

James Connolly's idea to rebel close to the heart of British Imperialism was not lost on those who benefit from subjugating Ireland. A British Army occupies Ireland today knowing that a united Ireland would have consequences reaching beyond Belfast across the Irish sea. Hence the Fascist laws that apply in both lands.

Our party wrote when the troops went into Ireland ten years ago:
"We call on British Workers to give solid support to the struggle of the Irish people for a United Ireland and an end to British rule. Their employers are our employers, their struggle our struggle. The class which sends the Army against Irish workers today will send it against British workers tomorrow."

# HISTORIC NOTES International Women's Day March 1917

Workers, men and women, march in Petrograd in March 1917. The overthrow of Tsarist autocracy. (From a painting by I. Vladimirov)

ONE DAY in March, 1917, the women of Petrograd (now Leningrad) streamed out of their tenements and shacks and took to the streets in a mighty demonstration. Workers' and soldiers' wives, they marched in such numbers and with such determination that not even the Tsarist troops and police dared intervene - and some of them even joined in.

The slogans of the marchers, held high on their banners, proclaimed: "Bread for our children" and "Our husbands back from the trenches". And as they marched through the streets of Petrograd they lit the flames of the Bolshevik revolution.

That day was March 8, 1917. And the occasion was International Women's Day.

The first Women's Day had taken place ten years earlier, in America. Then, socialist women had marked the day down as one of struggle for women's rights. Back in Europe the idea was taken up in 1910 by the International Conference of Working Women. A proposal for an International Working Women's Day to be celebrated throughout the world was put forward by Clara Zetkin, who was later to become a founder-member of the German Communist Party. The proposal, which was accepted, called for a day of struggle to be organised around the question of female franchise - the right of women to vote in parliamentary elections.

The first proper International Women's Day was duly held in 1911. Votes for women was the issue, and although its success differed around the world, one demonstration in Austria alone brought out 30,000 women. The date chosen was March 19, for that was the day on which, in 1848, the working class of Prussia had risen in armed insurrection against feudalism.

In 1913 International Women's Day, now changed to its present date in the calendar of March 8, was held for the first time in Russia. The slogan was "Votes for working women" and even then it was clear that such a demand was becoming a revolutionary one against the Tsarist autocracy. The meetings were illegal; they were held in secret; and they were raided by the police and speakers hauled off to prison. The same happened in 1914.

Then came the First World War. The barbarous massacres in the trenches were equalled by savage repression on the home front, and only in Norway could a meeting be held in 1915. In Germany and other countries the social-democrats, who supported this war for imperialism, collaborated with the ruling class to ensure that no meetings were held. They knew that such meetings would become rallying points against the war.

Had the social-democrats and ruling classes of Europe forseen the effects of March 8 in Russia in 1917, they would surely have made even more strenuous efforts at repression. For by then what was at issue was not the vote. Not any longer.

March 8 in Petrograd began a series of strikes and demonstrations which were to continue until October, when the Russian working class seized power and established the dictatorship of the proletariat. The tone of International Women's Day had been set, for the Russian women began that day the march into a new world, the world of Socialism.

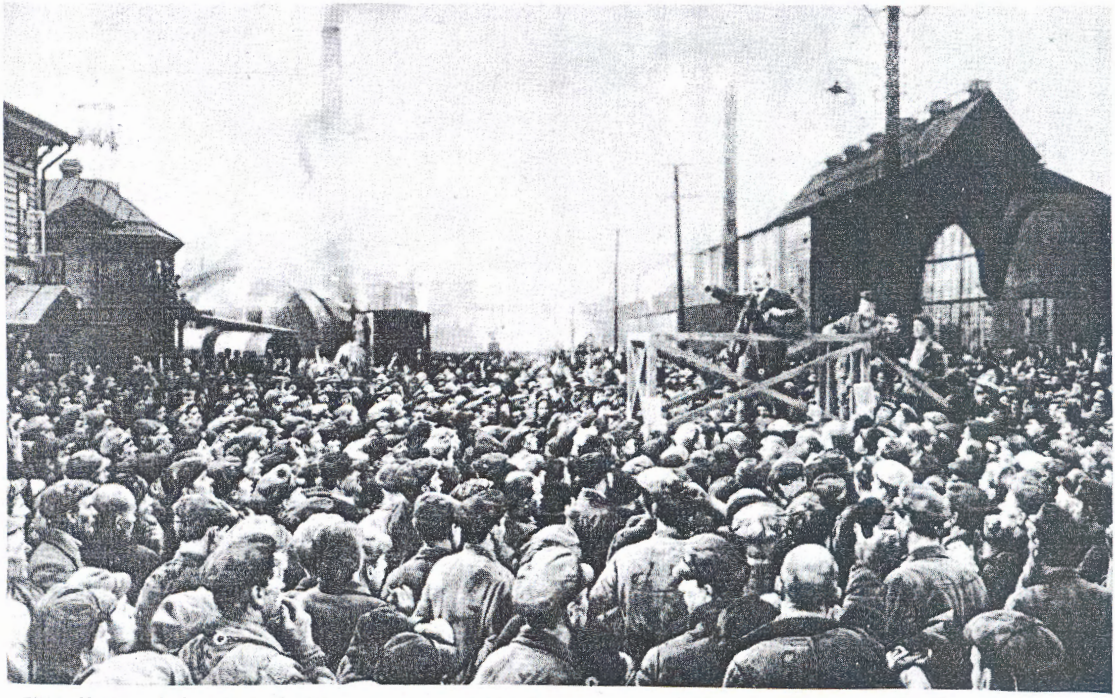
From then on, it could never any more be just a struggle for the vote. The era of proletarian revolution had arrived.

"If the task of International Working Women's Day was earlier, in the face of the supremacy of the bourgeois parliaments, to fight for the right of women to vote, the working class now has a new task: to organise working women around the fighting slogans of the Third International. Instead of demanding to take part in the working of the bourgeois parliament, listen to the call from Russia -

"'Working women of all countries! Organise a united proletarian front in the struggle against those who are plundering us! Down with the parliamentarism of the bourgeoisie! We welcome soviet power! Away with the inequalities suffered by working men and women! We will fight alongside men workers for the triumph of world communism!'"

(From a speech in 1920 by Alexandra Kollontai, the first Bolshevik Minister of Social Welfare.)

# Long live the glorious October Revolution 1917



LENIN addressing the historic Putilov Factory at the time of the October revolution. These workers played a very important role. They led the General Strike and turned their engineering skills into revolutionary skills by taking over the factory and making guns.

# Britain in the world - our task is revolution

ADDRESSING a packed audience at the Conway Hall on November 3rd, the speaker from the Communist Party of Britain (Marxist-Leninist) outlined the two fundamental truths which stare us in the face today. Firstly, that capitalism is in decline and that in Britain it is in total decline, an impasse from which it cannot be extricated, whatever the endeavours of the capitalist class. And secondly, that it is the working class - and only the working class - that can save Britain and the world.

If capitalism were tilted ever so slightly, that would have reverberations around the whole world; but here in Britain this must be done quickly before more damage is inflicted on our working class. That is our debt to the world. And that is our guilt - that we have allowed for so long the development of British imperialism - more cruel than the Nazis - from which the working class derived nothing. All the exquisite houses and gardens, and art collections filched from all corners of the globe were for the ruling class. For the working class there was squalor, whether in 1880, 1920 or 1978.

There were, she pointed out, two very good reasons why the working class could do it. One was our capacity for endurance and she cited the second world war when girls drove ambulances amid the bombing, and there was no turning away, and no looting. The other was our innate refusal to put our faith in leaders. There would be no Hitler or Kruschev in Britain. We chopped the king's head off centuries ago, and we didn't believe in divine providence either.

Our freeing ourselves from mediaeval superstition led to our emergence as the first industrial nation and so we created the trade unions, and that meant iron discipline, to be improved upon only by Communism. We were strong in class-consciousness. There were only two classes, us and the boss, the enemy. We have a genius for organisation, but lefties and righties deride it, because they want workers to be hurt, to be defeated.

But workers don't listen to them. The working class are the thinkers, and for all their affiliation to a reformist Labour Party, they express revolutionary sentiments and act in a revolutionary way. It was the job of our Party to give extra clarity to what the class is already thinking.

The speaker paid tribute to the Ford workers, many of whom were at the meeting, for their present leadership in the struggle of British workers. They had earned the support of Ford workers throughout Europe, and put fear into the hearts of the management. They were an example of why we should never be pessimistic - pessimism was a fault of the old, but at Fords they were young, clear, strong and united. There was no need for a picket line, there were no scabs.

The speaker went on to say that there was now not a section of the working class not in struggle, even if it had taken Ennals one month to realise that included hospital supervisors! And the struggle was not just economic; it was against the government and its pay policy, its destruction of Britain and its veiled insistence on war.

On the question of war the speaker attacked the shameful line being peddled by some so-called Marxist-Leninist parties to the extent that in the USA a protest is to take place against opposition to the manufacture of the neutron bomb, and against peaceful, civil uses of nuclear power. And it was not just in the USA. It was happening in Britain too. The working class does not want war; only those who do not have to fight in one want it. But we must guard against the idea that the working class are a lot of cloth-capped sheep. No ideas are ever foisted on them.

But the point at issue now is that they do not believe in social democracy, nor - as yet - in revolution, unless it is somewhere overseas. Our job as a party is to explode the myth that there is any other way, and to show that it is now a question of survival. We are already well on the way to being the beggars of Europe through entry into the EEC and all the other capitalist snares. While the Dutch, the Belgians, the Germans and the Americans busy themselves in Wales and Cornwall, some say Brittany, Cornwall and West Cumberland should be devolved since they share some ancient heritage.

In conclusion the speaker said we should look forward to the day when the government can no longer govern, the governed will no longer be governed, and we have a strong Marxist-Leninist party at our head. We are still far from strong, but we should not deride either setbacks or successes, and we have achieved much - on Ireland, on the two-class line, on demolishing the 3-world theory that would have us gang up with a bunch of murderous thugs, such as the Shah and Pinochet. We are rooted in the working class, are part of the class, yet we need to think more. We cannot take the day off and get drunk or not go into work because we feel tired. To enter such a miserable place as Fords today is revolutionary.

**Historic Notes**

# October revolution is still an inspiration

THE GREAT October Revolution is 62 years old this month but the passage of time has done nothing to diminish its historical significance. Indeed, as capitalism in Britain sinks into its final decline its great lesson, that the working class in a country can seize and effectively hold state power, has never been more important. Faced with an unprecedented attack on everything they have struggled for over two hundred years, the British working class, like the Russian people before them, must look to revolution as the only way forward to peace and prosperity.

The Soviet working class were the inheritors of a long history of political dissent under Tsarism, but the advent of capitalism in Russia widened the scope of this dissent into a formidable weapon. Grouped together into huge factories (the Putilov works in Petrograd employed more than 30,000 people), the Russian workers saw the importance of organisation. The daily struggle for a better existence led to the repeated outbreaks of strikes which were never purely economic and which led to the understanding that the root of all opression lay within, at the hands of their class enemy - Tsar, landlord or capitalist.

The Bolshevik Party, with Lenin's influence, provided the organisational leadership which turned general dissatisfaction into resolution to overthrow capitalism and to seize power for the working class.

Fed up with the war far from home which would obviously mean no benefit to the peasant or the worker, the land hunger which had burned unsatisfied across the centuries welled up and burst in the demand for "Peace, Land, Bread". In the February Revolution, mass desertions from the front spilled discontented soldiers into the big cities and factories long geared to war production became the revolutionary arsenal of the working class. Led by women textile workers the cries of "More bread" were soon transformed into "Down with the Tsar","Down with the War", until a quarter of a million Petrograd workers with one voice pushed the Tsar into oblivion.

The bourgeois government, conniving at a Tsarist restoration with Admiral Kolchak, had to appeal to the armed workers to come to their aid, it became clear where the effective power lay. When the time came to wield this power in another revolutionary thrust, support for the Provisional Government melted away, and in an almost bloodless evening, with the bourgeoisie being defended only by a company of cadets, power passed completely to the workers of Petrograd and Moscow.

A few days later, with the merger of the Soviet Soldiers and Workers Deputies and the Soviet of Peasant Deputies, the historical alliance of worker a and peasant was complete and one stage of the October Revolution over.

Through civil war, famine, and the indescribably difficult struggle to industrialise, the working class defended their revolution, always surrounded by the hostile capitalist countries, eager to ferment counter-revolution in every way.

With the creation of the Nazi war machine, the capitalist class realised their dream and unleashed a war of unprecedented savagery against the Soviet Union. It was only the singlemindedness and courage of the working class as displayed in the October Revolution that saved the Soviet Union and the world from complete destruction.

If a new clique of bourgeois rulers now struts in the Kremlin, who can doubt that they will eventually be overthrown.

The lessons to be learned from the October Revolution are immense. The fundamental tenet of Marxism, that society splits irrevocably into capitalists and workers was clearly shown as was the fact that the solution to all the problems besetting the working class - war, deprivation and economic disruption - can only be solved by destroying the class enemy within.

As the war-mongers prepare for a new war in Europe, we honour the Russian people and their great October Revolution, so that we can learn and follow that great example. We will not be dragged into the war against them.


The poster reads: "Without coal - factories stop; Without coal - trains will stand still; While the Don is not ours - we shall be hungry. Victory against Denikin's bands - Victory against hunger"

# The day the Army was sent to the streets of Glasgow

**WORKERS, MARCH 2010 ISSUE**

NINETY YEARS ago in the aftermath of years of capitalist **crisis and the "War to end all Wars", the British government** had the military on alert to deal with a working class response it feared. Organised workers had forged strong links between centres of heavy industry, particularly in Sheffield, Newcastle and Glasgow.

The ties were strongest among those working in engineering and shipbuilding. Even in the midst of the First World War, those workers had resisted the imposition of the Munitions Act, the Dilution of Labour Act and Defence of the Realm Act, all giving government draconian powers to negate long-fought-for pay rates and conditions for skilled work, and to crack down on opposition.

Social unrest grew too, with well organised campaigns such as the Glasgow Rent Strike of 1916. One of the leaders was suffragette and communist Helen Crawfurd, who helped forge close links between the Clyde Workers Committee (CWC) and the Glasgow Women's Housing Association.

## Organisation

Organisation was key, too, in the growth of the CWC itself, bringing together shop stewards, delegates and the Trades Union Councils. Its strength was demonstrated by the chasing off stage of the Prime Minister of the day, Lloyd George, at a showcase rally at Christmas, 1915, intended to promote the need for his various draconian Acts. The 3000 shop stewards and union delegates then took over the meeting.

The only newspaper to report this, FORWARD (with a circulation of over 30,000), was suppressed by the military. The smaller VANGUARD , inspired by Bolshevism, was also closed. Copies of FORWARD were even confiscated from newsagents and regular readers' homes. However, only a week later, the CWC launched its own journal THE WORKER – ORGAN OF WORKERS' COMMITTEES OF SCOTLAND. It ran to five issues before the editorial team and printer were arrested and most jailed for a year. It had featured the defiant statement:

"The British authorities having adopted the methods of Russian despotism, British workers may have to understudy Russian revolutionary methods of evasion… but here is THE WORKER once

again, symbolical of the fact that the cause of Labour can never be suppressed. It may be and has been bamboozled, hoodwinked, side-tracked and misled; it may be browbeaten, persecuted and driven underground, but it cannot be killed; and just when its enemies think they have finally subdued and made an end of it, it emerges more virile and vigorous than ever."

Workers organising was nothing new — the weavers of Glasgow's Calton district were strong enough to engage in a long and bitter dispute over wages and basic justice in 1787, only ending when several were killed by government forces. An insurrection in 1820 had ended in death and deportation, and Glasgow Trades Union Council was one of the earliest in Britain over 150 years ago.

By 1918, the combination of people's high expectations of peacetime and demands of the returning troops and sailors gave the government a dread of the influence of the world-changing actions carried out by workers in other lands.

Particularly on their minds were the 1916 uprising in Ireland, the Bolshevik Revolution of 1917 in Russia and the build up to what was an almost successful revolution in Germany in 1919.

Left: Glasgow rent strike, 1916. Right: three years on, and tanks are stationed in Glasgow on Churchill's orders as mass action grew.

Hence the reasonable demand for a 40-hour working week led to what became known as Black Friday, 5 February 1919. That day months of CWC agitation culminated in a mass demonstration of over 35,000 workers at the City Chambers in George Square in Glasgow city centre. It was attacked viciously by police and serious rioting ensued.

## Tanks and troops

Its Britain-wide implications were made clear by the actions of Churchill and his Cabinet in ordering tanks and troops into the city. Local soldiers were confined to barracks, while the troops brought in

were from well outwith the area. Machinegun nests on rooftops and even howitzers were positioned around the city centre.

However, although well organised and with a popular following, the workers committees were from a defensive tradition, of a trade union nature. They were coping with appalling conditions and the fear of looming mass unemployment. And there was nothing in the form of a Bolshevik or communist party in Britain at that time to inspire the struggle to go to a more ambitious stage.

It was perhaps no accident that diversions into nationalism and separatism – aimed at smashing the necessary British class unity – were concocted at this time. 1920 saw the formation of the Scots National League, John MacLean entering the cul-de-sac of Scottish republicanism and poet Hugh MacDiarmid writing his PLEA FOR A SCOTTISH FASCISM calling for socialism to develop "a fascist rather than a Bolshevik spirit".

Others, including speakers at the 1915 and 1919 rallies, walked off into benign parliamentary social democracy. Kirkwood became Baron Bearsden; Mitchell hardly spoke in parliament; Maxton faded with the Independent Labour Party and Gallagher was an isolated communist voice at Westminster.

Helen Crawfurd went on to play a leading role in the Workers International Relief Organisation, set up to defend the Russian Revolution, having met Lenin in 1920. She was politically active until her death in 1954, being elected as a communist to the town council in Dunoon, Argyllshire, in 1946.

# HISTORIC NOTES / Jolly George, 1920

THE NEWS of the overthrow of Tsarism by the workers and peasants of Russia in 1917 evoked a tremendous response among the whole working class of this country.

For two years prior to the "Jolly George" strike, agitation against the armed intervention by the imperialist countries, including Britain, against Soviet Russia had been growing. Lenin's "Appeal To The Toiling Masses", illegal in Britain, had been distributed in the docks. Vigilance against munitions being sent to Poland (the major imperialist base for the offensive against Russia) was sharp.

Whilst Bonar Law was emphatically denying in Parliament that any munitions were being sent to Poland, crates of aeroplanes and guns marked "OHMS Munitions for Poland" appeared at the East India Docks in London, and loaded onto the Danish ship the Neptune. She left the docks on May 1st but didn't get far. Two firemen on board halted the ship. Amidst arguments with the captain, the ship was struck off Gravesend by another ship and had to be towed sinking back to London.

News of the incident soon spread to the dockland borough of Poplar. By May, Kiev had been captured by the Poles , and the British and French imperialists in jubilation began openly to support and develop the war. Also in May, cargo arrived at the London docks for a ship called the Jolly George. The cargo was once again stamped "OHMS munitions for Poland". Would the dockers now follow the seamen's example?

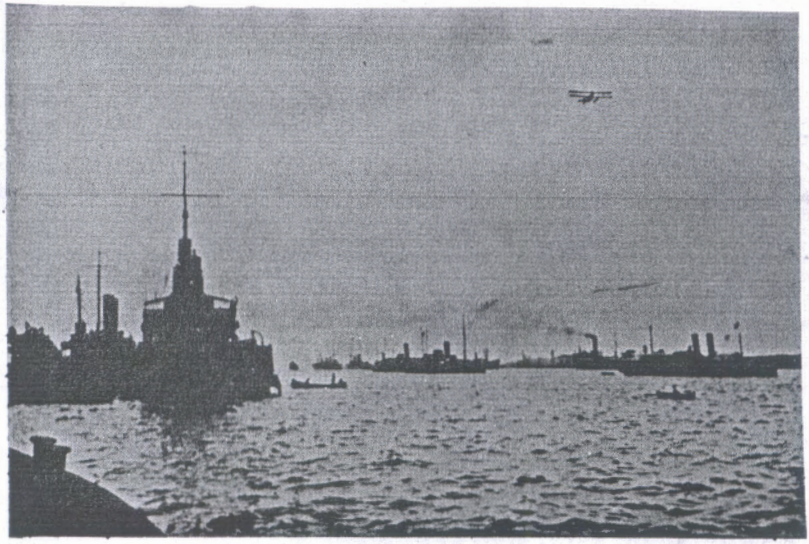
They soon showed they would and promptly received assurances of support from the Dockers Union in any action they took over the Jolly George. The London dockers struck on May 10th, 1920: the coal heavers refused to coal the Jolly George the same day.

The strike met with great support throughout the Labour movement. As was said at the time by the secretary of the 'Hands off Russia' movement, which had already been formed in 1919: "the offensive against Russia goes on, but the counter-offensive for Russia gathers momentum."

On May 15th the munitions were unloaded back onto the dockside. All across the country, Councils of Action against the war were set up. An emergency conference of the TUC was called, adopting on August 9th, 1920, a resolution which stated in part that the TUC "therefore warns the Government that the whole industrial power of the organized workers will be used to defeat this war", (that is, the war on Russia).

Faced with the threat of strike action at home and with mutinies abroad of British soldiers refusing to be sent to fight Russia, the government was forced to abandon its more obvious attempts to smash the first workers' state. Lloyd George made a speech in the House of Commons on November 19th combining an attack on Bolshevism with an acknowledgement that there were no means to fight it.

The "Jolly George" strike had been an important spark in ending open British aggression against Russia, but it did not arise from nothing: the strike had been preceded by years of anti-war agitation. It also shows the importance of the whole working class supporting workers when they take such a stand.



British warships in the harbour of Archangel during the intervention of imperialist powers to try to strangle the October Revolution soon after its birth.

The main capitalist political parties all agree that there must be massive cuts in public spending.Their common demand in 2010 echoes unmistakably what happened in the public spending debt crises of 1921 and 1931…

# The same old refrain: attack the working class

**WORKERS, JULY 2010 ISSUE**

Working class families suffered terrible hardship and suffering during the 1920s and 1930s, and especially now we must examine this part of our past to see what happened last time the political parties imposed such policies. Otherwise we will be condemned to repeat history endlessly.

## The Geddes Axe 1921

During and after the First World War, government expenditure in Britain rocketed and the national debt rose rapidly. Also, 1920 had seen a prodigious boom and speculative mania. However, boom quickly turned to slump and the banks were left holding debts that could not be repaid. Unemployment soared and fluctuated in 1921 between 1,664,000 and over 2,500,000.

The owner of the Daily Mail, Lord Rothermere, created the Anti-Waste League which between February and June 1921 started winning by-elections on a manifesto of attacking 'excessive' public spending.

Whereas in 1913−14 the Civil Services and Revenue Departments cost £81.3 million, by 1920-21 they cost £523.3 million, and in 1921−22, £590.7 million. Before the war, the Armed Forces cost around £77 million but approached

£190 million in 1921−22. The National Debt and other Consolidated Fund Services had increased dramatically over the same time too.

1934: one of the marches organised by the National Unemployed Workers Movement.

In August 1921, the Liberal Prime Minister, Lloyd George, appointed a businessman, Sir Eric Geddes, as head of the Committee on National Expenditure to find where "economies" could be found in various government departments for 1922–23. His Committee recommended a severe retrenchment in government expenditure, which advocated cutbacks totalling £87 million and became known as the "Geddes Axe". Total defence expenditure fell from £189.5 million in 1921–22 to £111 million in 1922–23; total social spending (education, health, housing, pensions, unemployment) fell from £205.8 million in 1920–21 to £182.1 million in 1922–23.

Most controversial were the cuts in social services. Lloyd George had promised the First World War soldiers "a land fit for heroes" but then cut back on those promises. The blade of Geddes Axe fell primarily on education and social housing. More workers became unemployed and there was a general attack on wages. Unemployment benefits were reduced. Distress was widespread.

The May Commission 1931

The economy never recovered during the 1920s. Instead there was a further economic slump and depression from 1929. Unemployment rose to two and a half million. The cost of unemployment benefit rose from £12 million in 1928 to £125 million in 1931. There was a collapse of European banks and a balance of payments crisis. A loan was negotiated from international bankers who stipulated public expenditure cuts.

In February 1931 the Labour Chancellor, Snowden, set up a Committee on National Expenditure chaired by Sir George May and other industrialists, which reported at the end of July 1931. Its conclusions were decided on the say-so of the majority, the 4 Conservative and Liberal nominees. The report calculated that the deficit for 1932-3 would be £120 million. They recommended that the deficit be "cured" by retrenchment in public expenditure, arguing that such expenditure was "definitely restrictive of industrial enterprise and employment". They argued for wage cuts for the police, teachers and sections of the armed forces. Most cutbacks were to be made in the social services and public schemes of work. The attitude was that all public expenditure was wasteful. The total cutbacks amounted to £96.5 million; the largest individual cutback was unemployment insurance; there was also additional taxation.

The Labour Cabinet appointed an economy committee. There was a run on the pound (surprise, surprise) to pressurise a decision. When a consensus could not be reached on cutting unemployment benefits, a National Coalition Government headed by Ramsay MacDonald was formed to enact the cutbacks, splitting the Labour Party.

Much can be learned from the experience of these two previous exercises in cutting public expenditure. Interestingly, just as now, then there was a massive degree of unity between the Liberal, Conservative and Labour parties on cutting public expenditure in the 1920s and 1930s.

There was wholesale cooperation and connivance with these political attacks on our class by finance capital and big business in a deliberate attempt to shift the balance of power and protect their profit-making regime. Informal or formal party coalitions against the interests of the people were the norm.

Again, just as now, the excuse was that there were to be only "economies" or "removal of waste" or other sickening weasel expressions, no acknowledgement that what was being imposed were actual cutbacks of jobs, skills and services essential to a working class and its quality of life.

## Attack on public sector

Crucially, the public sector workers laid off (or whose pay was cut) spent less on goods and services, no longer paid taxes and claimed unemployment benefits, which in turn deepened the recession and actually worsened the public expenditure finances. If allowed to happen today, the same things will recur.

The British economy remained in the doldrums for two whole inter-war decades: unemployment remained at least at one million and was often more than double that for nigh on twenty years. Capitalism's economic recipe was a disaster for British workers; but the bankers and industrialists who had caused the crises lived well.

In essence, the government attacks on public expenditure in 1921 and 1931 helped sustain a permanent slump with millions either out of work or on low pay, and those conditions only ended in 1939 with the emergence of a nationally state-directed economy in a world war: a chilling reflection on and indictment of the workings of capitalism.

# Historic Notes

# Prison for resisting rate increase

ONE INCIDENT out of British working class history which deserves our recollection, especially at this time when Heseltine is preparing to bring out the guns and penalties against local councils who carry out their mandates, is the imprisonment of the entire Poplar Council in 1921. All of the Councillors were jailed for refusing to raise the rates. While they were in prison children from one of the local poor schools in Hutton, Essex sent letters of encouragement to the councillors who, from their cells wrote the following reply.

Brixton Prison.
Sept. 25th, 1921.

My Dear Boys and Girls,

We have received your kind and most welcome letters and thank you all for thinking of us; we are all as pleased with your remembrance as with the remembrance of our best friends.

We are very glad you all understand why we are here, we have not done anything we are ashamed of, our action was against bad wicked laws and all good men and women should protest and refuse to obey laws which are unjust and bad.

John Hampden who your teachers have told you about refused to pay unjust taxes and commenced a revolution which took off the head of King Charles. George Washington and his friends would not pay taxes which they considered wrong and his friends would not pay taxes which they considered wrong and this resulted in the establishement of the great Republic of America.....

We are in prison because our people in Poplar are poor and cannot pay the rates and taxes and we shall not do what the Judges told us we must do until Poplar gets money from the rich to help the poor.

We want you to grow up strong active loving men and women,we want you never to be contented while there is one single man or woman starving. Do not believe anybody who tells you that God made the rich and also made large numbers of people poor. God and Nature made men and women. It is the selfishness and greed of people that make poverty.

When you leave school join a Trade Union, do not rush into the Army or Navy, none of you need to do so unless you like even if you are in the Band, the girls are not obliged to go to domestic service either they can choose other trades and occupations, though often service is best at the moment.

When you have joined your Trade Union go to branch meetings, learn all you can about the Labour Movement, when you have done this you will soon understand that working people, whether they work in an office, a school, in a mine or on a railway, in a factory or on a ship, that all of them together create all the wealth of the world.

Labour is the only source of all wealth whether it is labour by hand or brain, it is the workers who should enjoy leisure, pleasure, holidays and all the good things of life and as you grow up keep steadily in your minds the fact that everybody rich or poor that gets something without themselves working, get it at the expense of those who do work. We hope all you boys and girls will live to see the day when there will be no rich or poor paupers and millionaires, because you and your fellow men and women will join together to work for each other and by so doing make possible the establishment of Christ's kingdom on earth.....

We have asked that this letter shall be read in each standard and all of you who are 10 years of age and over shall have a copy.

Here's our love and lots and lots of good wishes from

Yours Truly,

| | |
|---|---|
| S. March, Mayor of Poplar. | |
| Henry W. Soloman. | W. H. Green. |
| R. J. Hopwood. | D. M. Adams. |
| Edgar Lansbury. | A. Baker. |
| J. A. Jones. | T. E. Kelly. |
| G. J. Cressall. | J. J. Heales. |
| E. E. Williams. | J. H. Banks. |
| A. Partridge. | B. Fleming. |
| J. Russell. | Wm. Farr. |
| T. J. Goodway. | C. E. Sumner. |
| C. Petherick. | J. E. Oakes. |
| Minnie Lansbury. | John Scurr. |
| George Lansbury. | Julia Scurr. |
| Susan Lawrence. | J. J. Burgess. |
| J. T. O'Callaghan. | J. MacKay. |

The detested Poor Law Act of 1834 was not just a feature of the Victorian era. It was still in use well into the 20th century...

# 1921: The ‘Poplarism’ struggle

**WORKERS, JUNE 2014 ISSUE**

The aim of the Poor Law was always to punish the poor with **the threat of the workhouse, or "indoor relief", but by the** start of the 20th century that policy was beginning to erode. The Boards of Guardians who administered the Poor Law **increasingly used "outdoor relief" to keep the poor out of** workhouses. It was cheaper to give out a sack of coal or a voucher for boots than to put a whole family into the workhouse. But it took working class resistance to finish them off.


Mural in Hale Street, Poplar, depicting the rates rebellion. Painted by local resident Mark Francis in 1990, it was recently restored.

After World War 1 the British economy was shattered and unemployment rose. Ex-servicemen had priority for jobs, often replacing women who in wartime had done those jobs to keep their families. In the East End of London many men had worked on the Docks throughout the war, but in the post-war period markets collapsed and dock work slumped. During 1921 and 1922 fewer than

half of registered dockers had work on any one day and other local firms were laying off workers too.

Unemployed ex-servicemen were entitled to a small stipend, but dockers got nothing. Poverty affected many London boroughs, but was particularly acute in dock areas like Poplar. Men tramped the streets looking for work; their families went without food.

## Election

In 1919 a hitherto unknown kind of council was elected in Poplar, east London. For the first time it reflected the local electorate. The Municipal Alliance (Liberals, Tories and Coalitionists) was soundly defeated; 39 of 42 seats went to Labour. Industrial workers and trade unionists made up most of the council and Board of Guardians.

This council's actions on local poverty became known as Poplarism. Two policies in particular put them on a collision course with the London County Council (LCC) and central government: the level of outdoor relief set to keep the destitute out of the workhouse and the rates to pay for that. In the words of Poplar mayor George Lansbury their aim was to "use the poor law machinery to the utmost extent to maintain in decency and comfort the sick and the aged, the orphaned children and the able-bodied unemployed – in fact, all who for one reason or another were unable to maintain themselves".

The council also refused to pay starvation wages to workers they directly employed. London local authorities had agreed to recommend a minimum wage of £3 10s 6d (£3.52p) weekly in 1920. Poplar decided on £4 as a minimum, applicable equally to men and women. In practice this meant a 25 per cent rise for men, and nearly 70 per cent for women. A scheme of public works on roads and sewerage was planned to provide local jobs.

The Poplar Board of Guardians introduced a more generous system of outdoor relief, including extra allowances for unemployed families with children. It rejected the household means test that used the income of wider family members to determine relief. There were some government grants and subsidies, but most of these costs had to be borne by the rates.

This caused a huge problem in Poplar. The amount collected for each penny on the rates was much lower than most other London boroughs. That was due to widespread poverty, higher unemployment and poor quality housing with low rateable values. A further disparity was that all London boroughs had to pay the same central precept for water, Poor Law hospitals and the police. The council would have had to put rents up by 3s a week to collect enough rates to relieve the poor and pay the precept. They knew people could not afford that.

Poplar councillors protested to the LCC that this was grossly out of date and unfair: "the poor had to keep the poor". As their protests fell on deaf ears, Poplar council voted to take action. It would refuse to pay the precept – an illegal action that councillors knew could lead to prison. It did.

The government was reluctant to imprison the councillors, but the Labour-dominated LCC refused to back down in their legal claim for the full precept. In the face of massive local support, the councillors marched to court on 29 July 1921 holding banners which said "Poplar Borough Council marching to the High Court and possibly to prison".

Conditions were harsh for the 31 imprisoned councillors, but they did not back down despite the health of some councillors suffering badly. This became a huge embarrassment to the government. The rates protest was gathering massive public support and spreading to other boroughs. The ruling class feared increasing working class action only a few years after the Bolshevik revolution.

## Refusal

Attempts to get the prisoners to agree to face-saving compromises met a united refusal to leave prison. Eventually the government found a way around the law. It freed the Poplar councillors after three months' imprisonment and their convictions were quashed. A conference called to discuss a more equitable way of paying for services agreed a rebate mechanism for cross-London services.

The councillors had won. They marched out of prison triumphantly to the cheering of huge crowds. The Labour party was irritated by George Lansbury and by like-minded councils and trade unions who made decisions without waiting for the word from above.

Much later many of Poplar's policies became the norm. The Beveridge Report of 1942 accepted the principle of full maintenance for the unemployed. The Family Allowances Act of 1946 recognised that families with children needed extra allowances whether working or not. The hated household means test ended in 1941. The Equal Pay Act 1970 prohibited paying women less than men for the same job, although this law, like the others, has only been as good as the strength of workers fighting to enforce it. ■

# Historic Notes Lowestoft teachers strike

**It is obvious that unless teachers are prepared to accept a pitifully small increase this year then they will have a struggle on their hands. They would do well to examine their history as they prepare for the forthcoming battle.**

TEACHERS organised in the NUT have a proud record of struggle to improve conditions in education. Successful campaigns have been fought not only on salaries but on many aspects of education in the country.

One outstanding example of the courage , discipline and determination of NUT members in conducting a campaign is that of the Lowestoft schools strike in 1923.

In 1922 a special conference of the NUT reluctantly accepted a 5 per cent cut in salaries for 1923-24. National scales were recommended by the government, but it made it clear that these scales would not be imposed on local authorities. Encouraged by this some authorities sought to make more severe cuts than 5 per cent.

Lowestoft was one of these authorities. The authority announced a 10 per cent reduction in salaries for teachers. This was immediately challenged by the NUT. The education committee started to sack teachers. Acting as one, 167 members of the NUT withdrew their labour. The authority brought in replacement teachers but were astounded when the parents of 1600 pupils refused to send their children to school as a gesture of support for the strikers.

The authority reacted by issuing summonses on the parents and threatening to withdraw financial assistance from scholarship holders.

In the meantime the strikers opened classes in community halls for those pupils not attending schools.

Against great hostility the teachers persisted until eventually the Board of Education had to intervene. After inspecting the 'official' and 'unofficial' schools the Board withdrew financial aid from the Lowestoft authority. The 'official' schools were found to be so bad that the Board would not tolerate them.

The Lowestoft education committee quickly approached the NUT and negotiations began. An agreement which was highly favourable to the teachers was reached. Thus after 11 months of struggle the NUT members emerged triumphant.

Lowestoft was not an isolated case. Southampton, Tyneside and teachers in South Wales took on their employers in similar struggles.

# HISTORIC NOTES

# General Strike in Brighton

OUTSIDERS may see Brighton as a sleepy sea-side town full of elegant Regency houses, but behind that facade lies a chronic housing problem, massive unemployment, literally hundreds of unorganised sweat shops paying starvation wages. And a large industrial base with a proud tradition of organisation by its workforce. Nowhere was this organisation more in evidence than in 1926, during the General Strike.

The Organisation for the Maintenance of Supplies (the strike-breaking apparatus under the leadership of Winston Churchill) was established in the town and given prominence by the local press.

Notwithstanding this a mass meeting of AEU members was held on Monday 3 May, 1926 and carried without dissent: "That this meeting of AEU members, having followed the negotiations between the Government, the Mineowners, the Miners and the General Council of the TUC approve of the last body's resistance to any reduction of wages or increase of hours for miners, and pledges its support to the General Council's resistance to this attack on the workers." A strike committee was set up and pickets arranged.

Meanwhile other trade unionists in the district were also preparing for action. The railwaymen, the transport workers, the builders and the printers had all met and made their plans. These, with the engineers, were the key industrial workers in the area and they were all represented on the Council of Action, set up to assume overall control of the strike locally.

The General Strike descended with full force in Brighton and Hove on the Tuesday. It came suddenly and relentlessly. When the inhabitants of the two towns awoke, there were no trains, no trams, no buses and no newspapers. It was an unfamiliar world and Brighton was solid.

The Organisation for the Maintenance of Supplies was hard at it, trying to undermine the effects of the strike. There were many clashes, and after one when an unsuccessful attempt was made to run the trams, many workers were sentenced to jail terms.

Morale was high and the effects of the strike still snowballing, when it was called off, by the TUC. The men who had sacrificed so much to prove their solidarity with the miners were completely bewildered when it was realised that their heroic stand had brought them so little. And of course the employers were vicious in their attempts to press home their advantage. Employers tried to resist taking back the active strike leaders. A desperate rearguard action was taken by the workers, and virtually everyone got their jobs back and the unions remained intact.

Though they were busy at the time resisting the attacks by the employers, the miners were still not forgotten. The local work force may have been destitute but they still raised over £1500 for the alleviation of distress in the mining areas. Clothes were also collected and forwarded to necessitous districts. In addition, over fifty children were brought from mining towns and villages and found homes among the Brighton trade unionists.

And when it was all over and Mondism (the collaboration between the TUC and the Mond group of employers) ruled the day, the workers of Brighton still stood, bloody but unbowed, capable of fighting another day.

At a time when some are calling for a General Strike we need to get clearer about what happened last time there was one in Britain...

# 1926: The General Strike, and why it should not be mindlessly imitated

**WORKERS, NOV 2011 ISSUE**

In trade union history 4 May 1926 is a special date – the day the General Strike took place in Britain. Given all the myths that have sprung up and the siren calls for similar action often **heard now, it's particularly important to recognise what** actually happened.

In fact, the impetus for the General Strike resides in much earlier events which unfortunately led to our working class drifting into a tactically inept, inflexible form of combat totally unsuited for an on-going, largely economic battle against a fully prepared, stronger class enemy.

In 1914, to strengthen their bargaining hand, the miners had sponsored the formation of a Triple Industrial Alliance with railway and transport workers as a tactic to press wage agreements and settle hours of work. The idea that trade unions should be revolutionary organisations − called syndicalism − was popular before the war and part of the background to this move.

In 1919, when the miners threatened to strike for more money and shorter hours, the other members of the Alliance declared support. To deflect this, the government set up the Sankey Commission, which duly reported almost wholly in favour of the miners, recommending wage increases, a seven- instead of an eight-hour day and a system of public ownership for the coal industry. Mines had been taken under direct government control during the 1914−18 War and remained so for a few peacetime years. With strike notices withdrawn, miners got their shorter day and some wage increases, but nationalisation was rejected.

At the end of March 1921 the mines were returned to private ownership. The coal owners refused to modernise the industry but immediately announced sweeping wage reductions, imposing a lockout of union members at all collieries. Again, the railway and transport unions threatened a Triple Alliance strike.

This time Lloyd George's government responded with a State of Emergency, called reservists to colours, had machine-guns posted at pitheads and sent troops in battle order to working class areas. Last-minute negotiations petered out in confusion and the Triple Alliance

strike action was withdrawn, earning the event the derogatory name Black Friday.

In this episode an obvious weakness was that the transport and railway workers had no demands of their own but were placing their own livelihoods in danger simply for the sake of the miners. The miners resumed work on the owners' terms.

The 1923 boom in mining allowed negotiation of higher wages, but collapse soon followed and by 1925 with a return to the Gold Standard came calls for a reduction in wages. The newly formed TUC General Council, in an attempt to displace the Alliance, supported the miners. Realising conditions were not sufficiently in their favour, the government bought time in negotiations and brokered a deceptive peace in the mines with a nine-month coal subsidy. Tempt the gullible with temporary solace. The trade unions, swollen-headed by the effectiveness of their mere threat to strike, thought Prime Minister Baldwin had capitulated, and called the day Red Friday. Whereas the government – knowing it wasn't ready – had allowed an armistice in order to gain time for a later assault.

## Government preparations

At once the government took preparatory action in a strategic, class-conscious fashion. In September 1925, Organisation for the Maintenance of Supplies Committees were formed in the metropolitan boroughs. Also registration of potential volunteers began, leading to a pool of 100,000 blacklegs by the time of the conflict, many of them British fascists. 226,000 special policemen were created. An Emergency Committee on Supply and Transport was established, meeting weekly to work out a scheme to keep food and transport services running. England and Wales were divided into ten divisions, each under a Civil Commissioner with Coal, Finance and Food Officers beneath them. In the event of a stoppage they were charged together with local authorities to control road transport, food and fuel supplies. By the spring of 1926, stockpiles of food, coal and fuel had been built up.

May 1926: An armoured car escorts a food convoy down the East India Dock Road, east London.

Meanwhile after Red Friday, trade union leaders acted as if trouble could be averted, and during the nine months of coal subsidy, to avoid being provocative, made no strike preparations or battle plans. Although the trade unions had declared war and rhetoric still flourished, union leaders and most of the membership had not apparently really meant it. No preparations for a national strike on the trade union side were made until the 27 April when two trade union leaders met. There was unreasoning faith in the prospect of a settlement crossed with a lack of enthusiasm for action among the majority of the General Council. Most had pinned their hopes on the Samuel Commission which reported unfavourably for miners in March 1926 on the key issues of hours and wages. The miners refused to accept it.

## Vain hope

Three weeks of futile negotiation followed in April 1926. Unlike in 1925 the government, prepared for eventualities, was not interested in making concessions or obtaining a settlement. The trade unions still remained ridiculously hopeful of a settlement. But in the very final negotiations on Friday 29 April, the mine owners offered a wage cut on worse terms than the Samuel Commission and the government refused to interfere or continue with negotiations. An Emergency Powers Act was signed. On 30 April − the day on which

the subsidy ran out – mine owners posted notices in most pits and a million miners were locked out.

On 1 May the various unions declared they were prepared to hand over their autonomy to the General Council during the dispute (never a wise course of action) and voted to join a National Strike on 3 May. The General Council now deemed the conduct of the dispute to be completely in its hands, either to organise a strike or – increasingly from day one – to arrange a climb-down and call it off.

The "General Strike" was not quite a general, all-embracing strike; it was a partial national strike of some elements. Only one section of the labour movement was called out: railway workers, transport workers, iron and steel workers, builders, printers, dockers. The number of strikers was between 1.5 and 1.75 million. Other trades and occupations were kept back: engineers, electricians, woodworkers, shipyard workers, post office and telephone workers. More critical, the trade unions went into battle unready and with divided leadership.

Government departments sent out detailed instructions, troop movements were announced including two battalions of infantry that marched through Liverpool. All army and navy leave was cancelled. Hyde Park was closed to serve as a food depot.

The response to the strike call was overwhelming. Its completeness surprised everyone including the TUC and the Labour Party which feared by association of losing "bourgeois" respectability. Public transport was mightily affected, especially the trains, and the trams in London stopped running for the duration of the dispute. Despite much publicity, the volunteers on buses and elsewhere had a minimal effect, but government plans to use road haulage lorries worked as goods were transported around the country by non-unionised labour.

The TUC General Council called off the strike on 12 May. It had obtained no terms for the miners or for the other workers who had struck in sympathy with them. The miners continued on strike alone for six months and eventually were forced back to work on regional settlements, longer hours and lower wages with an ever-present pool of unemployed miners to undermine their efforts.

In many other trades and occupations employers sought to inflict setback and sack trade union leaders. Within a year the Trades Disputes and Trade Unions Act of 1927 was introduced forbidding sympathetic strikes and mass picketing. TUC membership fell from 5.5 million in 1925 to 3.75 million in 1930.

Tactics and strategy are the lifeblood of our class. Properly understood, a general strike is a political weapon reserved for the most propitious circumstances when a working class is ready to move to the revolutionary seizure of power; a measure to be deployed only

when a class wants to overthrow the exploiters' system and seize the levers of power. Unless such a level of understanding is there, a general strike should not be broached; other more irregular tactics should apply. ■

# Historic Notes — 1939 - Capitalism's 'Pact of Steel'

Daladier signs the Munich pact for France in 1938...

FORTY YEARS AGO, the socialist Soviet Union stood in mortal danger of attack from a combination of imperialist powers. In May 1939 Japanese forces invaded the Mongolian Peoples' Republic, threatening the eastern borders of the USSR. On May 22 the governments of Germany and Italy, flushed with their victories in Spain, concluded the "Pact of Steel", a blatantly predatory military alliance.

The invasion of Prague in March 1939 had been the direct consequence of the Anglo-French appeasers' attempts to divert the German threat at the Munich Conference in September 1938. The fascist governments of Poland and Hungary had joined Germany in the carve-up of Czechoslovakia. Finland and Rumania stood poised to join the counter-revolutionary onslaught on socialism.

The British and French governments dispatched a military mission to Moscow with orders to procrastinate and not tie themselves down to any detailed commitments. The western imperialists had no interest in concluding an alliance with the USSR, only in appearing to do so in response to their own peoples' desire for peace, and in order to put diplomatic pressure on Germany.

The world held its breath. The Soviet Union was isolated. It was vital to take advantage of the contradictions between the Imperialist powers.

The German-Soviet non-aggression pact signed in August 1939 has ever since brought forth hysterical condemnation from the enemies of socialism, being thwarted in their desire for a Nazi-Soviet conflict to achieve the "elimination of Bolshevism" and the sapping of Germany's military strength.

Those who applauded wildly at the Anglo-French betrayal of Czechoslovakia now viciously assailed the USSR for "stabbing Poland in the back", ignoring the fact that the territories occupied by the Soviet Army had been seized by Poland in the early 1920s egged on by the Anglo-French Entente. Regardless of the national composition of the actual population, it had been justified only by the property deeds of absentee Polish landowners.

The events of the summer of 1939 should serve as an exposé of the blatant hypocrisy of the British and French bourgeoisie. Serious only in their enthusiasm to see the forces of socialism crushed, they had no real desire to challenge the rising imperialism of Germany and Italy, only to divert it elsewhere, to find a temporary accommodation with the Axis powers.

There are some who make facile comparisons between 1939 and the present situation in the world, casting the Russian Imperialists in the role of the German Nazis. We reject utterly such simplistic theories. We know that our major enemy now is our own British Imperialism, linked with its Common Market partners in a New Order. It may no longer be a lion among empires, but who could possibly claim that a pack of scavenging jackals is a progressive force in world history?

...and soon after Nazi troops march into the castle in Prague.

# Historic Notes: The Nazi - Soviet non - aggression pact of 1939

"THE FUTURE of Germany must lie on her Eastern frontier in an empire to which the future sets no limits." Sir Oswald Mosley 1935.

"While it is no part of our policy or of American policy, to foster a quarrel between Japan and Soviet Russia, it would be no concern of ours, if such a quarrel developed into war, to prevent Japanese expansion in Eastern Siberia." L.S.Amery 1935 (Cabinet Minister 1922-29 and 1940-45).

The net was tightening around Russia again. She faced this encirclement as she had the Civil War, relying first on her own people (described last week), secondly on workers abroad, thirdly on splits within the imperialist camp.

In 1934 Russia joined the League of Nations. As a legacy of the 1st World War there was an immense popular feeling in Europe against war, and a desire for the League to work. By taking an unequivocal stand against fascism, war and imperialism, Russia became the spokesman for this feeling at the League.

France, fearing a third invasion from Germany, made a series of treaties with Russia as they both did with most Central European states. But in the end France would not act without British backing. Therefore the possibility of a united stand against fascism came to depend upon Chamberlain (Prime Minister from 1937 to 1940). As Maisky, the Russian ambassador, told Halifax (Foreign Secretary) "although Russia can win a war of defence singlehanded, she cannot singlehanded prevent war in general."

As Germany rearmed (with the compliance of the United Kingdom) a quandary appeared: Hitler was a bastion against communism in Europe; he was also a threat to the Empire. However, Chamberlain told the cabinet in 1938 that he "had established a degree of personal control over Herr Hitler. This control amounted to allowing Hitler all his demands, but not through aggression.

As a result, by 1938 all but Czechoslovakia in Central Europe had come to terms with fascism. Czechoslovakia alone was still a parliamentary democracy. She had an arms industry, strong western fortifications, the will to resist Hitler's demands and mutual defence treaties with both France and Russia.

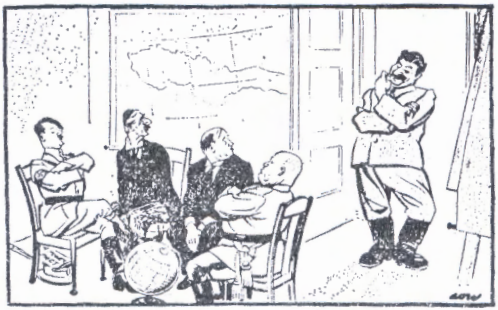
In August Hitler demanded the Sudetenlands. Chamberlain set out to break Czech resistance. On the radio he said, "How horrible, fantastic, incredible it is that we should be digging trenches and trying on gas-masks here because of a quarrel in a faraway country between people of whom we know nothing" (a noble sentiment from the leader of a party with such a tradition of pacifism).

At Munich, Mussolini, Hitler, Deladier (the French Prime Minister) and Chamberlain agreed the emasculation of Czechoslovakia. The Czech Prime Minister was not even invited to be present, nor any Russian delegate. The careful construction of the anti-fascist front was destroyed, whilst in Spain a blind eye was turned to the blatant breaking of the neutrality agreement by Germany and Italy, and they continued to stop help going to the Republicans.

Attempts by Molotov to get an Anglo-Soviet alliance continued. In March 1939 German tanks had rolled into Prague and Hitler put his demands to Poland. During May Molotov warned the British Government that if meaningful talks were not begun, Soviet policy was liable to be altered. Lord Halifax (Foreign Secretary) wrote in November 1938 "It is one thing to allow German expansion in Central Europe, which to my mind is perfectly natural, but we must be able to resist German expansion in Western Europe or our whole position is undermined" and in April 1939 "It was desirable not to estrange Russia, but always to keep her in play." So in late July military talks were agreed to. Negotiations now reached the level of farce.

Admiral Sir Reginald Ranfurly-Plunkett-Ernle-Erle-Drax was sent in a chartered steamer, the cheapest and slowest method of travel. He had been instructed to take the talks "very slowly . . . Agreement may take months to reach. "Not a senior member of the defence staff, he was unable to answer a single important question. On the 21st August, talks were broken off, the same day Ribbentrop was invited from Berlin; on the 23rd the Nazi-Soviet non-aggresssion pact was signed. Hitler fixed the invasion date of Poland for 25th August, postponed to September 1st. It was not until September 3rd that his backbenchers forced Chamberlain to declare war. To the end he had sought another Munich, a settlement which would have left the road to Moscow open.

Russia had been prepared to resist fascist aggression in 1936, 1938 and 1939. The refusal of the Chamberlain government to form an alliance left the Soviets little choice. The course of events was already clear to the Russian leadership. Litvinov had predicted in March that "France was practically done for" and that Hitler would soon rule "from the Bay of Biscay to the Russian Frontier". The non-aggression pact allowed a further 18 months of preparation before Hitler's inevitable "drive to the East". The blind and disastrous prejudice and pressure for war against Russia that characterises foreign policy today is not without precedent.



*What, no chair for me?*

# HISTORIC NOTES 1939 - 1940

# THE FIGHT AT SWIFT SCALES SEVEN AGAINST THE STATE

IN THE rise to power of Hitler, connived at and encouraged by the German and British ruling class and the Vatican, war hysteria began. By 1938 rearmament had got slowly under way and new laws in the event of a state of war in Britain were introduced, among which was the banning of all strikes. Elaborate machinery was established to provide arbitration but, under the pretext of prosecuting war, it was an attempt to break the back of organised trade union workers.

Meantime there was more and more collusion with the Hitler mob by the British Government and constant prodding to turn Britain against the USSR. This is history and these machinations fell short of accomplishment.

Now began in interim the struggle of engineers who with others had suffered severe unemployment and were suddenly in demand. Notwithstanding this, it was they, the engineers, above all others who said that this ruling class would not conduct a war against Hitler fascism and use it, as in 1914, for further imperialist sallies and to make war on the workers here in a different way. For the ruling class both envied and admired Hitler who had destroyed the great labour movement of Germany, enslaved the German worker and set up a Labour Front. Here they hoped to do the same.


Reg Birch who undertook his own defence at the trial. Picture shows him some years later speaking at Tower Hill in denunciation of the anti-trade union Industrial Relations Act.

At this time the Swift Scales factory in London, like all other light engineering factories, was on subcontract in armaments manufacture making aircraft products. As in all such factories the introduction of skilled workers, engineers rather than scale makers, began the process of organisation. Many skirmishes arose, as the workers taught the employer the true meaning of trade unionism in a factory, culminating in the dismissal of the convenor.

This began a 100 per cent strike, a six week strike which in '39 and '40 was of great historical length and well nigh unprecedented. It was sustained, though clearly against the law, by the great solidarity of engineering workers everywhere, especially in London.

The factory, though not a large one, was singled out to be broken. Because of the immediate influx of skilled workers trade union organisation was quickly built into a strong trade union factory, with a strong political direction. At one stage and in prelude an enquiry was conducted on the state of industrial relations, emphasis being given to the series of strikes which had taken place. Clearly, an example was required to be made of the engineers, an example to all.

The enquiry was under the new machinery, a tribunal including the ex-president of the Engineering Employers Federation and the immediate ex-president of the AEU, JR Little, from which it emerged that a strong Communist Party branch had been built, that regular Marxist classes took place of many of the workers other than communists; and great concern was expressed that here was a factory which three years in a row struck on May Day, war or no - the only factory to do so; that clearly here was a factory, though engaged in war production, which openly opposed the conduct of the war. At this time the Daily Worker, then the newspaper of the 'Communist'Party, had reneged, yet still the opposition to Government policy was strong and growing, and likely to be more contagious among engineering workers. Something had to be done. Hence sack the convenor.

Inevitably the process of law was begun, very slow and laborious. Still the strike held. Special branch police followed workers everywhere, spied on the mass meeting and strike committee meetings. So things continued to the point of charging seven shop stewards, six men and one woman. But the strike held. After a couple of sessions at smaller courts where the penalties would be smaller, the cases were referred to the Central Criminal Court, the Old Bailey, and a show trial began. Clearly the establishment wanted a great public example, a severe sentence superceding lesser sentences in lower courts, no doubt in the hope of intimidating all engineering workers.

The memories of engineers' struggles in the '14-'18 War haunted the ruling class. It could not be allowed to take such form in 1940. The 'National' Government was united against this little band of workers and all that they signified. Bevin, the Minister of Labour, applied Regulation 58AA. Within this was the phrase if "he", the Minister, apprehended a dispute, he could act, whether a dispute took place or not. At the trial six stewards were represented by counsel, the seventh, Reg Birch, electing to defend himself by agreement with the other defendants and factory committee. War regulations provided for a seven-man jury, the judge being Sir Gerald Dodson, Recorder.

All pleaded not guilty, Birch arguing on their behalf non-recognition of the oppressive Act, arguing for the right to organise in defence of wages and working conditions, the right of stewards to function within the factory to carry out their duties, the holding of mass meetings when required. All this the law forbade in what were termed "protected places", namely the factory of course. Though these workers were not criminals, they stood in the Central Criminal Court No. 2 because they opposed the conduct of the war.

The trial lasted two or three days. When Birch spoke of the workers the judge interjected with such comments as "we are all workers". Leaning towards the press bench and the jury box he made sure that they had taken the full weight of such intellectual observations. The trial of course aroused much public interest and during Birch's defence the court was crowded with legal by-standers in their gowns. The Lord Mayor and the like, other judges and Freemen in full regalia looked on, rather like Covent Garden box holders at the opera, all to see this curious little criminal worker perform.

Birch sought to subpoena Bevin, the Minister of Labour, since if he apprehended a potential dispute or a dispute this was a state of mind and he should present himself to answer in person what it was he thought at the time of instituting proceedings. He did not present himself. Whilst engineering workers could be exhibited the establishment was not going to suffer such ignominy or possible ridicule. The Minister of Labour sent a deputy

After adjournment the jury returned a verdict of guilty. The sentence was to be three years imprisonment and a £1800 fine on each. In the interim, on the day of sentence, Hitler attacked the USSR - June 22, 1941. At last the Government could extricate itself from its own stupidity, for engineers and trade unionists everywhere were fully alerted; solidarity and support were enormous and a threat to the Government.

The prisoners, the defendants, locked in cells when the court was adjourned during the day but allowed on bail to sleep at home at night, were offered the option of going to prison or behaving, for with the Soviet Union in the war the direction would now change. Their intervention would force a war against Hitler and the Nazis: the workers of Britain would support the USSR as their ally, the great Red Army and the heroic people. This they did and the conduct of the war did change.

The option offered was at first subject to disagreement among the seven, not all of them convinced that the sentence was unjust, the law oppressive and needing to be opposed and smashed. However, ultimately the Birch line was adopted by all. So the USSR, Stalin, the Red Army saved the seven from prison. Birch and the convenor remained unemployed for a time, though skilled engineers were in great demand. That these two skilled workers were unacceptable was most embarrassing. Ultimately, with the direct intervention of the Minister of Labour, Bevin, the president of the AEU, Tanner, and others they were placed in factories with sundry imprecations to behave.

Of course in each case they esteemed their trade union responsibilities aright and promptly began anew organising where they had been separately dispatched. But that is another story.

Blind-folded Justice with scales on top of the Central Criminal Court, the Old Bailey, where the Smith Scales shop stewards were tried, found justice weighted in favour of capitalism and blind to the needs of the working class.

# HISTORIC NOTES Betteshanger Colliery, Kent, 1941

WHEN is a strike not a strike? When it is a stoppage of work. During the Second World War, strikes were officially outlawed. State intervention into collective bargaining came in the form of the Statutory Regulation and Order, 1305. Order 1305 was introduced by the government in May, 1941. It declared both strikes and lock-outs illegal. Significantly, only 2 employers were ever prosecuted under the order - as against over 6000 workers.

In December 1941, the Betteshanger Colliery in Kent provided the setting for the testing of the practicability of prosecuting large numbers of men for going on strike illegally.

The initial struggle concerned allowances for work in a difficult seam where working conditions changed almost weekly. The dispute was referred to the compulsory arbitration court, the National Arbitration Tribunal. The arbitrators awarded in favour of the management. The men rejected the award, walked out, and 4000 were on strike. Although the strike was illegal it had the backing of the local union officials.

The Secretary for the Mines, a former miners' leader, took action with Cabinet backing. The first step was to select 1000 underground workers for attack. But charges against 1000 workers could only be handled satisfactorily if the men pleaded guilty, because if each man pleaded not guilty the proceedings could last for months. So the Union was asked if they would instruct their members to plead guilty and accept a decision on a few test cases which they obligingly did.

Three union officials were sent to prison. The Branch Secretary was sentenced to two months with hard labour; the local President and a member of the local executive each received one month with hard labour; 35 men were each fined £3 or one month's imprisonment and nearly 1000 were fined £1 or fourteen days. Yet the strike continued.

Protests from the working class came against the severity of the sentences, particularly against the jailing of three union officials. Many of the miners in the area were in the Home Guard and Kent was in the front line.

There was talk of sympathetic strikes - and the only men who could call off the strike were in jail. So the Secretary of Mines went down to Kent accompanied by the President of the National Federation of Mine Workers. After 5 days of re-opened negotiations, an agreement was signed in prison between the colliery management and the Kent Miners Union.

Apart from a few face-saving words, the agreement gave the miners what they wanted. The officials were released after 11 days imprisonment. And the mines re-opened; in the first week back the normal output of coal nearly trebled.

The lessons learnt from this miners victory were that the government could only prosecute on a large scale if everyone co-operated. It had irretrievably weakened the authority of Order 1305.

Of the men who were fined, only actually 9 paid. The county jail could only accomodate a few at a time, and it would have taken several years to work through the list. The Clerk of Justices asked for guidance - and the company offered to pay the fines since the cost to them would be so much less profits tax.

But the government informed them that on no account should they do this. Instead, the Court was advised not to invoke the fines ... (In 1950 the NUM asked formally that the fines paid should be returned. They were told in the appropriate civil servant manner to forget it.)

# Stalin - an anti-fascist revolutionary leader

TWENTY five years ago, on March 5, 1953, Joseph Stalin died. The man to whom, not just the international working class, but the whole world owed such a tremendous debt as the leader of the forces playing the major role in smashing the powers of fascist aggression has continued to this day to attract, as the leader of the first successful socialist state and society, the vilification of all enemies of the working class.

Indeed, the name of Stalin has become a touchstone for testing the true political intentions of many who profess to be sympathetic to the working class and its historic mission of liberating mankind from exploitation. Revisionists, Trotskyists and social democrats, no less than capitalists and exploiters of the people the world over, expose themselves by their hatred of this great socialist and defender of Marxism-Leninism, the ideology of the working class.

Let us workers of Britain make sure that our veneration for Stalin outmatches the hatred of him expressed by our class enemies as our love for socialism will one day triumph in revolution.

## Historic Notes

# Stalin - Architect of socialism. Born 21 Dec 1879

STALIN! Even today, 100 years after his birth and over a quarter of a century since his death, the very name summons up violent emotions - emotions of love and respect in those who fight for peace and socialism, of hatred in the enemies of the working class and progress. This week we begin a three-part series on Stalin to coincide with the centenary of his birth.

The world owes much to Stalin. He led the Russian people in their struggle for national sovereignty, led the whole world in the fight against fascism and saved the world from the Nazis during the Second World War. Throughout his long life, from 1879 to 1952, he never lost faith in the abilities of his people.

Stalin rose to leadership in Russia at a time of devastation. Millions of Russian workers and peasants had been killed and maimed during the First World War. When it ended, Imperial Germany robbed the country of a third of its population and of the richest industrial and agricultural territories. The Revolution, in which Stalin played a vital role, was followed by civil war and imperialist invasion by no less than 14 countries.

When the invaders had been driven out by the Russian people, led by their Communist Party, the country was destitute. Famine was rife, most of the livestock had been slaughtered, all the coal mine and iron works had been destroyed, along with most of the railways. On top of this, the proletariat of Europe had been unable to successfully make a revolution and join with the young Soviet state. In the face of the likes of Trotsky who said that the revolution could not be sustained, Stalin, a beacon of clarity, declared that socialism could be constructed in one country.

By 1928, under Stalin's leadership - he had assumed that responsibility following the death of that brilliant communist, Lenin, in 1924 - pre-1914 levels of production had been restored. Yet these were levels which had sufficed to provide only one man in ten with a rifle in 1916. Another attack on socialist Russia was inevitable, and an attack made by armies fresh and rearmed, unlike the war of intervention in 1919. To survive, the Soviet Union had to transform itself economically.

Stalin in 1945.

In this context, the fulfillment of the three 5-year plans (of 1928, 1933 and 1938) rank as one of the greatest feats of humanity of all time, both in political terms and in terms of sheer achievement.

Nor was it all hard work. During the period of the plans literacy increased from 45 to 81 per cent of the population, and free medical care was introduced. After 1928, no worker lacked the basics of reasonable food, housing and clothing, and the standard of living gradually improved. A vast new range of cultural activities were opened to all, at the excellent standard we know so well. This is why the capitalists call Stalin a monster - because he cared for the working class!

The newspaper reporter Alexander Werth, attending a local cinema in Moscow in 1941, wrote: "The audience cheered loudly only once - when Stalin appeared on the screen. He must enjoy general popularity with the ordinary people here; for people don't cheer in the dark unless they really feel like it." No wonder!

1933 was a key year in the struggle of the Soviets: Hitler and the Nazis were ushered into power in Germany. Their job was to crush communism, first at home, and then abroad, and the capitalists of Europe lost no time reminding the Nazis of their duty. Lord Rothermere of the Daily Mail put it simply in 1935: "The sturdy young Nazis of Germany are Europe's guardians against the communist danger ... Germany must have elbow room ... Once Germany has acquired the additional room she needs in Western Russia ... The diversion of Germany's reserves of energy and organising ability into Bolshevik Russia would help to restore the Russian people to a civilised existence, and perhaps turn the tide of world trade once more towards prosperity ..."

Such were the threats faced by Stalin and the Russian people. Industrialisation was no longer just a necessity for socialism, it was a matter of survival. The race was on, and it was a race against time!

NEXT WEEK: How Stalin fought for and won that time.

**HISTORIC NOTES** **February 2nd,1943.**

# Victory at Stalingrad

## The battle that saved the world

HITLER invaded Russia on 22nd June, 1941, almost to the day the anniversary of Napoleon's attempt. He met with the same end, with the difference only that Hitler ruled less long. His Reich foundered at Stalingrad.

Whatever tactical reasons - inability to subdue the British among them - determined Hitler's turn East, anti-Bolshevism had always been at the core of Nazism.

The Russians had to be forced back, step by step, and they even counter-attacked as soon as December 1941 to safeguard Moscow which Stalin refused to abandon.

Yet despite the initial swiftness of the Nazi advance, and the losses they inflicted, the Russians extricated the bulk of their armies from the planned encirclement. The invaders found themselves lured ever deeper into inhospitable terrain and above all into the implacable hatred of the people. So tenacious was their resistance that 1942 saw the Nazi thrust limited to the South.

In August, 1942, they turned East toward Stalingrad. The aim was to capture this vital crossing over the Volga and hit at Moscow from beneath. In September the Nazis were held, and in spite of intense efforts could not dislodge the Red Army. In mid-November the Red Army counter-attacked and surrounded the Nazis. The besiegers were now besieged.

The German Army at Stalingrad was trapped, their efforts to break out of the blockade unavailing. On 31st January, 1942 von Paulus, commander of the German Sixth Army, surrendered, the first German Field-Marshal ever to surrender - along with scores of generals and some 90 thousand men, all that remained of a once-proud army.

No-one can fail to admire the strategic wisdom of the decision to hold at Stalingrad, the tactical mastery of the counterencirclement, the technical equality not superiority in armament achieved by a country which a few years before had been among the most backward.

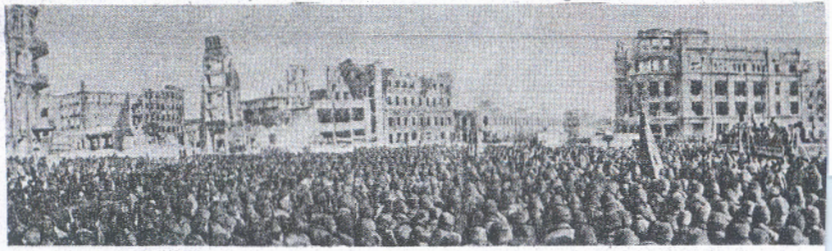
But what ultimately decided the outcome was the fighters. "We should get as close to the enemy as possible, so that his air force could not bomb our forward units. Every Nazi soldier must be made to feel that he was living under the muzzle of a Russian gun, always ready to treat him to a fatal dose of lead."

Stalingrad was where modern street fighting was born, where

individuals held key points, houses street corners, grain elevators against whole armies, where the workers of the tank factories climbed into the tanks they had just made and drove them into battle. This indomitable will gave victory to the Russians.

Mao Tsetung hailed the resistance at Stalingrad as a decisive victory in his article A Turning Point in World War II written long before the final capitulation. For ourselves the lesson, as it was for the Chinese, is that the outward ferocity of the aggressor betrays inner weakness.

Resistance itself, which began the moment a Nazi set foot on Soviet soil, was the means to victory, culminating in the unshakeable resistance of Stalingrad. Although ours is not a war of guns, the same spirit and tactics apply in our war of resistance against the destruction of our homeland by an alien bourgeoisie.



Below: A meeting in Stalingrad in February 1943 to celebrate the defeat of the German army and the liberation of the city.



# Spirit of Stalingrad

It was a Marxist-Leninist, Mao Tsetung, who first pointed the world-wide significance of Stalingrad. Even today it is difficult for us to understand why Hitler's armies, which had cut through Europe, should have been checked by the British airmen, the little boats at Dunkerque and the merchant seamen who kept the supplies going to Britain and the Soviet Union. Nevertheless, when the Nazis turned instead on Russia, everyone imagined they would fall as easily as most of Europe had done.

At a recent public meeting in London, the speaker pointed out that Stalingrad was no foregone conclusion.

For each of the two huge opposing armies, victory was indispensable and bitterly contested. The Nazi defeat cannot be ascribed to military incompetence, for they were excellent soldiers, from von Paulus, their commander, down. The Russian people on Stalin's order - Stalin who had refused to leave Moscow when imperilled - simply refused to move. They defended the narrow nine-mile strip of town with their backs against the Volga, laying down their lives for every fragment of brickdust, until they counter-attacked, encircling the besieging invaders. Von Paulus, in consideration of the lives of his men and in defiance of Hitler's orders, surrendered.

Could anyone today, the speaker asked, after Stalingrad, think that armies should once again be thrown at the Russians? That was Hitler's plan, a plan dear to the bourgeoisie even from the time of the Crimean War. Yet such a plan was being advocated today by some calling themselves 'Marxist-Leninists'. Stalin had the word for such 'theorists'. Would the name Marxist-Leninist become tainted as the name communist was with the advent of Khrushchev in Russia? Who would wish to enlist under their bourgeoisie in a war against Russia knowing the fearful consequences of modern warfare, of the neutron bomb?

Stalingrad aroused amongst the British an interest so passionate and enduring that workers here never believed the 'cold war' theories of 'Russian aggression', coming as they did from a Churchill whom they repudiated at the war's end. Nor are European workers anywhere taken in by today's clamour for war. Even at the outset of the '39 war, the British were not ready to fight at the request of Hitler's former friends, the Whitehall establishment. The need became paramount with the invasion of socialist Russia. The problem now, in Europe as in Russia, is the same as that facing the British during the war - the fight against one's own rulers who brought Hitler to power to destroy socialism, and who used the war as a pretext for even more exploitation at home. The Russians' was a fight against such an oppression, to which the young everywhere owe their lives. Recently, a British trade unionist and communist on a delegation visiting Stalingrad, now beautifully rebuilt, was asked to speak there. His words, broadcast on the radio for all to hear were: "You wrongly call your city Volvograd. The whole world will always call it Stalingrad."

**Historic Notes**

# 'Many sided and gifted' - Stalin during the war

**This article is the last in the current series written to celebrate the one hundredth anniversary of Stalin's birth.**

"WE HAVE only to kick in the door and the whole rotten structure will come crashing down," boasted Hitler in anticipation of his new Eastern empire. But, just to make sure, Operation Barbarossa was the biggest war operation ever mounted. Three million troops from Germany, Austria, Italy, Hungary, Rumania and Finland attacked the Soviet Union on June 22, 1941.

The now well-practised Wehrmacht struck with catastrophic effect. Within two months they had advanced 400 miles. The Soviet airforce was practically destroyed, whole armies were wiped out, figures of one million killed or captured seem inconceivable. Yet Hitler's plan had failed.

German strategy was to destroy the Russian ability to resist, yet to their bewilderment resistance continued. Thus a new stratagem was forced, a drive on Moscow whose capture would surely do the trick (shades of Bonaparte! ).

Early on, Stalin was made Supreme Commander in Chief. For the next four years, for up to eighteen hours a day, he personally supervised the Soviet military effort. Marshal Zhukov, who became Deputy Supreme Commander, describes in his memoirs how Stalin's study was the place where Headquarters decisions were made.

"Often sharp arguments arose at the Committee meetings. Views were expressed in definite and sharp terms. Stalin would usually walk up and down past the table, carefully listening to those who argued. He himself was short spoken and would often stop others with remarks like, 'Come to the point'. He opened the sittings without any preliminaries and spoke in a quiet voice and only on the main points. If no agreement was reached at the sitting, a commission would be formed of representatives of the two sides to report back. This happened only when Stalin himself had not arrived at a definite decision."

As the crisis deepened, he addressed the Soviet people by radio for the first time. All those who heard the speech remember its effect. The ability of the Bolshevik Party, with Stalin at its head, to mobilise all the people immediately is one that only a genuine leadership can possess.

By early December 1941 German troops were in the suburbs of Moscow, but there the advance ground to a halt. The entire adult population of Moscow had been mobilised. Historians quote the dramatic effects of the Russian distances and weather, the Russian troops also suffered from these conditions. At 40 degrees below freezing a counter attack drove the Germans back, demonstrated Russian resiliance and showed the ultimate fate of the Wehrmacht.

The areas lost had contained 40 per cent of the population and had produced a third of the National Product, but factories had been moved wholesale behind the Urals. Those left were destroyed. Partisan units were an integral part of Soviet tactics. By 1945 Soviet war production exceeded Germany's. During that time 20,000,000 Soviet citizens were killed. Victory was achieved by unstinting sacrifice. Defence did not mean retiring to a prepared position. It meant unceasing counter attacks with what ever forces were available. In this way the fascist forces were halted, allowing the strategic offensives to begin. Most of Stalin's conflicts with his General Staff arose out of his continued insistence on attacks. His faith in the ability and willingness of people to make the necessary sacrifice; the steel-like determination to victory at the centre was crucial.

"It was only once I saw him somewhat depressed. That was at the dawn of June 22, 1941, when his hopes that war could be avoided were shattered."

Zhukov leaves us with these further descriptions: "Though slight in stature and undistinguished in outward appearance, Stalin was nevertheless an imposing figure. Free of affectation and mannerisms, he won the heart of everyone he talked with. His visitors were invariably struck by his candour and his uninhibited manner of speaking, and impressed by his ability to express his thoughts clearly, his inborn analytical turn of mind...

"One seldom saw him laughing, and when he laughed he did so quietly, as though to himself. But he had a sense of humour, and appreciated sharp wit and a good joke.

"His tremendous capacity for work, his ability quickly to grasp the meaning of a book, his tenacious memory - all these enabled him to master, during one day, a tremendous amount of factual data, which could be coped with only by a very gifted man.

"Many-sided and gifted as Stalin was, his disposition could not be called even. He was a man of strong will, reserved, fervent and impetuous."

Less than four years after the full might of the Germany army rolled into Russia, the tables were turned. The Russian army and people, never at any time facing less that 70 per cent of the Nazi forces, had triumphed. Hitler lay dead in the ruins of Berlin, and the whole world had been saved from fascism.

Finally at the end of the war, Zhukov took the salute at the victory parade. Stalin told him, "I am too old to review parades. You do it, you are younger."

Stalin photographed as a young man by the Russian police.

Seventy years ago the world held its breath as Nazi troops came up to the gates of the Soviet Union's capital city...

# 1941: The battle for Moscow

**WORKERS, OCT 2011 ISSUE**

Struggle and sacrifice on behalf of workers everywhere should never be neglected. This is particularly true of the battle for Moscow, the Soviet capital, in 1941, which receives slight attention compared to those for Stalingrad, Kursk or Berlin. The battle was immense, shifting over a territory the size of France.

It was not only the greatest battle in the Second World War but also the largest battle ever fought between two armies, involving more than seven million soldiers of the Soviet Union and Nazi Germany and lasting for 6 months from September 1941 to April 1942. The Battle of Moscow was decisive in the reversal of fortunes for Nazi Germany, benefiting workers around the world.

The Soviet Union paid a dreadful price - the loss of 926,000 soldiers killed - for inflicting on Hitler's armies the first real defeat they had ever suffered. Previously the German armies had easily crushed Poland, Norway, Denmark, Netherlands, Belgium and France, and had an invincible aura. Hitler's goal was for another swift victory in the east so that he could then return to the war against Britain, but fascist Germany's blitzkrieg tactics, previously an unstoppable whirlwind, failed to triumph. After the Battle of Moscow, the myth of the invincibility of German soldiers perished, although three more years of bitter military conflict lay ahead.

Scanning the skies above Moscow for German aircraft.

In 1941, Germany had the best equipped army in the world and Hitler envisaged another rapid campaign - to wipe out the Soviet Union, take control of the resources of Russia and the Ukraine and ensure Germany could never be starved and blockaded of materials as in World War One. Hitler considered Russia as Germany's 'lebensraum' (living space). Initially, when they invaded on 22 June 1941, the Germans did catch the Soviets off guard. In the early weeks and months there was disarray and confusion. However, even in these first few days and weeks, there was solid evidence that some of the Soviet forces were capable of inflicting setbacks on the Wehrmacht (German army), even in circumstances of retreat. And on the second day of the war, the Soviet Union created the Council of Evacuation that would eventually lead to the dismantling and transporting of thousands of factories to the safety of the eastern regions of the country, out of the control of the Nazis.

German forces unleashed 3,550 tanks and 2,770 aircraft, backed up by another half million troops from Finland and Romania, and pushed deeper into the Russian heartlands, advancing 450 miles in the first month. Germany's Army Group Centre was obviously heading for Moscow because of the city's immense importance to socialism.

Before the coming of winter, German military operations aimed to capture Moscow, depriving the Soviet Union of its strategic and

political centre, which housed the Soviet government, contained a massive industrial and armaments centre and was the country's key transportation hub. Its seizure would have been a devastating blow. Nazi goals were to level Moscow to the ground and make it uninhabitable.

Despite large initial advances, the Wehrmacht was slowed by Soviet resistance, in particular during the Battle of Smolensk, which delayed the German advance until mid-September, disrupting the blitzkrieg.

At this stage, Moscow was vulnerable, but Hitler ordered the attack to turn south and eliminate Russian forces at Kiev − which resulted in a huge triumph for the Germans. Their advance on Moscow was resumed on 2 October 1941. Autumn 1941 was the lowest point reached throughout the war. But since 22 June, the Luftwaffe had lost 1,603 aircraft with a further 1,028 damaged planes. As a result, the balance of power in the air was shifting.

The initial advance resulted in two huge encirclements around the towns of Vyzama and Briansk which pocketed 660,000 Russian troops. But by mid-October, the Russian rainy period commenced, turning the roads and countryside into muddy quagmires. The German tank forces were reduced to a crawl, often unable to move. Through the great forests which lie in front of Moscow, only narrow trails were negotiable and it required only small Russian forces to block these. Their cavalry became very active during this period, frequently moving through the woods and getting behind German lines where they laid mines and ambushed supply columns.

## Stretched supply lines

By late October the German forces were worn out, with only a third of their motor vehicles still functioning, infantry divisions at a third or half strength, and serious logistics issues preventing the delivery of warm clothing and other winter equipment to the front. German supply lines were being stretched beyond their effective limit and the colossal loss of material on the eastern front − without having won a decisive victory − was bleeding the German economy.

Armed with heavy shovels, Moscow women and elderly men build a tank trap to halt German Panzers advancing on the Russian capital. More than 100,000 citizens worked from mid-October until late November digging ditches and building other obstructions.

On 13 October, Stalin's decision to stay in Moscow even though some parts of government such as the General Staff and various civil government offices were evacuated to Kuibyshev proved a key turning point, though there was a temporary panic among Muscovites. The Soviets created a reserve of army units around Moscow. Moscow was placed under martial law. The civilian population were mobilised in the war effort..

Moscow itself was transformed into a fortress. 250,000 women and teenagers worked, building trenches and anti-tank moats around Moscow, moving almost three million cubic meters of earth with no mechanical help. Moscow's factories were hastily transformed into military complexes: the automobile factory was turned into a submachine gun armory, a clock factory was manufacturing mine detonators, the chocolate factory was producing food for the front, and automobile repair stations were repairing damaged tanks and vehicles.

Additionally, Moscow was now a target of massive air raids, although these caused only limited damage because of extensive anti-aircraft defences and effective civilian fire brigades.

Russian winters are as cold as the summers are hot. Snow starts in October or November and continues until April or May. Most of the

German troops lacked winter clothing, resulting in over 100,000 cases of frostbite. Many Axis vehicles could not withstand the cool temperatures, resulting in cracked engine blocks. Their air force was grounded much of the time.

To stiffen the resolve of the Red Army and boost the civilian morale, Stalin ordered the traditional military parade celebrating the 1917 Revolution to be staged in Red Square on 7 November. Soviet troops paraded past the Kremlin and then marched directly to the front. The parade had a great symbolic significance in demonstrating Soviet resolve.

Of the two German armoured prongs, the 2nd Panzer Army operating to the south of Moscow got as far as the city of Tula where it finally ground to a halt. In the north, the 3rd and 4th Panzer Armies pushed across the frozen Moscow-Volga canal, but no further. By early December, some leading German units were able to see some of Moscow's buildings with binoculars.

## Fresh troops

On 5 December 1941, fresh Soviet Siberian troops – comprising 18 divisions and prepared for winter warfare—attacked along with new and reconstituted units of the Red Army. By January 1942, they had driven the Wehrmacht back between 62 and 160 miles, ending the immediate threat to Moscow.

It was the closest that Axis forces ever got to capturing the Soviet capital. Though the Wehrmacht had been forced to retreat before, during the Yelnya Offensive (September 1941) and at the Battle of Rostov, Moscow marked a turning point: it was the first time since the Wehrmacht began its conquests in 1939 that it had been forced into a retreat from which it did not recover the initiative.

Seventy years may have passed but we still remember the first great Soviet victory, the first great loss for Nazi Germany. ■

Seventy years ago, the Soviet Union's Red Army - in a colossal tank battle - smashed Nazi Germany's last major offensive operation, changing the balance of forces in the world...

# The Battle of Kursk – preparation, production and bravery

**WORKERS, JUL 2013 ISSUE**

**AFTER THE Soviet Union's victory at Stalingrad there was a** pause while both sides prepared for the next phase of the armed conflict. By early April 1943, information from Red **Army intelligence and the "Lucy" spy network indicated what** German intentions were. In an attempt to get back the strategic initiative, the German Wehrmacht intended to assemble two huge Panzer concentrations in order to pinch out the vulnerable Kursk Salient, which projected like a fist from the rest of the Soviet front line.

Memorial: Russian tanks that fought at the Battle of Kursk on display at the site of the world's largest tank battle.
Photo: Byelikova Oksana/shutterstock.com

By mid-April Marshall Zhukov and Stalin had formulated a plan to thwart Nazi goals. Thinking it would be risky for Soviet forces to go over to the offensive in order to pre-empt the enemy offensive, they opted to wear out the German army on the Soviet defences, smashing their tanks and then, by introducing fresh reserves, going over to a general offensive and beating them.

The Wehrmacht assembled a huge military force: 50 divisions (16 Panzer or motorised ones including 9 of the German army's finest divisions) comprising about 900,000 men with around 10,000 guns and mortars and nearly 3,000 tanks, 2,000 aircraft including elite Luftwaffe units and another 20 divisions deployed on the flanks as reinforcements.

But the scale of Soviet preparations was even greater. To defend the salient, immense numbers of troops were concentrated in and behind it. Elaborate defence lines were constructed of a complexity and depth far exceeding those which had protected Moscow in 1941 (see Workers October 2011). The system was not only frontally strong, but strong in depth, stretching for 110 miles from front to rear.

Behind the salient, in the 'Steppe' Reserve Front, was a further defensive system, and beyond that another line of defences on the east bank of the River Don.

Inside the salient were the Central Front and the Voronezh Front, whose combined artillery totalled 19,300 guns plus 920 of the devastating rocket mortars ("Stalin organs" or "Katyusha"). Their combined armoured divisions had 3,306 tanks and assault guns. And 2,650 Soviet aircraft were committed to the battle.

The salient defence system was based on six belts of concealed anti-tank strongpoints containing barbed-wire fences, anti-tank ditches, deep entrenchments full of infantry, anti-tank obstacles, dug-in armoured vehicles and machine gun bunkers. In front of and in between these strongpoints were minefields.

Some 503,663 anti-tank mines and 439,348 anti-personnel mines were laid, mostly in the first belt of defence. In addition, trenches totalling more than 6,000 miles were dug in the salient. Around 300,000 civilians from the Kursk area worked on all these constructions.

The Soviet plan was to progressively wear down the German panzer spearheads by forcing them to attack through a vast interconnected web of minefields and defensive strong points − by far the most extensive defensive works ever built. The plan worked, with the defence proving to be more than three times the depth necessary to contain the furthest extent of the German attack.

A new railway was built to improve the access of supplies to the Voronezh Front, while more than 250 bridges and 1,800 miles of road were repaired, mostly by civilian labour. And the German build-up was disrupted by partisan guerrilla attacks and air bombardments against German supply routes. More than 4,900 attacks hit German railways between February and July 1943, diverting large numbers of German units from front-line duties and preventing some ever being committed to the battle.

## Formidable

Soviet military might was formidable. Newly trained, excellently equipped armies were added to the salient and reserve areas, as Soviet heavy industry was now fully mobilised for war – manufacturing a custom-built range of reliable, proven hardware and weapons in huge numbers.

The Il-2 "Shturmovik" proved to be an outstanding ground attack aircraft, far more versatile than German planes. The Soviet T-34 medium tank and KV heavy tank had admirable streamlined design and rolled off assembly lines at up to 2,000 a month; whereas German Panther tanks were often beset with mechanical problems and experienced huge spare parts problems. Monthly production of the German tank Pzkw IV (itself inferior to the T-34 in every respect except in the gun-power of its latest version) only topped 100 in October 1942.

The German attack began on 5 July; by 12 July it had been ground down and halted in the north of the salient; in the south, by 23 July. Soviet counter offensives began and continued until early November. The Red Army broke out of the salient, retook Kiev and crossed the River Dniepr. German losses at Kursk were greater than at Stalingrad (see Workers January 2010).

A whole 11 months before the allied landings in France, the Soviet victory at Kursk sealed the outcome of the Second World War. After defeats at Moscow and Stalingrad, Germany had managed to rally and inflict some reverses; after Kursk, Hitler's armies were forced into an almost continuous retreat.

At Kursk, on ground of Germany's choosing, the Red Army beat and hurled back the Wehrmacht in high summer, hitherto Germany's best campaigning season. The superiority of socialism was confirmed in that most exacting test, war. ■

The Soviet Union bore the brunt of the Second World War in Europe, which ended with the defeat of fascism. The balance of class forces shifted away from capitalism for a few post-war decades...

# Victory in Europe: 8 May 1945

**WORKERS, MAY 2014 ISSUE**

After the battle of Stalingrad in the winter of 1942-43, the tide turned in favour of the Soviets. The German army was forced to retreat. For the next two years, the Red Army hurled back the Nazi invaders.

Photo-based illustration of the Soviet flag being raised on top of the ruined Reichstag, Berlin.

From 1943, the Soviet Union developed highly mobile, armoured formations. Their task was to punch through breaches in enemy lines, destroying German reserves and lines of communication. In autumn 1943 the German Wehrmacht deployed 236 divisions on the Eastern Front, more than 60 per cent of its total strength and more than 50 per cent of all its armour. When US and British forces opened a second front from D-Day in June 1944, they engaged just a third of the Axis forces and most of the best Wehrmacht formations were fighting on the eastern front.

By June 1944 the Red Army was advancing across a 2,000-mile front. Marshal Stalin supervised operations as overall commander-in-chief. He closely led a number of very able commanders including Zhukov, Konev, Rokossovsky and Chernyakhovsky, built up strategic reserves, oversaw weapon development and organised arms production.

First the Nazis were evicted from occupied Russia. Then the Red Army forced them out of Romania in August 1944, soon followed by Bulgaria and the Baltic states. By February 1945 the Nazis were out of Poland and Hungary; Vienna fell on 14 April. Immense Soviet forces were deployed along the Vistula river on the East Prussian border for the final assault on Germany which began on 16 April. These comprised an army of 6,500 tanks, 4,772 aircraft, 32,143 guns and heavy mortars and 163 rifle divisions. That represented a 5 to 1 advantage in manpower and armour; 7 to 1 in artillery and 17 to 1 in aircraft.

"Fortress Berlin" was Hitler's last wartime illusion. Berlin's defences were very poor compared to those of Moscow in 1941 (see Workers October 2011). Consideration was given to defending Berlin only in March 1945. Three makeshift obstacle rings were flung up: one 30 miles outside the German capital, another around its railway system and the last circling the central government buildings.

These defences were flimsy, without enough troops to man them and reliant on poorly armed Volkssturm and Hitler Youth members; they were easily overrun. No wonder quick-acting cyanide-based pills were much in demand among compromised Berliners. Eight Soviet armies encircled Berlin, and Red Army tanks advanced systematically, taking it block by block. By 25 April Soviet and Allied troops met at the River Elbe west of Berlin for a brief show of comradeship in arms.

## Reprisals

In Berlin water and public transport finally broke down; food supplies were low and residents started looting. Flying SS court martial squads roamed the city shooting and hanging deserters. Outside of Berlin diehard Nazis often took savage reprisals against civilian officials attempting to surrender their towns to British and American forces. Hitler shot himself on 30 April; Nazi Germany offered unconditional surrender on 7 and 8 May.

Hitler's fantasy of a "thousand-year Reich" completely ruined Germany. Most of its cities were rubble by the end of the war. A trail of devastation also littered the rest of continental Europe. Hitler's ebbing empire was finally reduced to a concrete bunker 55 feet below ground.

In April 1945 Allied forces had overrun the concentration camps in Buchenwald, Bergen-Belsen and Dachau. Newsreel evidence was immediately screened in British cinemas, where audiences received it in stunned silence.

V-2 rockets accompanied the death throes of the Nazi regime. Silent and giving no warning, 1,052 V-2s were spotted from September 1944 onwards. Of those 518 hit London; 2,754 people were killed and 6,523 severely injured. The last V-2 fell on 27 March 1945.

During the war people's thoughts in Britain were already turning to the organisation of peacetime. There was mass pressure for change. By 1942 this brought forth policy documents that culminated in the Beveridge Report. This called for comprehensive social reform of society – and sold 600,000 copies. Other reports followed with planning ideas for education, hospitals and full employment. Total war had depended on the state and the people.

## Public debate

That mood continued post-war when regulation of aspects of capitalism was popular. There was wholesale public debate of national plans in civilian life and the armed services.

From the first week in April 1945 people were buying bunting and Union Jack and "Welcome Home" flags in readiness for VE Day – Victory in Europe. Shops sold Victory scarves, ribbons, rosettes and even hair-slides. On 7 May VE Day was announced for the following day and a 2-day holiday declared. Crowds began appearing in central London that evening. At midnight big ships riding in ports from the Clyde to Southampton opened up their sirens whilst searchlights flashed out Vs across the skies. Lights blazed everywhere as blackout regulations were ignored.

VE Day was a long piece of national rejoicing. Large crowds thronged the streets of central London most of the day and night. There were set speeches by prime minister Winston Churchill and George VI to vast gatherings, plus innumerable impromptu light-hearted happenings with much dancing, singing, hugging and kissing.

Though London featured most in the media, much the same occurred in the other notable towns and cities of Britain. Floodlighting and glare replaced wartime darkness. There were bonfires with effigies of Hitler and his henchmen and fireworks everywhere, throughout the land. Inhibitions were temporarily forgotten.

In the general election of July 1945, Churchill's Tory Party lost convincingly to the Labour Party. Hopes and aspiration for a better future were truly widespread, but these were dissipated and banished over the next few decades. ■

When Japan withdrew from Malaya after the end of the Second World War, Britain resumed imperial control of its former colony...

# 1948–1960: Britain's war in Malaya

**WORKERS, FEB 2013 ISSUE**

Malaya – now Malaysia – was the great material prize in South-East Asia, possessing precious minerals and resources – above all, rubber and tin, but also coal, bauxite, tungsten, gold, iron ore and manganese. Its tin and rubber industries were important to **imperial Britain's recovery after the Second** World War, being the biggest dollar earners in the British Commonwealth. Seventy per cent of Malayan rubber estates were owned by European, primarily British, companies.

Gurkhas on patrol during the Malayan war.

After the war Malaya had high unemployment, low wages and high levels of food inflation. A large number of strikes by increasingly powerful trade unions broke out between 1946 and 1948. The social

unrest was met with arrests, deportations and curfews. The colonial authorities' desire to uphold the old ways of ruling meant people had no option but resistance, which the Malayan Communist Party organised.

The origins of the conflict lay in the failure of the British colonial authorities to advance the cause of the Chinese in Malaya, who made up nearly 45 per cent of the population. Britain, in line with its usual imperial tactic of divide and rule, traditionally promoted the rights of the Malay community over those of the Chinese.

In 1948 Britain promoted a new federal constitution that would confirm Malay privileges, consign about 90 per cent of Chinese to non-citizenship and see the colonial High Commissioner preside over an undemocratic centralised state where the members of the Executive Council and Legislative Council were all chosen by him.

Three European plantation managers were killed in June 1948. Britain declared an Emergency, not just to defeat the armed rebellion but also to crack down on workers' rights. The colonial authorities banned some trade unions, imprisoned their members, outlawed the Malayan Communist Party and gave police powers to imprison without trial.

Retreating to rural areas, the newly formed Malayan National Liberation Army led a guerrilla campaign to disrupt the tin mines and rubber plantations. The British military despatched 40,000 troops to fight 8,000 guerrillas to ensure British business could exploit Malayan economic resources.

The MNLA was partly a re-formation of the MCP-led Malayan People's Anti-Japanese Army, a guerrilla force which had been the principal resistance against the Japanese occupation and that had received training and arms from Britain. The Malayan Chinese had offered the only active resistance to the Japanese invaders.

In December 1945, guerrillas were encouraged to disband and hand in their weapons to the British Military Administration in exchange for economic inducements; around 4,000 refused.

The guerrillas were drawn almost entirely from disaffected Chinese in the tin mines and rubber estates and received considerable support from over half a million Chinese "squatters". The MNLA attacked rubber plantations, sabotaged installations, destroyed transportation and infrastructure. The Malay population supported the MNLA in smaller numbers.

## Brutal measures

Initially, British military strategy was to guard important economic targets, but soon it aimed to cut off the guerrillas from their supporters among the population and restrict the MNLA's food supply.

Declassified files reveal how British forces embarked on a series of brutal measures.

Beginning in 1950, 500,000 rural Malayans including 400,000 Chinese from squatter communities were forcibly relocated into guarded camps called "New Villages", which were surrounded by barbed wire, police posts and floodlit areas in order to keep inhabitants in and guerrillas out. Before the "new villagers" were let out in the mornings to go to work, they were searched for rice, clothes, weapons or messages.

It was described by the Colonial Office as a "great piece of social development", but the Empire had used this tactic before in the Boer War. Where people were deemed to be aiding the guerrillas, "collective punishments" of house curfews and rice ration reductions were inflicted on villages, as at Tanjong Malim (March 1952) and at Sengei Pelek (April 1952).

In the first five years of the Malayan war, Britain conducted 4,500 air strikes and trialled a 500 pound fragmentation bomb. Chemical agents were also used. From June to October 1952, 1,250 acres of roadside vegetation at possible ambush points were sprayed with defoliant. There were also cases of bodies of dead guerrillas being exhibited in public.

At the Batang Kali massacre in December 1948 the British army killed twenty-four Chinese, before burning the village. The British government initially claimed that the villagers were guerrillas, and then that they were trying to escape, neither of which was true. A Scotland Yard inquiry into the massacre was called off by the Heath government in 1970.

Dyak headhunters from Borneo worked alongside the British forces and decapitation of guerrillas occurred. A photograph of a marine commando holding two guerrillas' heads caused an outcry in April 1952 and the Colonial Office privately noted: "there is no doubt that under international law a similar case in wartime would be a war crime".

Repressive British detention laws resulted in 34,000 people being held for varying periods without trial in the first eight years of the war; around 15,000 people were deported to China.

British capitalism achieved its main aims in Malaya: the guerrilla army was defeated and British business interests were essentially preserved; the extent of foreign control over the economy hardly changed, even after independence in 1957. By 1971, 80 per cent of mining, 62 per cent of manufacturing and 58 per cent of construction were still foreign-owned, mainly by British companies. A resort to war had protected the economic order. ■

**Historic Notes**

# US partition divided Korea and led to war

**The first of a two-part article on the Korean War examining the events which led to UN intervention**

PRESIDENT CARTER'S warning that "outside interference will not be tolerated", exemplifies yet again the blatant hypocrisy of United States involvement that has been the crushing burden on the people of Korea ever since the Second World War.

The rapid advance of the Soviet offensive against Japan in August 1945 had brought panic to the US Imperialists who hastily proposed the 38th Parallel as the military demarcation line for the surrender of the Japanese forces, but it was not until the 8th September that US troops were able to land in the South. Two days earlier

Photomontage: Jürgen Holtfreter

a representative assembly of the anti-Japanese political bodies in Korea, the "Committees of Preparation for National Independence" had formed a national government with jurisdiction over all Korea.

The US occupation force ignored this government and instead appointed an Advisory Council which contained many well known Japanese collaborators, and re-armed the Japanese and quisling forces to maintain "law and order". The US Military Government proclaimed itself the only lawful authority south of the 38th Parallel. In February 1946 a "Representative Democratic Council" was knocked together headed by Syngman Rhee, just returned from over 30 years comfortable exile in the USA and Kuomintang China.

By the summer of 1946 South Korean prisons were full of opponents to the new regime, and the US Assistant Secretary of State himself admitted that "Many Koreans feel that they are worse off than they were under the Japanese". Comparisons with the situation north of the 38th Parallel were not difficult for the ordinary Korean; there the Soviet forces had handed over power to the anti-Japanese Committees, which had set up a government led by Kim Il-Sung the veteran leader of the guerrilla struggle. It had implemented a wholesale policy of land reform to benefit the peasants, and quickly reinvigorated the war-damaged industry, so that during the harsh winter of 1947/48 everyone in the North was adequately fed and clothed, with enough fuel made available by efficient rationing to every household.

In late 1947 the United States proposed that the "Korean problem" be handed over to the United Nations, where the US and its allies and dependencies had an inbuilt majority in the General Assembly. A UN Temporary Commission on Korea was established, which proceeded to "supervise" elections, and accompanied as they were by a terror campaign by Rightist thugs in which over 500 people were killed, perhaps the THIRTY observers were a little hasty in regarding the inevitable result as "a valid expression of the free will of the electorate", especially as "illiterates" were not allowed to vote. Two rebellions that occurred in 1948 against the UN approved government were suppressed with brutal savagery.

The results of the South Korean elections of May 1950 were to prove not so satisfactory. Even after the arrest of many opposition candidates during the campaign, it was obvious that the Syngman Rhee government was virtually isolated from all sectors of Korean opinion. In such circumstances, bellicose threats to "take Pyongyang within a few days days", i.e. to invade the North, were commonplace in order to create an atmosphere of tension. South Korean raids across the 38th Parallel had caused the North to deploy their forces closer to the demarcation line. On June 25th the North Koreans had had enough. Their response to the incessant provocations was to mount a counter-attack into the South.

Next week we consider the United States agression against Korea, a war that lasted in effect less than a year, yet was fought with such savagery by the Imperialists that it resulted in between 3 and 4 million dead.

**Historic Notes**

# The Korean War. Part Two

THE KOREAN war has always been presented in British history books as the result of a vast conspiracy masterminded by Stalin in order to probe the Western defences in Asia. Yet this widely accepted belief is hardly compatible with several incontestable facts.

At this time the USSR was boycotting the proceedings of the UN Security Council in protest at the exclusion of the recently victorious Communist government from China's seat in the UN, so it was hardly in a position to exercise its veto to combat the inbuilt pro-US majority in the General Assembly. The North Korean armed forces had not been adequately mobilised to mount a full scale invasion (only 6 out of the 13 divisions were initially involved), and they could hardly have been expecting the complete collapse of the South Korean puppet army.

The United States reaction to the success of the North Korean armed forces, advancing in conjunction with widespread guerrilla activity in the South, was an unprecedented manipulation of the United Nations to provide a 'respectable' cover for US aggression. The UN Commission in Korea were expected to call for a cease-fire and mediation between the two Korean governments, so it was imperative for the United States to present the UN with a fait accomplit.

President Truman had already ordered US occupation forces in Japan to give Syngman Rhee's ragged troops cover and support before the Security Council were persuaded to adopt a US resolution condemning the North Korean armed attack on the Republic of Korea. It was Britain's representative at the UN who pandered to the US designs in proposing a unified command for UN armed involvement in Korea under a US commander, quickly despatching part of the Hong Kong garrison to Korea. The 'peace-loving' United Nations had now declared war upon the Korean people for having the cheek to attempt the independent unification of their nation.

The first taste of the barbarity of the Imperialist forces came after the amphibious landings at Inchon and the advance to capture Seoul. UN commander MacArthur had boasted that he would take Seoul in 5 days, yet it took two weeks of intense aerial and artillery bombardment to achieve his goal. The ramshackle wooden dwellings of the ordinary people became a prime target. Thousands of civilians were trapped and burnt to death or horribly maimed in the inferno. Whole districts were devastated and panic-stricken refugees were cut down. The greatest triumph of MacArthur's military career was to capture a capital city that he had reduced to rubble.

The hypocrisy and arrogance of the United States now became blatant. President Truman had claimed that "we do not want the fighting in Korea to expand into a general war", yet forces also from Britain and other countries had taken part in the Inchon invasion. The US had claimed to be fighting "solely for the purpose of restoring the Republic of Korea to its status prior to the invasion from the North", but once the 38th Parallel had been retaken by UN forces, the United States declared that "the artificial barrier which has divided North and South Korea has no basis for existence in law or in reason" (conveniently ignoring the fact that if this were true then the UN could hardly condemn the North Koreans as 'aggressors' for crossing a line that divided their own country).

Again it was a British resolution to the UN that sanctioned the invasion of the North, but perhaps the best comment came from the US Secretary of the Navy: "it would earn for us a proud and popular title - we would become the first aggressors for peace."

Diplomatic warnings from Chou En-lai that the Chinese people would not "supinely tolerate their neighbours being savagely invaded by imperialists" were blithely dismissed as just propaganda in the euphoria that surrounded MacArthur's 'Home for Christmas' offensive to occupy completely all of Korea. This boast was perhaps to prove more true than was intended, as once the UN legions came up against the Chinese forces that had rushed to the assistance of their Korean comrades, it resulted in such a headlong retreat that it left the UN troops back below the 38th Parallel in time to celebrate the festive season.

MacArthur's arrogant statement that there was 'no substitute for victory' was to rebound against him. Desperate threats to use nuclear weapons and invade China were to prove too much for the allies of the US, which under pressure from their own populations, were forced to abandon the aim of unifying Korea under imperialist control.

The UN retreat from North Korea had been a 'scorched earth' policy that left few material resources of any value, and what remained was subject to 'strategic bombing' as the US met the Communist superiority in morale with 'meatgrinder' attacks aiming to massacre as many of the defiant Koreans and Chinese as possible. The inhumane nature of the imperialists was best revealed in their choice of names for their offensives - 'Operation Killer' and 'Operation Ripper' whose success depended upon the use of chemical and bacteriological weapons so familiar later in Vietnam.

Although cease-fire talks began in 1951 and an armistice was signed two years later, Korea remains divided as the United States has persistently opposed any moves towards unity After a wave of popular unrest Syngman Rhee was replaced in 1960 by the late unlamented President Park, who, despite the imposition of a ruthless dictatorship, failed to prevent the recent upsurge of the Korean people demanding democracy and unity. Korea will be reunited: no people will tolerate forever the artificial division of their nation imposed by outside forces.

The Korean people have never given up the struggle for unification and independence. Our picture shows demonstrating students coming under a tear gas attack from armed police in the streets of Seoul, South Korea, on December 31, 1974. The students, from Korea University, formed a centre of opposition to the dictatorial rule of the late unlamented President Park Jung Hi.

Photo: Hsuinhua News Agency

It is sixty years since the outbreak of the Korean War − a conflict which saw the United States and its allies − including Britain − committing troops to the aim of holding back the spread of communism…

# 1950: The outbreak of the Korean War

**WORKERS, NOV 2010 ISSUE**

Sixty years ago a bitter, three-year war broke out in Korea, propelling to centre stage a country that hitherto had been at the margins of international politics. It became the flashpoint of all the tensions then raging between the competing systems of socialism and capitalism. The Korean War was waged on land, on sea and in the air over and near the Korean peninsula. The first year of the war was a seesaw struggle for control of the peninsula followed by two years of positional warfare as a backdrop to extended cease-fire negotiations.

In 1910, Korea had been annexed by Japan, whose domination lasted until the latter stages of the Second World War. The Yalta Conference of 1945 agreed that Soviet and American troops would occupy Korea with a demarcation line along the latitude 38° parallel, pending the establishment of a unified and independent Korean government. Effectively, the terms of Yalta divided Korea into a communist northern half and an American-occupied southern half.

## Usurped

America occupied South Korea and usurped power from locally controlled People's Committees, reinstalling many of the former landowners and police who had held office when Korea was under Japanese colonial rule. These moves met with heavy resistance and open rebellion in some parts of South Korea such as the southern islands. In 1948, both the Soviet and US forces were withdrawn. However, after several altercations at the border, it appeared that civil war might be inevitable.

With her brother on her back a war-weary Korean girl tiredly trudges by a stalled M-26 tank, at Haengju, Korea, on 9 June 1951. (Image courtesy Wikipedia Commons)

The war began on 25 June 1950 when the North Korean army crossed the 38th Parallel intending to use force to reunite the south and the north with armoured and infantry divisions. The invasion was also fuelled by a massacre in which 60,000 communists and supporters were killed on Jeju Island in the South. The decision to move into the South appears to have been the initiative of Kim Il-Sung, the North Korean leader, rather than that of his Soviet supporters. This bid to reunify the country met with popular support across the South. Quickly, the North Korean army, armed with Soviet tanks, overran South Korea. Its capital Seoul fell after three days. By the end of August, the North Koreans occupied almost all of the South, except around the port of Pusan.

Although Korea was not strategically essential to the United States, the US political environment at this stage was such that its government did not want to appear "soft on Communism". So it came to South Korea's aid. The US managed to contrive its intervention as part of a "police action" and it was run by a UN force from 15 nations, though the bulk of the troops were American with a large contingent from Britain.

With the US, UN and South Korean forces pinned against the sea at Pusan, MacArthur carried out an amphibious assault on Inchon, a port on the western coast of Korea. Having made this landing, MacArthur caught the North Korean army in a pincer movement. By October the US and UN forces had recaptured Seoul. Instead of being satisfied with the rapid re-conquest of South Korea, the US General MacArthur crossed the 38th Parallel and pursued the North Korean army. On 19 October, Pyongyang, the North Korean capital, was captured. The US and UN forces proceeded all the way to the northernmost provinces of North Korea, forcing Kim and his government to flee north, first to Sinuiju and eventually into China.

Afraid that the US was interested in taking North Korea as a base for operations against Manchuria, the People's Republic of China, which bordered North Korea and had only just won its independence in 1949 after decades of war, issued warnings to America that it would not tolerate further advances by American troops. The US ignored them, failing to take note of the revolutionary zeal, military experience, confidence and leadership of the Chinese soldiers redeployed to the Korean border area, many of whom were veterans of the successful national war against Japan and the civil war against the Nationalist Chinese forces.

At the very beginning of the war, the Chinese had sent a volunteer army across the Yalu River (the North Korean/Chinese border) and entered the war as allies of the Korean People's Army. The Chinese attack on the combined US/UN/ROK forces was so great that they were compelled to retreat. Chinese troops retook Pyongyang in December and Seoul in January 1951. In March UN forces began a new offensive, retaking Seoul. After a series of offensives and counter-offensives by both sides, by 1951 the front was stabilised along what eventually became the permanent "Armistice Line" of 27 July 1953, where there followed a gruelling period of largely static trench warfare for the next two years.

## Devastated

North Korea was devastated by US air raids with very few buildings left standing in the capital and elsewhere in the country. By the time of the armistice, upwards of 3.5 million Koreans on both sides had died in the conflict. Around 53,000 US and 1,100 British soldiers were killed and estimates of perhaps 400,000 Chinese volunteers.

During the war North Korea and China accused the US of large-scale field-testing of biological weapons across all of North Korea and parts of China close to the border, including the spread of diseases such as anthrax and the use of disease-carrying insects. The allegations were always denied but clear evidence has emerged in subsequent years that after the Second World War US medical scientists in occupied Japan had undertaken extensive research on insect vectors for spreading biological diseases from as early as 1946, with the assistance of Japanese staff formerly working for the old imperial regime, so the capability was always there.

Boxes containing thousands of incriminating documents from the Kenyan colonial service show the barbarity with which the British Empire sought − vainly − to cling on to power in East Africa...

# 1952 to 1956: The Mau Mau rebellion

**WORKERS, JULY 2011 ISSUE**

Sometimes the past returns in the form of nightmare to shock the present, as has happened with revelations this year from a **host of "lost" official documents unearthed this year which confirm British imperialism's violent suppression in the 1950s** of the Mau Mau rebellion in Kenya.

The British Empire's connections with Kenya go back to the 19th century, when it developed trade with the East African coast in the 1840s. By 1887 the British East African Company secured a formal lease of land that ultimately developed in 1893 into a British government protectorate. Then in 1920, Kenya became a Crown Colony and its legislative councils were a privilege of the white settlers who had begun to farm there at the turn of the twentieth century.

There was a prolonged pattern of land expropriation by white farmers from Britain eager to acquire some of the richest agricultural soils in the world: for instance, the leading Kikuyu tribe lost 60,000 acres of land, whilst the Giricama tribe from the coastal regions were pushed to and fro.

By 1948, 1,250,000 Kikuyu people had ownership of a mere 2,000 square miles, while 30,000 white farmers had 12,000 square miles. This displacement also provided the white settlers with a ready supply of cheap labour. Meanwhile, the colonial authorities adopted a policy of near total neglect of African farming. But there was a history of resistance to British imperialism from the 1880s onwards notably the Nandi Revolt (1895 − 1905) and an uprising in 1913-14.

Though India won independence in 1948, the British government in the 1940s and the 1950s was split over granting self-government to all its colonies. It was more willing to go down that route in West Africa, but not elsewhere in Africa. The more diehard imperialist members of Macmillan's Conservative government (1957 to 1963) combined with the white settler inhabitants of these countries to protect white minority colonial rule. Earlier, British ex-servicemen had received money from Attlee's, Churchill's and Eden's governments to assist them to establish farms in Kenya.

This expanded colonisation generated heightened resistance from the Kikuyu tribe, which formed about 20 per cent of the population.

Ultimately the Kikuyu and other tribes pursued a course of violence including killings to drive the white settlers out, beginning in the summer of 1952 and continuing until 1956 with sporadic actions beyond that date. The Kenyan Land and Freedom Army was formed. Effectively, a civil war broke out between the anti-colonial Mau Mau nationalists and the colonial authorities supported by the British military and collaborators.

The colonial authorities responded harshly, turning Kikuyu districts into police states. There were wholesale arrests and curfews. In 1954, 25,000 British security forces were deployed in Nairobi, leading to internment for tens of thousands. Scores of detention camps, often staffed by white settlers, were established for "screening" (as always with our rulers, language became a casualty too). As many as 150,000 Kikuyu were "screened".

Sanitation was non-existent in the camps and epidemics of diseases such as typhoid spread through them. Collective punishments were imposed on populations suspected of supporting the rebellion: communal labour; collective fines; further confiscation of land and property, including tens of thousands of livestock.

By the end of the civil war the number of hangings by the colonial courts reached 1,090, a staggering scale of terror. In addition, a "villagisation programme" was set up for over a million rural Kikuyu; its aim was to break the Mau Mau by removing people from the stronghold of their land, establishing new villages with curfews and surrounding the new villages with deep, spike-bottomed trenches and barbed wire. (So that's where the Americans in Vietnam pinched their ideas from!) The civil war was bloody and violent.

In March 1959 widespread indignation followed the deaths of 11 Mau Mau inmates of the Hola prison camp. Though they had been beaten to death by their warders, the authorities first claimed they had died from lack of water. Wholesale revulsion to this act revealed that white minority colonial rule was no longer possible and hastened a change in the British government's Kenyan policy. Self-government was announced in June 1963 and Kenya became a republic in December 1964. Even then, many white settlers were richly compensated with British taxpayers' money and returned to Britain.

## In court

In 2011, four elderly Kenyans, who allege they were tortured between 1952 and 1961 by British colonial administration officials during the suppression of the Mau Mau uprising, started legal proceedings against the British government and are seeking compensation at the High Court. They variously claim they were whipped, beaten, sexually abused or castrated while detained under colonial rule.

The British government, though not denying the claims, says it cannot be held liable for the alleged abuse and is fully defending the case, claiming that Kenya had its own legal colonial government that was responsible for the detention camps where Mau Mau supporters were taken. Does the tail wag the dog? No. The imperial government dictates policy in a colony. The attitude of the British government is no doubt determined by the fear of such litigation becoming contagious, spurring other victims of imperial adventures into coming forward.

Boxes containing 17,000 incriminating pages of previously undisclosed documents from the Kenyan colonial service have been "discovered" during research into the legal claims. They were removed from Nairobi at independence in 1963 because of the damning information they held and have been hidden away for almost 50 years to protect the guilty, stored in British government buildings.

These official colonial documents confirm the full extent of British brutality in the Mau Mau rebellion: systematic torture, starvation and even the burning alive of detainees; forced labour in camps; violent interrogation to extract confessions; and the British colonial governor present at beatings. Ripples from Kenya's past still flow. ■

## HISTORIC NOTES

## JULY 14 1958

# Middle East Bastille, Iraq

IT was like any other morning when we left our house at six for a swim in the River Tigris. It was July 14 1958. The cool fresh air was anxiously waiting for the hot sun to climb above the horizon. The man at the boat-house had glee in his eyes as he took the boat into the river. Apart from a few army trucks and jeeps crossing the bridge as the boat floated softly underneath there was nothing to suggest that history was being made. In the almost deserted streets of Baghdad the army was more noticeable. There were soldiers erecting posts at street corners, a tank parked at a strategic roundabout but everything was calm and quiet. We knew that the Iraqi government was preparing to send troops to bolster up the shaky Kingdom of Jordan. But why have they stopped in the Iraqi capital?

The radio broadcast began as usual at 7 o'clock with a reading from the Koran. Few people ever listen to the words, it is the poetry and classical singing that intrigues so many. Immediately after came the announcement. The Monarchy had been overthrown and the Republic of Iraq had been established. The Bastille had been stormed and the monarchy was immediately dubbed the 'ancien regime'. In less than an hour the streets of Baghdad were packed with people. Banners suddenly appeared, slogans were shouted, crowds were cheering. How the overthrow was achieved was of little interest. It was enough that it had happened.

News spread rapidly through the capital. The King was dead. His uncle, the real power behind behind the throne had been executed. Other government ministers and their henchmen were arrested. One name was missing ... Nuri Al- Said, the obedient servant of British imperialism.

A curfew was declared at 2 in the afternoon which no one seemed to take much notice of including the soldiers who were asking people to go home as soon as possible to ensure the safety of the revolution. By nine in the evening the streets were empty except for army jeeps and motor-bikes rushing from place to place. The sun has gone down and darkness fell very quickly. Sleeping on the flat roof, as everyone did during the hot nights, we could see the lights flickering all over the capital. Suddenly the calm of the night was interrupted by a loud explosion followed by a big ball of fire from the direction of the oil reservoirs.

Everyone was back to work the day following the revolution. Work was done more efficiently. No bribes were offered and no bribes accepted at government offices. The wretched police, now stripped of their guns, stayed at home. The numerous spies, and every street had one, dared not show their faces. The calmness of the population belied the very serious situation that the young republic was in. The US sixth fleet was anchored off the shores of Lebanon. British troops stationed at bases in Jordan and Cyprus where on alert, the Baghdad pact countries were waiting for an excuse to interfere. Nevertheless messages of support came from all over the world.

The most memorable was the message from Cuba where only months previously the dictatorship of Batista had been overthrown. Workers in a Chinese factory decided to work an extra hour with the proceeds going towards the Iraqi revolution.

The final act of the drama came at 2.30 in the afternoon when we heard that Nuri Al-Said had been captured. It is difficult to say how the news reached our home from the other side of town. We listened to the radio for confirmation and it was not long in coming. Nuri Al-Said dressed in women's clothes with a veil over his face had asked the way to a suspicious address. As he walked away his pyjamas were noticed below the black gown women were encouraged to wear by the ancien regime. Snatching the veil from his face the people in the streets carried out the long-standing sentence of the Iraqi people. When the army arrived on the scene the young officer pronouncing him dead emptied his machine gun into the air in jubilation. The people, determined to avenge the murder, torture, arrests and repression dragged the body through the streets of Baghdad.

The Bastille of the Middle East had fallen. Iraq was free. Little did we know that the end of the Monarchy signalled the beginning of an even fiercer struggle.

**Historic Notes**

# Laws will never stop trade unionism

"The government newspapers have been recommending the Parliament to pass a law to put an end to these Unions. Better call for a law to prevent those inconvenient things called Spring Tides." William Cobbett, 'Political Register', December 1833.

The cry that the Unions are "too powerful" is as old as capitalism itself, for it was a petition from a group of employers in 1799 pleading against "a dangerous combination ... among the journeymen millwrights within the metropolis ... for enforcing a general increase of their wages," which prompted Parliament to pass a law making it illegal for any workman to join with others to secure an increase in wages or any improvements in conditions of work.

Such was the threat to the profit system posed by collective bargaining that for twenty-six years this Combination Act remained on the statute book. That eventually repealed in 1825 was in no way a change of attitude by the employing classes, but rather of the defiance of the law by the working class which made its continued existence counterproductive. Far from dying away, trade unionism flourished, openly in some parts of the country, and solidarity was strengthened. In 1810 alone the London goldbeaters sent donations ranging from £5 to £30 to eight other unions. However it was the escalation of violence in industrial disputes and the development of the very conspiracy which the Combination Act was intended to root out which frightened Parliament into repealing it.

Capitalist law confronts the Shrewsbury pickets after the building workers' strike in 1972.

Photo: Press Association.

Repeal did not bring an end to capitalist assaults on the trade unions as the case of the Tolpuddle Martyrs and countless similar episodes have demonstrated, but at no time since their infancy in the early days of capitalism has the question of the trade unions and the law so preoccupied Government and Parliament than in the present decade of accelerated capitalist decline. It was just over ten years ago that the Labour Government issued its white paper, 'In Place of Strife', many of whose proposals and all of whose attitudes are reproduced in the present Government's planned assault.

When the Government attempted to implement its proposals in an Industrial Relations Bill, the trade union movement forced it to drop it in 1970. The Conservatives, however, given confidence by their 'mandate' from the electorate were not so timid, and undaunted by a series of one-day strikes had by August 1971 placed an Industrial Relations Act on the statute book.

It was only then that the trade unions really mobilised their strength. The TUC advised its affiliated unions to boycott all the machinery connected with the court and some, led by the AUEW, refused even to recognise the authority of the Industrial Relations Court. The court's prestige never recovered from the humiliation of committing three dockers to prison for contempt of court, for defying its order to stop picketing of some premises they had blacked. It had to witness their release five days later on the orders of the Official Solicitor because of a planned one-day general strike called by the TUC as the opening salvo of a campaign for their release. The Act, already rendered unworkable by the self-conscious action of organised workers, was finally repealed in 1974.

As the new barbarians prepare to make yet another attempt to limit the power of collective bargaining, we must be mindful of the lessons these episodes can teach us. They show clearly that the Government is nothing but the executive committee of the capitalist class and that its laws exist primarily to protect and enhance profit. They also show that only through their own organisations, and not through Parliament, can the working class protect its interests.

# Historic Notes – Picketing

NOW that there is again talk of which sort of picketing the Government will allow - picketing is alright so long as it has no effect - we look back at lessons from history.

Ever since the establishment of the Craft Unions for skilled men, the employers and their governments have been trying to break them up. The Unions set up large strike funds, and boasted of their size, so the Lord Chief Justice sanctioned the theft of funds from the Boilermakers by a treasurer who absconded - even though unions had been officially legal, they were 'so far in restraint of trade as to render the society an illegal association'.

The struggle for wages and shorter hours led to a massive lockout, but still the employers could not win, without the aid of the law. So finally, in 1866, when a can of gunpowder exploded in a blackleg's house in Sheffield, the government immediately cried out against the 'terrorism of Trade Unions'. The government promised to protect those 'forced to join' the unions from the extremist minority, the 'number of unscrupulous men leading a half-idle life'.

The immediate response of a handful of 'respectable' union secretaries, nicknamed the Junta, including Allen of the Engineers, and Applegarth of the Carpenters, was to suggest the government set up a Royal Commission to investigate trade unions. The government seized on this to set up a Commision to investigate all trade union activity every where for the past 10 years. They granted a pardon to all witnesses, accomplices and even perpetrators of violence who would come and testify against their unions.

Before the Royal Commission, Applegarth and Allen insisted that their unions were not really militant organisations, that the new unions sought not to encourage but to prevent strikes, and that they were more like insurance companies, with their sickness benefits, than fighting organisations.

The Commission took them at their word, offering the unions legal protection on the condition that they abandoned all restrictive practices, and ceased to help one another. This shock united the labour movement. The International Working Men's Association, in which Marx was involved, the London Trades Council, and many national unions began agitating for a bill granting the unions' case.

The agitation was so great that the Liberal Government was forced to recognise the unions' legality and protect their funds, provided that their rules did not contravene the law. Strikers could no longer be imprisoned for conspiracy.

But the struggle was not over. Applegarth's attempts to disown pickets who resorted to more than 'peaceful moral persuasion' was seized upon by the Law. In 1867, Judge Bramwell pronounced that pickets in combination were guilty of 'molestation', even if they only gave black looks, or were present in large numbers, or stood across the road from their employers premises.

In 1871, an act was passed which while recognising the legality of trade unions, made them impossible to operate. It resurrected the words of the Combination Acts without definitions: 'molest', 'obstruct', 'threaten', 'intimidate', etc. 'Persistantly following' any person, or 'watching or besetting to premises', was outlawed. While employers could 'blacklist' workers, a man who bonspired to persuade another not to work could be imprisoned for three months. This threat was indeed carried out.

Great demonstrations followed. In one of them, 20 000 trade unionists marched through Glasgow, carrying banners saying "Down with all Class Legislation". As a result, Disraeli's Government was compelled to legalise picketing and make acts committed by trade unionists subject only to ordinary laws (1875).

**Historic Notes**

# 'In Place of Strife' killed off in 1969

**As this government with its Employment Bill treads the path of anti-Union legislation, the WORKER looks back at its predecessors' attempts to shackle the Trade Union movement - each of which ended in ignominious failure. The first in this series deals with Labour Party proposals of 1969, so clearly opposed by the Trade Unions, that they were dropped.**

SINCE 1945 governments have always sought to limit the rights of unions to obtain better conditions for their members, by wage freeze and other devices (George Brown's Wage Pause among others). Working class opposition was variable, now submitting, now opposing. Overall, the attempt by governments Labour and Tory to limit union power failed, and the imposition of each wage freeze was, sooner or later, followed by its rejection by the labour movement.

Hence, towards the end of the '60's, the voice was raised for a "new" approach - the "reform" of the Trade Union movement.

This was nothing but a return to the oldest stance known to capitalism (penal law against unions as with the Combination Acts). The cloaking of it with windy jargon testified to the fear inspired in the capitalist parties, Labour and Tory, by the organised labour movement, stronger after two hundred years of struggle.

Public opinion was prepared - as they say - by the Donovan Report. Hundreds of pages of analysis of trade unions as the vehicle for proposed restrictions of their freedom. It fell to the Labour Cabinet in January 1969 to adopt (not without dissent) Barbara Castle's proposals contained in the White Paper "In Place of Strife".

However it was the voice of the trade union movement within the Labour Party (that misbegotten and woeful creation of our working class), which secured the defeat of the proposals.

Such was opposition, that special meetings of the trade union group of MPs and the entire Parliamentary Party were organised. 53 Labour MPs voted against the proposals on March 3rd. On March 26th, the National Union of Mineworkers successfully moved in the Labour Party Executive that the Executive could not accept "legislation based on all the proposals of In Place of Strife." By early summer, the Trade Union movement had imposed its will on the Labour Party. On June 18th, by agreement between the TUC and No 10, the proposals were dropped.

The battle illustrates the strengths and weaknesses of the opposing sides. Neither side was willing to press for all-out war against the other, and particularly so the working class. How times have changed with Thatcher!

On the capitalist side then, within the Labour Governments, the voice for immediate penal legislation against the trade unions was a minority. It was opposed by Castle with her more shamefaced and apologetic approach, which was itself opposed by those whose stance willynilly reflected trade union opposition.

It is interesting that the Callaghan faction which opposed legislation in 1969, once in power after the defeat of the Heath anti-union laws in 1974, imposed the bitterest of any curtailment of trade union power until then, through wage restraint, and all under the banner of "no legislation against the unions" so opportunistically raised in 1969.

On the side of the working class, opposition to In Place of Strife was never as wholehearted as it could have been. This hesitation in response gave hopes to Heath and Callaghan that they might yet succeed where Castle failed.

The consequence of mitigated opposition to Castle in 1969 was the misery of life under Heath and Callaghan, overthrown though they have been. But the consequences of mitigating opposition to Castle's successor Thatcher are unthinkable.

# Historic Notes

# 'We will not go to court or recognise this law.'

**'We welcome' said Reg Birch of the AUEW striking against the Industrial Relations Act in November 1973, 'the other trade unionists who have seen the correctness of our stand and have joined us because our stand has been a somewhat lonely one.' This third in our series on the defeat of recent anti-union legislation shows how the guerrilla action of 1972 against Heath was developed by the Engineers into a protracted struggle which, even unassisted by other unions, culminated in the massive strikes of 1973-74 which alone overthrew Heath's prototype of Thatcher's proposals.**

WORKING CLASS OPPOSITION to Heath had not risen to strike action strong enough to prevent the Industrial Relations Act becoming law in 1971. Because of this weakness, action continued, guerrilla and irregular, in 1972, as we saw last week.

Nevertheless, the passivity of large sections of workers was expressed by their leaders in the TUC, who wished to betray the struggle of that year by setting up conciliation machinery with the government. Heath, on the evidence of this weakness, stepped up his attack and imposed the Wage Freeze with its Phases I, II, III.

The Engineering Union alone had decided on a policy of non-cooperation with the Industrial Relations Act. Heath and his tool Donaldson of the National Industrial Relations Court (NIRC) now judged the AUEW so isolated as to be able to attack with impunity.

## Fined for 'contempt'

They began with a £5000 fine for the Union's "contempt" of court, refusing to answer why its members in Sudbury had denied membership to a certain Goad. Then a £50,000 fine followed. The Government, although empowered to take over the whole union and imprison its leaders, shrank in cowardice from this, and seized a total of £67,000 through a stockbroker. All hopes they had of avoiding conflict were dashed by the wave of engineering strikes which followed then and in the New Year of 1973.

Defeat even more glaring followed immediately when a Chrysler worker tried to resign his AUEW membership. Strike action was so solid that the NIRC, to which he appealed, refused to pronounce judgement, and hence capitulated to the Union.

The Engineers' struggle against Heath moved to a higher, more organized stage when at the Special TUC Congress of March 1973 – a congress called specifically to avoid struggle – the motion was carried for a one day general strike on May 1st.

## Guerrilla Struggle

That first of May was marked by over two million workers defying the government. It also marked the fifth birthday of the Communist Party of Britain (Marxist-Leninist) in whose Chairman, Reg Birch, the line of non-cooperation with the Act by the AUEW originated.

Now the Party published its best-selling pamphlet "Guerrilla Struggle and the Working Class", looking forward from the guerrilla struggle of the first stages of the fight against the Act, to the protracted struggle of the Engineers, which, as it became more organised and won the support of other workers, was to become mighty enough to overthrow the Act itself.

Yet no sooner was May Day past, than the TUC reopened negotiations with the Government. The AUEW sabotaged this move (one of so many) towards capitulation by forbidding their President to attend the six-man talks. Nevertheless, (even though the Engineering Employers informed Donaldson of the NIRC that his Act was a failure) Donaldson could still hope to wear down this one remaining obstacle to the Act, the AUEW.

In August 1973, the Government attempted to bring the Union, not to the NIRC, but to a County Court but with as little success as before.

Then in the autumn, when the employer at a small non-union firm in Surrey, Con-Mech, sacked twenty men for attempting to join, they thought they saw their opportunity. The size of the fine (£100,000) for the Union's non-attendance at the NIRC, and the lack of organization at the heart of the dispute must, they hoped, produce results. But the political gains of the previous years' struggle were such that the Engineering Union members struck nationwide.

Reg Birch speaking at Tower Hill on November 5th 1973 articulated the true significance of the AUEW's stand. "We have believed we could live with the employing class. The capitalist government has brought in Phase One, Two and Three against the working class. We are still in our phase one of live and let live. We must have phase two of our attack. This is class war. We shall have class law – our law. They try to impose their law on us but we shall destroy them. They believe we shall sue for peace, but our end is the end of the employing class."

Such clarity of purpose explains why popular history, in the interests of the bourgeoisie, holds as a sort of dogma that the "Miners defeated Heath". Not that the Miners and all others who opposed the Wage Freeze did not play their role, particularly the NUM with its winter strike, in forcing Heath to election defeat in February 1974. But to say that the "Miners defeated Heath" is to refuse to recognize the line of all-out opposition to the Government represented by the Engineering Union, which was, all too often, unsupported by fraternal unions.

Thus no sooner was Heath defeated, than voices of collaboration with the new government were immediately raised – even though the Industrial Relations Act was still on the books. When Donaldson in May in a final fit of pique sequestered the Union's funds, the reaction of the Union was instant. The Executive Council "instructs all members of its engineering section, without exception, to withdraw labour forthwith." In face of such massive action, the employers capitulation was complete. Within hours the monies required were provided by anonymous capitalist donors. It was indeed, as the WORKER said "one of the quickest and most complete victories ever won by workers against the state" – a reminder that guerrilla struggle is never an end in itself but a means to higher and more organized struggle.

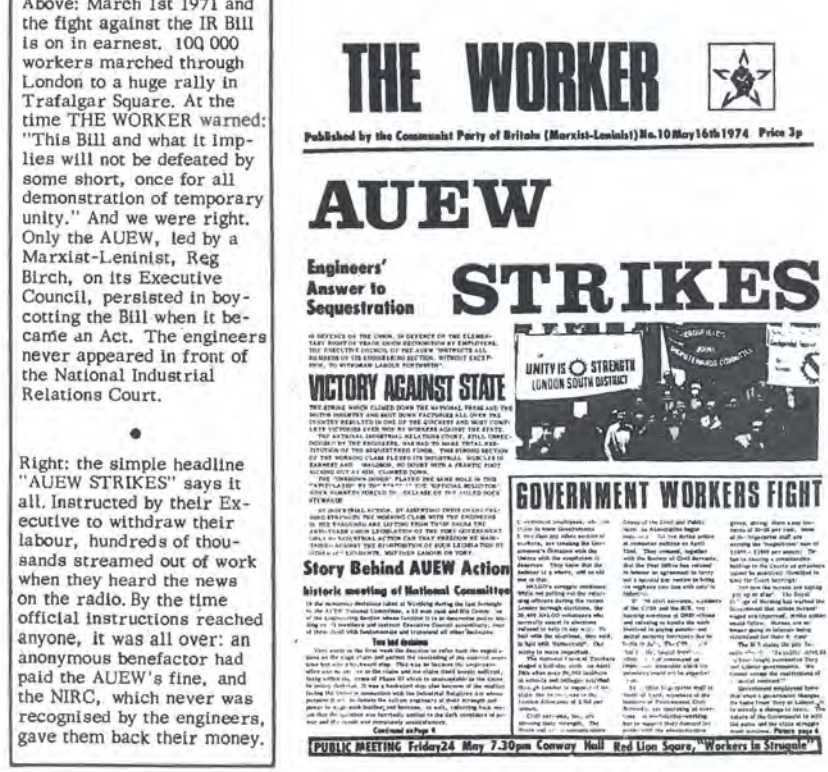
## Fighting Thatcher

As we face under Thatcher a revival of Heath's legislation we should remember the great power wielded by only one union, united under correct leadership, as a reminder that this time it should not be one union, but all united. How right the WORKER was then. "Only by industrial action can freedom by maintained against the re-imposition of anti-Trade Union legislation."


Above: March 1st 1971 and the fight against the IR Bill is on in earnest. 100 000 workers marched through London to a huge rally in Trafalgar Square. At the time THE WORKER warned: "This Bill and what it implies will not be defeated by some short, once for all demonstration of temporary unity." And we were right. Only the AUEW, led by a Marxist-Leninist, Reg Birch, on its Executive Council, persisted in boycotting the Bill when it became an Act. The engineers never appeared in front of the National Industrial Relations Court.

•

Right: the simple headline "AUEW STRIKES" says it all. Instructed by their Executive to withdraw their labour, hundreds of thousands streamed out of work when they heard the news on the radio. By the time official instructions reached anyone, it was all over: an anonymous benefactor had paid the AUEW's fine, and the NIRC, which never was recognised by the engineers, gave them back their money.



THE WORKER

Published by the Communist Party of Britain (Marxist-Leninist) No.10 May 16th 1974 Price 3p

AUEW

Engineers' Answer to Sequestration

STRIKES

VICTORY AGAINST STATE

UNITY IS STRENGTH
LONDON SOUTH DISTRICT

Story Behind AUEW Action

historic meeting of National Committee

GOVERNMENT WORKERS FIGHT

PUBLIC MEETING Friday 24 May 7.30pm Conway Hall Red Lion Square, "Workers in Struggle"

**Historic Notes**

# Guerrilla Struggle against the Bill

**This second article in our series looking back over recent attempts to emasculate the unions deals with the early stages of the fight against Heath's Industrial Relations Act. Irregular, guerrilla opposition was indispensable to maintain a protracted struggle against the employer's law. This created the conditions in which the Engineering Union flouted and made inoperable the Industrial Relations Act and, other unions supporting, ultimately destroyed the Heath government.**

IN PLACE OF STRIFE was withdrawn by the Labour Government because of the opposition from the Trade Union movement. But there was never single-minded opposition to state interference. Opposition was even undermined by the pervasive support among trade unionsists, at all levels of the movement, for the Labour Government while at the same time there was opposition to Labour policy in practice.

This weakness in working class opposition found expression in the 'solemn and binding' agreement with the Labour administration, elaborated by the TUC as a framework for cooperation with the government, and a quid pro quo for the withdrawal of In Place of Strife. The Solemn and Binding Agreement like the Social Contract, offered to Callaghan later, was more than a face-saver offered to the Government, it was based on the dream of union cooperation with government. The Government, on the other hand saw it for what it was - an indication of passivity. Heath, succeeding Wilson, could hardly doubt that the Trade Union movement would this time submit to state legislation to fetter it.

Heath had every reason to hope for success. Although on December 8th 1970 half a million workers came out against the Industrial Relations Bill, it was without TUC blessing. The TUC was wedded to temporising and advocated education and discussion meetings. In March 150,000 workers under TUC banners flooded Trafalgar Square in protest. The Engineering Union called two national strikes, on the 1st and the 18th, the latter in particular massively supported and involving many other unions, several million workers in all.

Nevertheless the Engineers were alone among all unions when on 26th January 1971, they looked realistically ahead to the Bill becoming law, and decided to prepare well in advance for a campaign of non-cooperation with it in that event. By contrast, the TUC at Croydon, expressed the lack of clarity in workers' minds, when it decided against a campaign of industrial action, in spite of the support for that of the AUEW.

The Bill became Act in the course of 1971 and at the TUC Congress in the autumn, there was much dust raised over "de-registration" under the provisions of the Act. In effect, this was a refusal to consider the "non-cooperation" with the Act adopted by the AUEW.

As the year ended, the WORKER wrote: "The situation in the Engineering industry is about as complicated and muddied as it could be. Unemployment rises. The Industrial Relations Act exists. Already, the employers have taken gauge of the confusion, have taken note of the lack of involvement of the membership" in the current wage claim.

It was from this position of weakness that opposition to Heath grew, slowly at first, from struggles which were isolated and guerrilla.

In July 1971, the Upper Clyde occupation began. The miners took on, and in 1972 won, their wage claim against the Government. Throughout most of the year the AUEW waged a guerrilla campaign on its claim with official support for all factories taking action. It was a struggle from weakness which in the end involved many more than could have been involved in frontal confrontation.

Reg Birch of the AUEW Executive Council receiving the offer from the District Secretary, London South, and other AUEW members to defend the union property if requested to do so. (photo: WORKER Sept. 1973)

In June, the Government used the act to enforce a ballot on the question of industrial action on the railway men. A massive vote in favour of struggle was the embarrassing result for the Government.

In July the government, seeing the dockers divided on a national stoppage and preparing to retreat, blundered into using the Act. They imprisoned three men. Instantly the dockers were all out, the men released and the mysterious Official Solicitor settled the situation in the union's favour.

Slow to learn, the employers a month later tried to exploit rivalry between the dockers and container men.

Under the Act five dockers were put into Pentonville. Working class reaction this time was overwhelming. The dockers were released, the law was proved to be an ass.

In September the government, under pressure, retreated on the Act. It would only be used as a last resort! The TUC were invited to and agreed to set up conciliation machinery with the Government to do the Government's work where the Act would not be used. This was a tactical retreat the better to use the Act, which still remained on the statute books.

Despite the resolve of the TUC that unions should not register under the Act, a decision culminating in the expulsion of the National Union of Seamen when it did so, union after union took the decision to defend themselves in the National Industrial Relations Court (NIRC). The AUEW however, stood firm in its resolve not to recognise the court and its successive defiance resulting in the sequestration of larger and larger sums of money from the union's funds. Finally, the presiding Judge, Donaldson, lost his temper and imposed a massive fine. A national engineering stoppage took place on Guy Fawke's Day in 1973. The *Industrial Relations* Act was effectively smashed. The unions had shown that its real assets were its membership and not its funds.

The Act was repealed by the Labour Government which was elected following the smashing of Heath's pay freeze by the miners in the spring of the following year. The Act was gone, but it was a close run thing.

# Miners' Strike of 1972 The world on our back

"THE STRIKE has already won something", said Lawrence Daly at a rally during the 1972 Miner's Strike. "There are eight miners walking around today who would have been killed in the last four weeks."

This comment, given by Kent miner Malcolm Pitt in his book "The World on Our Backs", illustrates the conditions facing the miner in his daily work. These conditions, and the solidarity among the miners which arises from them, are described by Malcolm Pitt as a precursor to his chronicle of the 1972 miners' strike.

Improved conditions in the pit have been won , of course, by union struggle since the early days - and although you won't see women and children down the mine you will see men crawling on their bellies in a narrow tunnel to reach the coal face, sometimes working in deep water, sometimes in extreme heat when to wear any clothing is unbearable.

Mining exemplifies the "socialisation of production", where workers, herded together by the employer as a producing unit, combine together of necessity to defend against the employer.

And the contradiction between worker and capitalist (or the state acting on behalf of the capitalists after nationalisation) is probably nowhere more sharply defined than in the struggles underground. For the union has to be always on the lookout to defend its members' working conditions against "new methods" and "rationalisation" by the Coal Board. The employer not only uses every last ounce of the labour power he buys from the miner every day. He sometimes takes the miner's life and always robs him of his health. When a miner dies, it is said "his eyes set like two lumps of concrete".

Incidentally, it took only a few years for miners to realise that the NCB was no different an employer from the private owners, having closed 548 pits and destroyed 410,000 jobs between 1956 and 1971.

The personalised description of the well organised, well supported miners' struggle of 1972 is a lesson from which every member of the working class should learn. It was a military operation. The Kent miners were made responsible for the area from Fulham Power Station down the Thames and round the South coast to Shoreham to ensure no power station was fuelled. Workers all over the south east supported the Kent miners by giving them food and accommodation close to their picket lines and taking numerous collections.

Examples of the ingen uity of the working class fill the book. The NUM organised launches to traverse the Thames across the path of scab ships delivering to power stations. Any coal which subsequently landed could therefore be legitimately blacked.

The 1972 strike cannot be seen as a complete entity. It arose out of miners' struggles all over the country, and out of it arose the 1974 strike which was to bring down the Heath government. But 1972 must be remembered as a significant advance in the long history of British workers.

"The World on Our Backs" - The Kent Miners and the 1972 Miners' Strike by Malcolm Pitt. Available at Bellman Bookshop.

HISTORY NOTES

# NALGO and white collar unionism

IN THE nineteenth century local government consisted of some 2000 separate and autonomous local authorities who, apart from a few specialist posts for which Parliament had prescribed qualifications, employed whom they pleased as they pleased.

It is no coincidence that at the turn of the century- a time when total trade union membership in Britain topped two million for the first time - workers in local government began to look to collective organisation to bring about change.

## The breakthrough

The first real break was the founding of the London Municipal Officers Association.

Next came the foundation of the Liverpool Municipal Officers Guild by Herbert Blain in 1896. This was the first association of local government officers in Britain which attempted to reach all the staff of an authority.

Blain sought to extend the idea and within four years similar guilds were formed in many places.

Starting off with 8000 members the new association grew rapidly. By 1914 its membership stood at almost 35000 or nearly 70% of all local government officers. But in terms of trade unionism they were indeed early days. Its aims were pensions, the improvement of the efficiency and status of local government officers and the abolition of nepotism rather than the improvement of salaries.

The horrors of the first world war created a desire for a new world and an increased interest in trade unionism.

With all this came a new statement of policy which, while not actually mentioning salaries, went beyond the previous policy in setting out, as its main objective, the creation of an "adequate and efficient local government service". Opponents denounced the plans as "not reorganisation but revolution — blood-red anarchy". NALGO at last was on the right lines!

## Advent of Whitleyism

It was no surprise that, given its historical background, NALGO evolved into Whitleyism. With the idea that local government officers officers were a "responsible" class of workers and that trade unionism was inappropriate, the attractions towards the findings of the Whitley Committee's report published in 1917 were obvious. Whitley Councils with their "gentlemanly" joint industrial councils representing management and workers provided a "perfect" method for NALGO to step into the field of pay. The fact that Whitley had met against a background of industrial unrest and in order to "secure a permanent improvement in the relations between employers and workmen" was seen as a good thing rather than the dampener on trade unionism it was intended to be.

Ironically no sooner had the local authority employees agreed to a draft "Whitley" constitution and a set of salary scales than local authorities reneged one by one. Very few kept their agreements, and so NALGO set itself the the task of rebuilding from that tiny nucleus. It was a case of NALGO fighting for Whitleyism when Whitleyism had been invented to fight trade unionism.

The employers finally realised the opportunity Whitleyism provided and in 1943 the National Whitley Council for local government was set up with the first national salary scales laid down in 1946. To this day, Whitleyism has has remained the cornerstone of NALGO's negotiating procedure.

Meanwhile, NALGO did have one major achievement - the original objective of retirement pensions. This had been a long uphill fight, culminating in the Superannuation Act of 1937.

## The post war years

The post-war years saw NALGO facing a potentially crippling loss of members as the national health, gas and electricity services were formed by removing their functions from the municipal authorities. In the event NALGO decided to follow its members into the new services and in 1952 changed it its name from the "National Association of Local Government Officers" to its present title "The National and Local Government Officers Association".

In 1961, NALGO took a major step towards full "trade unionism" status with the addition of a strike clause to its constitution. Members did not rush to take advantage of this and it was not until 1970 that 18 members' first official strike action took place at Leeds over the application of an incentive scheme.

## Affiliation with the TUC

Finally, NALGO took its biggest step towards being a trade union in the fullest sense, when 43 years and twelve conference debates and six ballots of the membership after it was first suggested, NALGO decided to affiliate to the TUC. Despite all the forebodings that members would leave in droves, NALGO recruited 7,500 members within 6 months of affiliation with just a handful of resignations.

The Union has grown and grown. In this, its 75th year, the 750000th member has been clocked up making NALGO Britain's fourth largest union and the world's largest white collar organisation. This anniversary year, of course, saw NALGO's finest hour when there was a magnificent and successful response to the call to action against the employers during the recent comparability dispute in the local government section.

Historic Notes

# Albania celebrates 35 years of Socialism

IN CELEBRATING the 35th Anniversary of the victorious conclusion of Albania's great contribution to the world proletarian cause, what the Albanian people have heroically demonstrated is that no country is too small nor too hemmed in by hostile neighbours to achieve genuine national independence and to build socialism self-reliantly.

The passionate desire for an independent Albania appeared on the stage of history as early as 1443 when the great national leader, Scanderberg, raised over the fortress of Kruja the double-headed eagle standard of resistance to the Turkish invasion of Europe. For 25 years the Albanian people, united by the national consciousness forged in the course of fighting, kept the Turkish hordes at bay; and when the Albanians were eventually overwhelmed by sheer weight of numbers, that same national spirit kept alive, during 500 years of occupation, the sense of being Albanian, speaking the Albanian tongue and never losing the Albanian will to be free.

In 1912, independence was won from Turkish domination, but after the First World War the allied countries tried to carve up Albania to pay off their obligations to Italy, Greece and Yugoslavia. The Albanian people fought back and, among other actions, threw the Italians out of Vlora.

Then in 1939, ironically on Good Friday, the Italian fascists invaded Albania and turned it into a colony of Il Duce. As the Italian grip weakened with the strength of Albanian resistance, the German Nazis poured in thousands of brutal well-armed troops to try to crush the spirit of Albanian revolt.

In 1941 Enver Hoxha summoned a founding conference, and the Communist Party of Albania, the Party of Labour , was born. Thus was added to the Albanian passion for independence the Marxist principles of scientific socialism. Not only was the war one of liberation of the country from fascist invaders; it was also a revolutionary war to prevent the return to power of businessmen, priests and feudal Zogists (supporters of the deposed King Zog) who had exploited the people and betrayed them to external enemies. The Albanians, waging a people's war under the leadership of the Communist Party, absolutely unaided, defeated an Italian army of 100,000 and a German army of 70,000, thus making a very considerable contribution to victory in the war.

Even before the war was over, Yugoslavia, in whose own liberation war Albanian partisans had participated, plotted against Albania's independence. The argument was that Albania was too small to stand on its own and was bound to be gobbled up by some imperialist power; therefore it would be better if Albania were incorporated in Yugoslavia as a seventh province.

Under Enver Hoxha's firm leadership, the Albanian people asserted their right to exist on their own, and refuted the charge of falling prey to imperialism by standing up to both Britain and the US who combined together to continue, long after the war was over, trying to destroy Albania by sabotage and bribed subversion.

The Albanians have received assistance from fellow socialist countries in building their socialist society; but they have never depended on such aid to the extent that they would sacrifice for it their freedom or their right to go on developing in a Marxist-Leninist way. First the Soviet Union and then China, having given Albania useful help, abandoned socialism and began to expect Albania to accept colonial status in exchange for further assistance - just like the western imperialist powers. In both cases, and with considerable hardship, the Albanian people rejected such help with strings and made up for the loss by redoubling their own efforts.

On this occasion of their 35th Liberation Anniversary, we salute the historic struggle of the Albanian people for national independence and for socialism, because the two things are ultimately inseparable.

The epic story of the battle of Cuito Cuanavale in southern Angola in 1987/89 is little known in Britain. But the events leading up to it show how small yet decisive actions by workers can bring about massive changes in the world…

# Cuito Cuanavale – the story behind the battle that became Africa's Stalingrad

**WORKERS, JULY 2010 ISSUE**

You could argue that the battle of Cuito Cuanavale all started with the actions of Cuban workers through their trade unions, that led first to the Cuban revolution of 1959, and then through their crucial role in Africa to the establishment of independent Guinea Bissau, Angola, Mozambique and Namibia, handing a decisive defeat to Portuguese and US imperialism in Africa and contributing to the victory against apartheid in South Africa.

Without the Cuban revolution, one Jorge Risquet would not have led an armed column to Congo Brazzaville in 1965 at the request of the newly independent Congolese government. Here contact was made with the Popular Movement for the Liberation of Angola (MPLA) who were fighting for independence from Portugal.

Neither would one Ernesto Che Guevara have led another column to Eastern Zaire via Guinea where he talked with Amilcar Cabril, the leader of the independence movement for neighbouring Guinea Bissau and Cape Verde (PAIGC) that was conducting armed struggle against the Portuguese colonialists and who were considered to be the best organised liberation movement in Africa.

The consequences of these engagements were very significant. Cuba sent to Guinea Bissau 31 volunteers – 11 mortar experts, 8 drivers, 1 mechanic, 10 doctors and an intelligence officer, all of them black to be unnoticed and all in time for a battle to take the Portuguese fortified camp at Madina de Boe.

The doctors were to go to the liberated areas and the mortar experts were sent to instruct on the use of artillery that Cuba would send along with trucks, munitions, olive uniforms, medicines and, of course, cigars and brown sugar! Cuba also trained 31 students from the Cape Verde islands in guerrilla war tactics and returned them to fight with PAIGC. By 1967 there were 60 Cubans in Guinea Bissau.

In 1969, US Ambassador Dean Brown reported from Dakar "The war in Portuguese Guinea has gone from bad to worse for the Portuguese during the past three years despite increased Portuguese troop strength from 20,000 to 25,000. PAIGC controls 60 per cent of the country". In November 1970 the Portuguese resorted to attacking the

capital of neighbouring Guinea hoping to overthrow that government and so end its backing for the PAIGC's anti-colonial struggle.

The attack was a fiasco and the writing was now on the wall. With Portugal about to lose Guinea Bissau to PAIGC and fighting the MPLA in Angola and Frelimo in Mozambique its army was set to mutiny. On 25 April 1974, revolution overthrew the fascist dictatorship in Portugal, whose troops were withdrawn from Guinea Bissau by November.

In 1975, Portugal was set to hand over power to Frelimo in Mozambique and to a combination of three independence movements in Angola: the MPLA; the FNLA funded by the CIA and Mobutu's Zaire; and Unita, backed by apartheid South Africa. In July 1975, the US agreed secretly to fund both the FNLA and Unita.

## Double invasion

Fighting broke out in 1975 between the deeply unpopular but well armed FNLA, whose Zairian leader had not stepped foot in Angola since 1956, and the MPLA. At the same time Zairian troops entered Angola from the north and South African forces from the south to support Unita. Eventually the MPLA would take control of the whole of Luanda, the huge capital city, where it had mass support.


Angolans bid farewell to Cuban troops in 1989.

As Independence Day approached in November 1975, the MPLA appealed to Cuba for military instructors, weapons, clothing and food as Zairian and South African forces headed towards the capital.

Cuba sent 480 instructors who would create four training centres that opened in October 1975. They also sent weapons, clothing and food and were set to train 5,300 Angolans in three to six months. However, as the South Africans and Zairians advanced, they found themselves having to go into action themselves to defend their training camps.

Cubans were queuing up to volunteer to go to Angola, but the USA did not find out about this until weeks after the first Cubans arrived. It was described as the world's best kept secret – only eight million Cubans knew about it! They crossed the Atlantic on old Britannia planes dressed as tourists,

with weapons in their suitcases and in the hold of the planes. They went by ship as well. Jorge Risquet was politically in charge of the military and civilian Cuban missions.

As the South Unita and Zairians/FNLA closed in, all seemed lost. But with the MPLA fighting on their own turf, Soviet military equipment arriving and Cubans going into action straight from their plane, Independence Day came with the MPLA in control of Luanda and the joint Cuban/Angolan forces pushing back the South Africans and Zairians. Victory was sealed after a few months. However, FNLA and Unita continued a slash and burn war.

Cubans began to help Angola build health and education services, carrying out vaccination and anti illiteracy campaigns and training the Angolan Air Force and Army (FAPLA). Whilst Cuban and Angolan forces still had to battle with Unita and FNLA, the South West African Peoples Organisation (SWAPO), fighting for Namibian independence from South Africa, set up bases in southern Angola with Cuban and Angolan support.

The South African Defence Force (SADF) set up what it called the 32nd Battalion, comprising ex-FNLA soldiers who had fled to occupied Namibia plus other black mercenaries under white SADF officers, who murdered and sowed terror in Angola. South African bombers frequently attacked Angolan towns, cities and Namibian refugee camps. Invasions of southern Angola were frequent.

Eventually, after another South African invasion of southern Angola in 1987, the combined forces of Cuba, Angola and SWAPO forced the South Africans back to the Namibian border taking the strategic Angolan town of Cuito Cuanavale. The South Africans responded with airpower and tanks and tried to retake the town, knowing its strategic importance. Cuba sent reinforcements, tanks plus Cuban and Angolan MiGs.

As Jorge Risquet said, "There were negotiations going on between Angola and the US, who was after all behind the South African government. In southern Angola, the SADF responded with aircraft and stopped the FAPLA offensive. FAPLA withdrew to Cuito Cuanavale where elite Angolan troops were gathered. The SADF laid siege to Cuito Cuanavale aiming to liquidate the Angolan troops in the midst of negotiations. If they won they would have demanded Angola's full surrender.

"The US had refused to allow Cuba to participate in the negotiations and Cuba had said that it was prepared to stay in Angola until apartheid was defeated, but would only stay as long as Angola wanted them to. However, the SADF launched an attack on Cuito Cuanavale on January 13 1988. By then Cuban reinforcements had arrived and Cuba's best pilots were flying sorties against the SADF inflicting heavy casualties. The South African attack was defeated.

This changed the balance of forces and the US agreed by the end of January to the participation of Cuba in the negotiations.

"In March another meeting was held between Angola, Cuba and the US after the South Africans suffered another defeat in their second attack on Cuito Cuanavale in February. Five attempts to take Cuito Cuanavale were made by the SADF and all failed. We built an airstrip in record time and our planes could now reach SADF bases in northern Namibia and this forced South Africa to accept the first four-party negotiations in May. It was time for the US to stop serving as a messenger between Angola and Cuba on the one hand and South Africa on the other. It was time to seat the declared enemy at the table and seek a negotiated settlement.

Decisive

"So Cuito Cuanavale was decisive. The negotiations came later. The battle of Stalingrad took place three years before the fall of Berlin, but it was at Stalingrad that the outcome of World War II was decided. The South Africans arrogantly used delaying tactics but the die was cast after two more defeats at nearby Tchipa and Calueque. They realised that a frontal war in southern Angola and Northern Namibia would be the swan song for apartheid. So they were forced to negotiate."

The result was full independence for Namibia, no further South African or US support for Unita, withdrawal of all SADF forces to within South Africa's borders and withdrawal of Cuban troops. The SADF was broken and so was apartheid.

In April that year, Nelson Mandela was transferred to Pollsmoor Prison from Robben Island and in December to Victor Verster Prison to negotiate the end of apartheid, followed by his release on 11th February 1990. In 1994, the first democratic elections were held in South Africa sweeping Mandela and the ANC to power.

No wonder so many ANC activists and trade unionists said at the time that those elections were made possible by not only their struggle but by the Cubans at Cuito Cuanavale.

A long and bitter struggle in the winter of 1989-1990 laid the foundations for the current transformation of ambulance workers into paramedics…

# When ambulance workers drove a coach and horses through government pay policy

**WORKERS, OCT 2010 ISSUE**

A long and bitter struggle in the winter of 1989-1990 laid the foundations for the current transformation of ambulance workers into paramedics, by building the understanding, confidence and organisation of the workforce. We should never forget the dispute or the people who took part, and never permit the airbrushing of it out of our history.

In the small hours of a cold late February morning in 1990 at a South London, Elephant & Castle government building, a deal was struck between the unions representing ambulance workers (NUPE, COHSE, NALGO, GMB and T&GWU) and the Department of Health, after a marathon meeting throughout the night. This deal was to be put to ambulance workers as a way of trying to resolve the six-month-old national ambulance dispute.

A very tired Roger Poole, chief negotiator for the Joint Unions, came out on the front steps and, facing a forest of microphones, television cameras and Press, made his famous (infamous) "Coach & Horses" speech: "Today we have driven a coach and horses through the Conservative government's pay policy!"

The proposal inside that coach included a 16.9 per cent increase over two years, an extra 2 per cent for productivity, increases in London Allowance, and funding to develop the new role the paramedic for the future. The increases were to be backdated, with part of it paid as a lump sum.

In return for this the unions agreed, under duress, to withdraw a major part of their claim – an annual pay formula linked to the pay systems of police and fire-fighters.

The full original claim from 1989 was:

- £20 a week increase to bridge the gap between ambulance staff and the fire service;
- A formula to determine pay in the future;
- An overtime rate for overtime work;
- A reduction in the working week and 5 weeks' holiday;
- Better pay and holidays for long service;
- An increase in standby pay.

By 13 March 1990 over 81 per cent of ambulance workers nationwide had accepted the offer.


So, after six months of a hard-fought dispute starting in September 1989 with a rejection of a 6.5 per cent pay offer amid an overtime ban and a work to rule; with police and the army on the streets doing ambulance work; Christmas and New Year without pay; marching and demonstrating in London's Trafalgar Square with 40,000 others; collecting money in buckets from a very generous and supportive public; being locked out of ambulance stations; breaking back into ambulance stations for "sit ins"; being called "van drivers" by the then Health Secretary, Ken Clarke; taking 999 calls straight from the public at stations in a kind of Soviet/commune atmosphere; presenting a 4 million plus signature petition, which at the time broke the British record for the largest ever collected (and may well still be the largest for an industrial dispute); having thousands and thousands of other workers stop work in support on one lunchtime: after six long bitter months…

At 07.00 on the 16 March 1990 ambulance workers across the country went defiantly and proudly back to work.

Those who can remember the ambulance dispute of 1989-90 will also remember the bad taste in the mouth that it left. Although the political, the moral, and the public argument was won, the six-month dispute ended with a settlement that didn't move ambulance workers on very far as a profession worth joining or working in.

One reason for this was because a major component of the pay claim that year had been the establishment of a pay formula. But this was dropped.

The formula would have seen pay and terms and conditions improve year on year without an annual fiasco, and without putting patients at risk. It would have brought stability and professionalism into the ambulance service and at last seen ambulance staff gaining the respect that they deserved and were entitled to.

In addition to this, a pay formula would have been a way of creating a proper career structure based on training and experience.

Because of lessons learned from the dispute and a more disciplined, organised union (particularly Unison, particularly in London) ambulance staff now work within a modern, professional Ambulance Service alongside and among staff whose training, skills, career choices, pay and terms and conditions could not even have been

dreamt of by the workers who stood at the picket lines and fought for their future back in 1989/1990.

Poster produced by ambulance workers during the dispute.

## Ideas and vision

All this did not come about by accident, nor was it simply given to ambulance workers. All this did not happen in a void. These gains and improvements are attached to an invisible umbilical cord stretching right back to the ideas, vision and strength of character of workers who went through the dispute and came out the other end still optimistic and positive.

The experience of the dispute certainly cleared a lot of heads and gave firm views of what trade unions ought to do and where ambulance services ought to be. A seed was planted in that national dispute that has been watered, tended and lovingly cultivated by workers who went through it. A belief and confidence sprung up alongside a determination that ambulance workers and ambulance services would never go back to those times ever again.

Clarity emerged that the police and fire service were not role models in the sense of positioning ourselves within the public services as many politicians wanted. Ambulance staff knew that their position should be at the heart of, and central to, the National Health Service and that the pursuit of some kind of 'joint rescue sector' with the other emergency services was a red herring.

The dispute taught workers that with organisation and discipline they could stand on their own two feet. They have done that and their achievements in the ambulance service are many.

Agenda for Change is the modern version of the pay formula that was brushed under the table at the Elephant & Castle 20 years ago. Finally rescued, resuscitated and brushed down, it has not only brought parity with the police and fire service but has surpassed them.

## Training

The need for properly trained paramedics was an idea that started to grow in the latter stages of the dispute when the unions were not only fighting a pay claim but, with their members, fighting for the survival and future of ambulance services and ambulance workers. Ambulance workers deserved better, the public deserved better and patients deserved better.

The union's full involvement in decision making was vital if they were to drag poorly funded, poorly paid, poorly appreciated ambulance services into the modern age, and although it took a further ten years to start the process of partnership working as one way to protect public services (a lot of wounds were still raw), the battlefield relationship between management and staff in 1989/1990 and before made it plain that things had to change.

One of the greatest visible links between the past, present and future of ambulance services is currently back at the Elephant & Castle. Who would have thought that the very building where that deal was struck in the early February morning of 1990 – the Department of Health's Hannibal House – would now be used as a training centre for London Ambulance Service at which student paramedics are trained at the start of an innovative three-year course?

How ironically full circle that the same rooms in the same place that had witnessed many a difficult meeting in the midst and struggle of a national ambulance dispute to improve work, pay and job security, are the very rooms now being used to train the future!