

Workers power

Monthly paper of the Workers Power group

February
No.90 January 1987

ISSN 0263-1121

30p/10p strikers

AGAINST THE LOCK-OUTS DEFEND UNION RIGHTS

BRITISH TELECOM MANAGEMENT'S crackdown is a warning to all workers. In industry after industry management are issuing ultimatums to accept their terms on jobs, on flexibility and procedures or else. In privatised industries or in industries targeted for privatisation the attack is becoming more and more severe. The lock-out is becoming the favoured tactic of the hard-nosed bosses.

British Telecom's suspensions (a form of lock-out) for refusing to work overtime are part of a pattern of these hardening management attitudes. London Regional Transport and British Rail have adopted a similar line, refusing to negotiate on their offers to the unions. The BBC have cocked a snook at their electricians. Provincial print bosses are mimicking Murdoch one after another. Caterpillar management decided to up and leave without a pretence of negotiation and consultation. In the North East, Austin and Pickerskill locked their workers out for refusing to co-operate with sub-contract working and compulsory overtime.

Privatised Telecom management's trial of strength is a sign of things to come in the Gas (already sold off), Water and Airways (to be privatised) if workers let them get away with it.

CONFIDENCE

That there is a Tory government in power is giving the employers continued confidence. That wage levels are seen as the biggest obstacle to boosting profit margins is fuelling the urgency of the bosses' onslaught. Should the Tories be re-elected they will become even more rampant.

In the face of the attack the standard refrains of the New Realists in the trade union movement and Labour Party are saying that somehow management are no longer playing by the rules of the game. In this scenario Murdoch is a nasty ruthless individual who spoiled a cheery working relationship with the unions. In a similar vein British Telecom management have become "more dogmatic than the Trotskyists" according to the NCU witchfinder General Secretary John Golding.

Those crying "foul" take their arguments a step further. Given that workers have suffered defeats and job losses at the hands of the Tories, the New Realists claim that workers are not prepared to do battle and that somehow the Tories are invincible. Blaming the members, the union leaders vainly

appeal to the bosses to allow them to give in but within the terms of the old rules and with the minimum of public humiliation.

In fact this latest round in the bosses' offensive is not fuelled by spite, dogmatism or a decline in chivalrous behaviour. The needs of profit dictate it. The spineless response of the trade union and Labour leaders serves to encourage it all the more. In fact, we are reaping the bitter fruits of 'New Realism' not a demonstration of the need for yet more doses of it. Knowing that the trade union leaders will not stand and fight their corner, the employers feel under less and less pressure to avail themselves of their services.

ATTACKS

It simply is not true that workers have not been prepared to fight back against the wave of vicious attacks. In fact it has provoked a series of bitter battles fought by workers in defence of their jobs, conditions and rights. To the surprise and visible embarrassment of their union leaders the men and women sacked by News International have stuck it out for over a year. Austin and Pickerskill stayed firm for seven weeks against their lockout and were back in action soon after their return. Telecom engineers, despite having been beaten in 1983, accepted the challenge of strike action once the management signalled they would not tolerate the New Realists' chosen overtime-ban. London NUR members overwhelmingly opted to strike for jobs and against privatisation. Caterpillar workers defiantly occupied their plant rather than lay down and accept redundancies.

TREACHERY

The problem with the defensive battles to date is not only the treachery of the union leaders who have to be dragged kicking and screaming into giving any official support for action. It is also that each struggle takes place in isolation from the other. This prevents us deploying a common front against the treacherous union leaders and against the bosses. It also increases the pressure on groups of workers to fight their battle as a special case, as a sectional plea rather than part of a unified class offensive.

Caterpillar is a case in point here. On the advice of Gavin Laird and Jimmy Airlie, a militant occupation that was holding the bosses'



Caterpillar workers occupation

property as ransom for workers' jobs and thwarting the lock-out tactic has been turned into a work-in in which the workers are asked to demonstrate their flexibility and suitability to be exploited by another employer.

What is needed is to fuse the anger and action of all those who are standing in the front line now. This means linking the struggles directly together through delegations, joint demonstrations and a united campaign to halt the labour movement's headlong retreat and mobilise it for action. It means taking the issues to all workers in the privatisation and redundancy firing line and urging them to mobilise to resist now.

This will meet with bitter hostility from the trade union leaders. They will try to dampen fighting spirit with talk of how nothing can be expected from the Tories and why workers should keep their powder dry until a Labour government comes to their rescue. Our response must be to refuse to give up the fight and to attempt to spread and co-ordinate it. Otherwise we will be paving the way

KINNOCK'S PATRIOT GAME

NEIL KINNOCK HAS once again demonstrated that he is totally unfit to lead the Labour Party. He has shown that he cannot be relied upon to defend even the democratic rights of parliament let alone the interests of the working class. He was badly stung by Thatcher's taunts of lack of patriotism over the Peter Wright affair when she threatened to exclude him from security briefings as a privy councillor. To make amends, he has weighed in as super-patriot in the Zircon satellite affair.

Taking a stand to the right of Thatcher, Kinnock berated her for not trampling brutally enough on the rights of parliament, the freedom of the press and on the legal limitations on judges to issue injunctions. Earning the shocked indignation of his own supporters in the PLP, he supported injunctions against the *New Statesman* and the Speaker's ordering of the Sergeant-at-arm's minions to block the showing by Robin Cook of the BBC

film in the House of Commons.

The Liberal and even the Tory press has sneered at his cave-in before Thatcher on an issue in which the House of Commons and its Committee system have been plainly deceived. In 1982, in the wake of the revelations that Callaghan and Thatcher had deceived the Commons on the Chevaline affair - the updating of Polaris missiles - a solemn undertaking was given by the government to notify the Public Accounts Committee of all items of defence expenditure in excess of £200 million. The Zircon spy satellite will cost £500 million. It is aimed at providing the British Government's spy centre at GCHQ with independent information about what is going on in the USSR. British governments hitherto have been totally dependent on the USA.

Kinnock's patriotic posturing is motivated no doubt by a fear that the Tories will take Labour to the cleaners over the unpatriotic nature of the non-nuclear defence policy. This also motivates front bench spokesmen's attacks on the Tories for cutting defence spending. Kinnock's tank driving on the Rhine and visit to the front-line in Northern Ireland are all part of this struggle with Thatcher over the Union Jack. Here Kinnock is carrying out in practice the policy long advocated by *Marxism Today* of challenging Thatcherism for 'hegemony' within the terms of British chauvinism.

Yet all such capitulations to Thatcher's agenda will only demoralise and disorient the labour movement. Trying to outpace Thatcher as John Bull will be a complete failure. Labour tried that to its cost at the time of the Falklands/Malvinas War and helped her to her record election victory, opening the way to her attack on the miners. Labour's patriotism always looks a shoddy second best. If the Russians are a threat and need to be spied on and "we" need to up defence spending then surely "we" will need nuclear weapons as long as they have them. So will reason most voters. If we need NATO and it has nuclear weapons surely it is inconsistent to get rid of Britain's independent weapons or to refuse to have US weapons here?

DIFFERENT

A consistent socialist, working class position starts from a completely different standpoint. Britain's workers can only defend their interests and thereby those of the vast majority of the inhabitants of these islands when they have overthrown the capitalist state and taken its weaponry out of the hands of the bosses' generals, admirals and air chiefs. At the moment our "main enemy" is at home. When we do take power then NATO, the Pentagon, the CIA will be our direct enemy not the Kremlin (unless the American workers have made the world safe for workers' democracy first).

Now Britain's armed forces are instruments not for "our" defence but for the national oppression of Ireland, for imperialist bandit expeditions like the seizure of the Malvinas from their rightful owners, or for exerting pressure economic and military on the USSR and other countries where the capitalist class has been eradicated.

Instead of Kinnock, Healey and Co and their privy councillors' patriotism the working class needs an internationalist policy on defence. Immediately this means standing for:

- Not a penny for the conventional or nuclear defence of imperialism.
- An end to defence secrecy - publish all the reactionary treaties and agreements and expose the plots against the working class at home and abroad.

editorial

ZIONISM AND ANTI-SEMITISM

THE SUDDEN CANCELLATION of Jim Allen's new play *Perdition* by the traditionally liberal Royal Court Theatre management in London, testifies to the strength of the pro-Zionist campaign. This campaign, underway for some time now, has been directed against all criticism of the state of Israel and of the Zionist Movement. So powerful has this campaign been that several student unions have been persuaded to 'no-platform' prominent supporters of the Palestinian people's right to self-determination.

In an important sense the present Zionist offensive is a reply to the attempts of a few years ago to get student unions and other progressive bodies to declare Zionism as racism. Deemed racism it could then be 'no platformed' on the basis that it was equivalent to advocating NF style racism. Workers Power always opposed the extension of the slogan 'No Platform for Fascists' into the much vaguer 'No Platform for Racists'. Of course we are in favour of combatting racism, by argumentation, counter-demonstration, picketing, heckling or whatever means are appropriate. But the definition of racism is too broad to dictate an abandonment of democratic methods.

Fascism aims to destroy the Labour movement, to pogrom oppressed minorities and to destroy all democratic rights. It uses tactics of extreme violence, intimidation and disruption as a central part of its road to power. Therefore we advocate radically different tactics appropriate to destroying such a deadly enemy.

Zionism, on the other hand, is a bourgeois nationalist ideology which advocated, then put into practice and now defends the colonization of Palestine by European Jewish settlers. Palestine was not a "land without a people". It was already inhabited by a Palestinian Arab people, one of the most advanced and developed sections of the Arab world. Thus the Zionist colonization project could only lead to a clash with these people. When it proved successful it resulted in their national oppression.

The Jewish populations of Eastern and Central Europe were themselves the object of brutal racist oppression culminating in the holocaust - the worst act of racist barbarism ever perpetrated in human history. Marxists have no reason whatsoever to underplay this fact or to underestimate the feelings of Jewish people about it. However the project of the Zionists, who never won majority support amongst European or North American Jews prior to 1940, was condemned by revolutionary communists for two reasons.

First it was absolutely the wrong strategy for the threatened or persecuted Jewish populations of these countries. The Zionists' policy of Jews leaving these countries and emigrating to Palestine weakened the fight against fascism and anti-semitism. Secondly the project of a Jewish national home could only be carried out in collusion with one or another imperialist power and at the expense of the Arab people. History has confirmed the correctness of revolutionary Marxism on this issue.

We therefore deny the right of Zionism to claim immunity from criticism and we rebut with indignation the charge that anyone who opposes Zionism is an anti-semitite (or if they are Jewish a "self-hater"). Our indignation stems at least as much from determination that the victims of real anti-semitism shall not be used to cover the crimes of the Israeli state, which are many and various, as from our support for the oppressed Palestinians.

As Marxists and Leninists we oppose all national oppression but we give no carte blanche to any nationality to do what it wishes. All nations can oppress other nations. The tragedy of the Jewish people in this century proves this. It has been doubly bitter - to be the victims of the most horrific act of racism and chauvinism and, for those who emigrated to Israel, to find themselves practicing national oppression themselves. This has unavoidably led them down the road of massacres, of driving Arabs from lands they and their forbears worked for centuries, of denying them citizenship and equal rights.

PROFOUND CONTRIBUTION

But Marxists do not in any way identify the Jewish people with Zionism. How could a movement whose founders and protagonists included Marx, Trotsky and Rosa Luxemburg fail to recognise the profound contribution to the international culture of humanity, to democracy and to the world working class movement of Jews. The fates of our class and of the Jewish people are indissolubly linked. But this by no means obliges us to cover over the crimes of Zionism. We support the Palestinians right to self-determination, to live as equal citizens in their own country, and we believe all Jews who are sincere democrats must do likewise.

For us this means that an exclusively Jewish state or one which gives the Jews enormous privileges such as the Israeli state does, cannot be supported. We believe that the Palestinian war against this state is justified although we give no political support to the PLO's leadership or its strategy.

We absolutely deny that this means 'driving the Jewish settlers into the sea'. The Palestinians espouse the goal of a democratic secular state of Palestine. To the extent that this means the right of all Palestinian families driven out since 1948 to return if they so wish, this is, we believe, a demand no democrat can oppose. To the extent that this means the abolition of all confessional or pseudo-religious aspects of the state or its citizenship rights we again ask, what democrat can be opposed to it? None of the major tendencies of the Palestinian movement have called for the expulsion of Jewish settlers and democrats and socialists would and should be opposed to any such idea.

As revolutionary communists however we believe that such a democratic solution under capitalism (i.e. under the Israeli or Arab bourgeoisies and with the constant interference of imperialism which created and maintains the witches' cauldron of national hatreds in the Levant) is a utopian solution. We believe that only the strategy of permanent revolution which, whilst it must start from the legitimate democratic and anti-imperialist struggles, as well as the struggles of the Arab and Jewish workers, must be transformed into a united class offensive for workers' states throughout the region.

In Britain revolutionaries must resist Zionist intimidation and defend the Palestinians' struggle without slipping into any unprincipled 'anti-Zionist' front which could include vile anti-semitic creatures such as David Irving and other 'historians' of the holocaust who seek to portray the Jews as responsible for their own genocide. Anti-semitism remains a keystone of far-right cranks and fascist vermin.

We should demand and defend free speech for non-fascist Zionists and anti-Zionists alike provided they do not resort to intimidation or anti-democratic methods themselves. At the moment this may well put us alongside many anti-Zionists protesting against the banning of Jim Allen's play. But we reject any alliance whatsoever under any circumstances with hidden or open anti-semites. Tomorrow we may have to stand shoulder to shoulder with Zionists against fascism and real anti-semitism. We must never forget this, even for a minute.■

RESTORE ALL CUTS



SINCE 1979 THE Tories have cut central government grants to local councils by £17 billion. This has led to a 50% cut in capital spending - on schools, building programmes etc - plus a 70% decrease in investment in housing. Private sector rented housing has also decreased massively leading to an escalation in homelessness and deprivation concentrated in the inner cities.

Yet these savage attacks have not yet satisfied the parasites of the City who want public spending to be reduced still further. Top of their hit list are the Labour councils who have tried to avoid making major cuts in their services. Decried as the "loony left" by the Tories and their loyal press, and echoed by the Kinnock camp, a major campaign has been launched to show how councils such as Haringey, Brent and Lambeth are "socially mugging" the people of London (Tony Marlow, Tory MP), and leading the capital into anarchy and bankruptcy.

TORY LIES

Using the campaigns of the gutter press, based on hysterical racism, sexism, homophobia and bare-faced lies as justification, the Tories are rushing through yet more legislation to control council spending and undermine local government democracy. The Local Government Finance Bill is intended to close off the few loopholes left in existing legislation. A successful court action by Greenwich council revealed that all the grants made by central government to local government in the past five years have been illegal. Undermined, Environment Secretary, Nicholas Ridley, introduced this Bill which will retrospectively legalise all their decisions. It also grants sweeping new powers to the government to directly control capital spending. This would effectively outlaw any 'creative accounting' by local councils who are using capital accounts to help balance their deficits. In addition Ridley has slipped in a neat clause to

make him immune from any past court procedures or appeals over levels of the Rate Support Grant!

The front bench of the PLP has responded to these moves with a combination of attacks on the "loony left" plus vague promises to restore local democracy if elected. Shadow Environment spokesperson John Cunningham retorted that "only 0.1%" of Labour councils were as mad as the Tories claimed. Along with Roy Hattersley he has been quick to reassure the City that a Labour Government would not bail out the councils which have overspent! Kinnock's crew have deliberately distanced themselves from the left wing councils because they do not want to alienate the bosses by being associated with such policies as equal opportunities and defending services. Both of these are Labour policies but not ones the Kinnockites would have any intention of carrying out in office.

In early February Kinnock will use the Local Government conference in Leeds to launch the election campaign. His emphasis will be on building mass support for the rag-bag of vague policies and empty promises on which he, and ex-lefts like Blunkett can concoct into an electoral package. Blunkett demonstrated his faith in Kinnock's new realism in an article in *Tribune*. He urged support for the Labour local government campaign

"which links justice and morality to the practical vehicle to carry it forward, rather than responding to the 'absolutist' demands of the 'loony left'" (his quotation marks!)

BANKRUPT

Sheffield council, of which Blunkett is leader, demonstrates the bankruptcy of the previous council campaigns against central government cuts. They now face having to make £30 million worth of cuts and sack 3,000 workers if they are not 'bailed out'. Many other councils have drawn up budgets with a 30% deficit, closing their eyes to their future problems

by Helen Ward

SPINNEY HILL UNDER ATTACK

SPINNEY HILL LABOUR Party ward in Leicester South constituency is in direct conflict with the Labour Party NEC. It is in danger of being suspended. The ward is defending its right to choose its own candidates for the council elections in May.

At its selection meeting in October, at which there were 68 members present, the ward decided through a majority show of hands not to accept the candidates just selected by the secret ballot and voted to proceed with another selection process.

The rejected candidates were somewhat put out especially as one of them, Peter Soulsby, is leader of Leicester City Council and in need of a safe seat. The NEC stepped in, overruled the branch and is now attempting to impose Soulsby and Rashid Owen Almura as candidates against the expressed

wishes of the members.

The CLP and DLP have, so far, backed the decisions of the branch. The ward selected its two candidates on 16 January. The NEC meet on Wednesday 28 January and will decide what action to take against the ward.

There is a long history behind this dispute. The ward's membership is predominantly Afro-Caribbean and Asian. Soulsby, councillor for the ward for years, has treated the ward like a colony. He has cynically used the unwavering black support for Labour to further his own career. Yet his ward remains chronically underemployed with high black youth unemployment. He put himself in direct conflict with these youth when he closed their Youth Club, Red Star, over two years ago. He has consistently tried to obstruct their membership and

participation in the branch. He's even prepared to use the racist gutter press to further his attacks on the local black youth.

The NEC are prepared to back the racism of Soulsby against the black youth. They are obviously hoping that the support from the DLP and the CLP will collapse at the threat of suspension or expulsion. Then the Labour Party will remove any electoral risks and get down to rightwing business as usual.

The ward has selected two candidates that are prepared to stand. The task remains to maintain active support against the NEC action to impose its candidates, and to continue the fight up to and including refusing to retreat in the face of threats of suspension and disaffiliation.■

workers power

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published by **Workers Power** BCM 7750, London WC1N 3XX printed by **Spider Web Offset** 14-16 Sussex Way, London N7

FIGHTING FUND

Last year WORKERS POWER set a three month target of raising £2,000, to help us buy new typesetting equipment and to help our international work. In particular we aimed to finance work with comrades in Peru and Bolivia. We are pleased to say that in December we surpassed our target. We took our total fighting fund to £2,175.48. Our thanks go to readers, supporters and members in Reading, London, Merseyside, Manchester, Newcastle and Glasgow. In 1987 we are beginning a new fund. New technology does not come cheap. So, between now and May day we aim to raise £5,000. Rush the cheques, cash and postal orders to us without delay.

NHS - SAFE IN LABOUR'S HANDS?

"THE NHS IS safe with us" says Thatcher. She reels off figures about more doctors and more nurses. Norman Fowler proudly unveiled his list of new hospitals at the last Tory conference. But patients and workers in the NHS know the reality behind this string of lies.

The government claim that they have increased spending on the NHS by 20%. Part of the increase was Lawson's £600 million pre-election hand-out last November. But behind these propaganda figures a Select Committee on Social Security reported in 1986 that one third of the government's increase in spending had been consumed by the Clegg pay award in 1980, one third had gone to Family Practice and only 6% had been spent on services in the NHS itself. The same report also revealed that the increase actually needed by the NHS in view of the costs of medical technology and the larger number of elderly people in the country, was 13%. In other words the government's much vaunted spending on the NHS is 7% below that required to ensure that it provides a basic service.

ATTACKS

This inadequate growth in spending is integrally linked with the Tories' strategy of 'efficiency savings' - in plain language cuts in services. Last year Fowler 'saved' £150 million through 'efficiency savings', and he plans to do the same in 1987.

The cuts being carried through by the Tories mean fewer beds and fewer jobs. Over the last two years 110,000 beds went in London alone. And despite Fowler's 100 new hospitals opened, the truth is that the 221 closed since 1979 mean that the number of beds available daily across the whole country has fallen by 35,000.

At the same time demand is rising. The waiting lists have not shrunk from the 750,000 inherited from Labour as the Tories claim. These masters of massaging the figures simply removed 100,000 day cases from the lists and everybody else who failed to reply to a letter sent to them by the Health Authorities.

PROFIT

Since Thatcher came to power 50,000 ancillary workers have lost their jobs. Many more are forced to work for private contractors with no protection of their pay or conditions. Meanwhile the private cleaning firm Crothalls have made £9 million from the NHS. The cut in ancillary staffing levels means that nurses are having to do more and more work formerly done by the ancillaries. Moreover the claims of the Tories to have recruited more nurses is not as straightforward as it seems. For one thing 25,000 nurses are working part-time. And the numbers recruited have not been sufficient to cover the loss of person-hours resulting from the reduction in the nurses' working week. While we are 100% in favour of a reduction of the working week it should be used to expand the workforce. The Tories have not done this to the level necessary to ensure that nurses can cope with the demands of an increasingly older and sicker society.

The standard of service for patients has deteriorated drastically over the last seven years. In 1980 the Black Report pointed to vast differences between the health of workers and the health of the rich. Twice as many working class babies die at birth than

those of the rich. Manual workers are two-and-a-half times more likely to die before retirement than their bosses. In 1986 the Tories tried to suppress a government report which showed that this health gap had widened even further.

The Tories have gone onto the offensive in terms of the structure of the NHS as well as its finances. They have cultivated privatisation and private practice (via BUPA and other such outfits) to undermine the NHS, to turn it into a type of second rank, threadbare service for the poor. They have also tried to turn the NHS into a 'business'.

Every level of NHS management has become a rubber stamp for the Tory cuts - from the Health Authorities packed with Tory appointees to the new layer of 'General Managers'. These managers, many lured from industry by £6000 a year handouts on top of their already fat salaries, have been hired on limited contracts. They know little and care even less about the NHS. Their jobs depend on them implementing the cuts. Whilst their main target has been jobs there have been hundreds of reports of petty penny pinching by General Managers - like turning down heating and touring the corridors turning off lights in the evening. All of this has put patients, staff and visitors at risk.

ALTERNATIVE

Badly damaged under Thatcher's first two terms, what are the prospects for the NHS under a third Tory government? Thatcher's advisers in the Adam Smith Institute recently produced the **Omega Report** which called for: charges for every hospital stay or GP visit; means testing for those too poor to pay; private contractors managing the hospitals and the Health Authorities to be scrapped altogether.

To stop the further devastation of the NHS we have got to get rid of Thatcher. But what is Labour's alternative?

Labour's **New Deal On Health** commits the Labour Party to a "well resourced National Health Service, free to patients." But it is extremely short on hard promises and definite targets. Labour says it will "aim for 3% a year growth" (our emphasis). But when will this 'aim' be reached? They will "phase out health charges such as prescriptions". But why "phase out"? They could abolish them the day after the election and relieve many people of needless costs. Labour says it will "cut waiting lists" and recruit more nurses. But they give no indication that they will reverse the cuts already implemented. They will not say how many nurses they will recruit, or put a figure on the number they will take off the waiting lists.

SPENDING LIMITS

In short there is nothing precise about Labour's promises on the NHS. This is because the key to Labour's policy is the imposition of strict limits on public spending. This is the policy with which Roy Hattersley has re-assured the City of London bankers and the businessmen. A really free and well resourced NHS costs money - money Labour will not have if they stick to the limits laid down by the bosses.

The rest of Labour's Health policy concentrates on preventative medicine, health education and raising standards in the local GP's service. But all this misses the point. Health education, proper

food labelling, taking lead out of petrol etc. comes cheap. On its own, without a massive increase in spending on the NHS, it does not address the problem of increased demand for services due to the declining standard of workers' health and the increase in the elderly population.

But if Labour's promises are vague or miss the point, the real problem is what is missing altogether. Labour's entire **Freedom and Fairness** package says nothing about privatisation in the NHS and nothing about health workers' pay and conditions. There is no firm commitment to get rid of General Managers or to reform the Health Authorities - despite this being Labour conference policy. And true to tradition it says nothing about abolishing pay beds in the NHS.

If workers are to avoid a re-run of the attacks on the NHS Labour carried out from 1976 to 1979 we must fight for a firmer and more precise policy now. The NHS unions must lead the fight to achieve a real socialist policy for the NHS but all unions have an interest in winning it. All conferences this year must adopt fighting policies and formulate them as demands on Labour. This means taking them into the Labour Party at every level, from ward meeting to NEC and the annual conference.

Labour should be forced to expand spending on the NHS to a level that can guarantee to:

eradicate all charges at a stroke,

cut waiting lists to nothing,

restore all the cuts in beds and staff

They should immediately re-nationalise all the privatised services. At present they are only committed to reconsidering private contracts as they come up for renewal. All private contracted labour should be re-employed in the NHS. And Labour should abolish pay-beds and all other aspects of private practice.

Labour is committed to some form of a national minimum wage. But this is conditional on the trade unions holding back on pay claims for better paid workers. NHS workers should unite to demand a minimum wage agreed by committees of low paid workers themselves and wage rises for all linked to the real cost of living. The Pay Review Body should be scrapped in favour of free collective bargaining between workers and employers.

Labour should abolish General Management. It is an invention of the Tories, thought up by Griffiths, the head of Sainsburys.

WORKERS CONTROL

The NHS existed without a change in management structures from 1948 to 1976. Only with the need to cut the NHS have different and new layers of management been introduced. Instead of government appointed managers, the NHS should be run under workers' control, based upon committees of health workers, but excluding the scab professional organisations like the RCN. As organisations they have no place on workers' control committees. Only TUC affiliated unions should be allowed to be represented as organisations on workers' control committees. However, as part and parcel of winning over members of the scab organisations or indeed winning non-unionised members to the unions, mass meetings of the whole workforce should have the right to elect non-managerial individuals to represent the workforce or sections of it regardless of their organisational affiliations.

Hattersley will splutter: "there is no money to pay for it all". But if the drug companies and supply industries were nationalised without compensation this would massively boost money available for NHS spending. We must demand this is done by Labour.

Because Labour is not committed

to these priorities but to the priorities of the international bankers, NHS workers will have to organise to fight for these demands.

The attacks on the NHS, privatisation, the cuts and so forth, have weakened trade union organisation in the health service. We should begin now the fight for a fully unionised workforce and a closed shop. The TUC unions need to fight against the 'professional organisations' which bolster the past and potential future scabs in the workforce; in particular the Royal College of Nursing.

We need a single fighting union in the NHS, but until this can be won on a non-bureaucratic basis we should build joint union committees of TUC affiliated unions, and fight for recognition of these as sole negotiating bodies.

The immediate demands of NHS workers, before, during and after a General Election should be:

no more closures; no loss of beds,

no more job losses; unfreeze all posts,

private contractors out of the NHS,

defend all conditions of service, nurses shift patterns etc. against 'efficiency savings',

break with the Nurses' Pay Review Body. For action now to win a massive pay rise across the board for all NHS workers. No local deals,

for strike action and occupations to win these demands. For a rank and file movement across the NHS unions to fight for them.■

by Jane Potter



NHS cuts are not a laughing matter

WOMEN SUFFER MOST

THIRTEEN THOUSAND WOMEN die of breast cancer and 2,000 die of cervical cancer each year. Yet 2,000 breast cancer and 1,000 cervical cancer patients could be saved each year by effective screening.

Labour, in its **New Deal on Health**, promises to tackle this problem by setting up a computerised call and recall system for screening and ensuring that every woman has the right to a regular check up. They promise to extend facilities to the workplace and shopping centres. They are right to highlight this scandal which the Tories have allowed to continue. But women trade unionists must beware.

Facilities, if they are provided do not equal an automatic right to screening. Women workers will have to fight for the right to have time off for this screening.

Some unions such as NUPE and the NUHKW (Hosiery), which have a large number of women members have won this at national level in certain sectors. But it will have to be taken seriously by rank and file trade unionists to win comprehensive local agreements for time off for screening.

Labour's programme on women's health ends there. Yet women have been the key section on the receiving end of Thatcher's attacks on the public services. It is women as health workers who have lost their jobs or had their hours and pay drastically cut. Labour have nothing to say on this. It is women who have had to give up their jobs to care for the elderly, the sick, the mentally ill and handicapped - all those who cannot be looked after properly by a shrinking NHS and social services.

Labour however does recognise the plight of the "carers" in the home and the fact that they are mostly women. But instead of full and free health and social services provision and 24 hour creche facilities Labour gives these women a pat on the back for providing "a service of importance to all of us". All Labour's programme offers is a few back-up services.

We should fight for Labour to implement their promises to carers - more day centres, more district nurses and home helps etc. But in the absence of the fight for a properly funded NHS that provides adequate facilities for all, Labour will end up condemning women to a never-ending life of household drudgery.■

by Jane Potter

FOR A DEMOCRATIC OPEN CONFERENCE

THE WORKERS REVOLUTIONARY Party in Britain has launched an international initiative calling for a "world conference of Trotskyist organisations". This proposal has already been discussed at a "Trotskyist/Revolutionary conference" in San Francisco and at the GOR/RWP's International Conference to which both the WRP and the Movement for a Revolutionary Communist International (MRCI) along with other groups sent delegates. The MRCI and its sections welcome this call. We declare our willingness to participate both in the preparations and the conference itself.

Such a conference, if it is achieved, will take place at a time of serious crisis for the major centrist organisations who claim the mantle of Trotsky's revolutionary Fourth International. The explicit rejection of the theory of Permanent Revolution by the SWP(US) signalled a flight towards Stalinism by whole sections of the United Secretariat of the Fourth International. It has resulted in sizeable splits and a visible decline of that tendency. Nahuel Moreno's ill fated fusion and split with the OCI of Pierre Lambert has been followed by a series of splits and disintegrations in his International Workers League (IWL). Outside of

its stronghold of Argentina this organisation is declining. The Lambert group itself has suffered two splits in the past period in France. The International Committee of Gerry Healy has, of course, exploded into fragments since the split in the WRP at the end of 1985.

CENTRISM

All of these events reflect the crisis of 'Trotskyist' centrism in the 1980s. This brand of centrism grew dramatically, especially in Europe, on the wave of radicalisation and class struggle which followed the French general strike in 1968, an event which signalled the end of the "long boom". Today, in the face of a ruling class offensive in Europe and a struggle by US imperialism to reassert its hegemony at home and abroad, the bankruptcy of centrism - in its twin forms of sectarianism and opportunism - masquerading as revolutionary communism (i.e. Trotskyism) is being exposed. Parties and organisations which have no programmatic answer to the crisis of leadership within the working class are now wracked with organisational crises.

A world conference in such circumstances, which drew into discussion and polemic the major centrist organisations claiming to be Trotskyist, could provide a real opportunity to seek programmatic clarity provided it allowed for an open struggle with centrism. On this basis the MRCI has argued for a completely open conference, inviting the participation of all those claiming to be Trotskyist. We see no point in setting preconditions designed by one or other of the major centrist organisations to exclude their competitors. For example the IWL have insisted that all participants must stand for the building of "sections of the Fourth International . . . in all countries".

As far as we understand it, Moreno does not even claim to be building his own organisation, the MAS of Argentina, as a 'Trotskyist Party'. Nor is the Fourth International itself to be a 'Trotskyist' International. According to the IWL it would be one in which Trotskyists might be "a minority". So why not exclude the IWL as well as the USFI?

We certainly do not reject the principle of building Trotskyist parties in every country. Indeed we believe it is essential to the building of a new international revolutionary leadership. But the

exact meaning of such a principle, more importantly the programmatic basis on which such parties and a Trotskyist International are built, is precisely the issue that an open conference should discuss. The resolutions and programmatic documents adopted (or rejected) by the organisations at such a conference will in themselves delineate the centrists from the communists.

The most important part of such a conference will be the preliminary preparation, circulation and publication of position documents of the various participatory organisations. A commitment by all those taking part to circulate and discuss the contentious issues within their organisations, and as the WRP resolution puts it, to reject "calumny and slander as a substitute for political discussion and polemic", is necessary. To achieve this the conference must be organised and run democratically.

All organisations willing to commit their resources to building such a conference, as the MRCI is, should be represented on national or continental coordinating committees, whose tasks should include the production of multilingual conference bulletins and their circulation within the organisations involved. Such bodies should organise national or continental pre-conferences to determine the key issues and differences to be debated.

SOLUTION

We think it would be an illusion to pretend, as some WRP leaders are suggesting to their membership, that such a conference will be a magical solution to "the crisis of the Fourth International". We believe the leaders of the major centrist fragments of Trotsky's

Fourth International have proved themselves over many years and in every revolutionary situation to be incorrigible and unreformable centrists. We believe that many of the smaller fragments are guilty of ingrained sectarianism, opportunism or both. We believe that both must be fought with vigour. To this end we will strive to build a bloc of all those willing to combat centrism, both in theory and in practice, in any such conference around a principled common declaration against the centrist distortion of Leninism and Trotskyism. We have already proposed such a perspective to the GOR/RWP and the Bolshevik Tendency (USA). We invite the WRP and its fraternal organisations (as we have done before) to enter into such a political discussion process and struggle against centrism.

EXCUSE

Of course there is a real danger that the project of a 'world conference' will become nothing more than another excuse for a new unprincipled bloc between centrist organisations. We remember our attempts to participate in the much vaunted 'open conference of world Trotskyism' of Lambert's OCI and Moreno's 'Bolshevik Faction', which, when it actually occurred, was a 'closed' and unprincipled fusion conference.

If the members of the WRP wish to avoid a similar fate they must ensure that the open conference is democratically run and avoids all attempts at exclusionism based on unprincipled combinations. A democratic open conference provides the opportunity to take forward the struggle against centrism and for the refounding of a Leninist-Trotskyist International. ■

The MRCI Secretariat

AAM CONFERENCE

LEADERS BLOCK REAL SOLIDARITY

THE EVER GROWING repression in South Africa, especially the continued detention of hundreds of trade union militants and leaders like Moses Mayekiso, has highlighted once again the need for direct trade union action against the apartheid state. The necessity of campaigning in the trade union movement for this has been raised in 2 conferences over the last two months with very different results.

In Birmingham in December delegates from 59 trade union branches, shop stewards' organisations, trades councils, Anti-Apartheid branches and Labour Party branches, held detailed discussions on ways to take the boycott movement forward. The delegates agreed that the central aim of the new Campaign for Trade Union Sanctions would be to win support for workers action to stop goods and services moving to and from South Africa, and to break all British links with the apartheid regime.

Detailed discussion took place on the areas to target, such as ICL computers - widely used in local and central government here. Delegates also agreed that there was an urgent need to publicise action that was already taking place and agreed to set up a regular campaigning newsletter.

PICKET

A further delegate conference will be called later this year to take resolutions and establish a formal constitution. Meanwhile an interim Steering Committee was chosen to take the work forward. It is charged with producing the newsletter, attempting to organise a tour here by US longshoremen who have taken boycott action, and putting supporters of the campaign in the same and related unions in touch with each other. It has called for a trade union picket of the South African Embassy on Saturday 21 February in protest at the continued State of Emergency

and detention of trade unionists.

An important question for the trade union sanctions campaign was its attitude to the Anti-Apartheid Movement (AAM). The most glaring weakness of the AAM in the last period has been its failure to mobilise rank and file trade unionists to take direct boycott actions against South African goods. Indeed its leadership has tried to obstruct attempts to mobilise around the lobby of the TUC for action.

REFUSAL

This refusal by the AAM to make trade union sanctions central to the Anti-Apartheid campaign flows directly from its commitment to the popular front policy of the African National Congress. Outside South Africa this means placing the emphasis in solidarity work not on the working class but on creating alliances which can pressure "progressive" (and not so progressive!) capitalist governments to implement sanctions against South Africa. Criticism in Britain therefore, of the trade union leadership or the Kinnock leadership of the Labour Party for their criminal inaction on the question, must be avoided at all costs. So too must rank and file trade union actions be avoided lest they discomfort these gentlemen.

The leadership of the AAM, heavily staffed by Stalinist fellow travellers of the South African Communist Party and ANC, will do everything in its power to prevent this strategy being disrupted. Early in the AAM's annual general meeting the platform made it clear that it was more interested in the defeat of one of its major opponents inside the AAM, the City of London Anti-Apartheid group, than it was in discussing effective trade union action. Delegates were faced with undemocratic chairing. Only after a demonstration by City supporters, the adjournment of the conference and negotiations, was there a proper card vote on a



South African blacks face these goons everyday - our solidarity is vital

challenge to the conference arrangements committee report.

A major issue at the meeting were proposals to change the constitution. The changes involved a move to a delegate structure for the AGM, and the drawing up of model rules for local organisations. Workers Power supporters opposed the changes because they vested power in the hands of the national committee, a large section of which is not elected by the AGM, to interpret policy, and to approve organisations for affiliation.

BUREAUCRACIES

While we are in favour of a delegate structure which allows working class organisations to democratically decide the policies and priorities of solidarity work, the purpose and effect of these changes was to confirm the control of the AAM by the labour and trade union bureaucracies and their Stalinist footsoldiers. This is particularly important for them in

election year when they don't want anyone to rock the boat!

The moves complete the witch-hunting of the City of London group whose crime in the eyes of the AAM leadership is to mount the non stop picket of the Embassy. It is noisy, angry and attracts youth and black people who want to put up a visible fight against apartheid. But the AAM hates it because it is outside its control.

The AAM approach to trade union action was reaffirmed despite a united intervention by those supporting the trade union sanctions campaign around the positive resolutions on the question. Only one hour of the one and a half days was spent discussing trade union work despite the fact that 16 motions - by far the largest number on any single subject - had been submitted. What's more the discussion was opened by the NUM's Jack Jones - who scabbed on the NUM loyal Leicestershire strikers during the Great Strike!

The lay executive committee Resolution number 17, reaffirmed the popular front perspective. It included a call on the 'international

community' to unite 'all forces' to isolate apartheid. Workers Power spoke against this strategy, explaining that this means reliance on the international capitalist class to overturn apartheid - the very people who profit from it and whose idea of 'progressive' change is designed to prevent the working class challenging those profits.

WEAKNESS

It is the fundamental weakness of the City of London group that they share this popular front strategy, although they would like to implement it a lot more actively than the existing AAM leadership. This political weakness was revealed when the City Group threw its weight behind Resolution 17 and voted for it. Further the Group proceeded to vote against extending time for discussion of resolutions dealing with trade union actions.

The City Group has announced that the AAM has reached the 'end of the road'. If by this they mean we should have nothing more to do with it, they are wrong. The vast majority of trade unions are affiliated. Membership has rocketed in the last year. Most workers and young people who want to do something about apartheid look first to the AAM. By building the Campaign for Trade Union Sanctions alongside AAM, working in action oriented Anti-Apartheid groups for a trade union orientation, for taking up the fight against racism, and by continuing to oppose the popular front strategy inside AAM and trade union branches, we can ensure that the arguments for effective working class action will be heard. ■

by Sue Thomas

Trade union picket of the South African embassy to protest against the continuing detention of political and union activists. From 2pm to 4pm, Saturday 21 February. Contact Bronwen Handyside for details. (01-274-7722 ext 2010)

TRANSFORMING THE UNIONS

TODAY, WITH 'New Realism' firmly in the saddle in Congress House and a large majority of union head offices, the idea of fighting for a fundamental transformation of the unions is increasingly likely to provoke laughter on the left.

Cynicism and disillusion have become so common because in a time of profound crises for capitalism - with over 4 million actually unemployed - the unions have either capitulated without a fight or suffered tragic defeats. Tragic in that in industries like Steel and the Mines many of the best militants have been victimised and tens of thousands of jobs been lost.

Capitalism is teaching us - in its brutal fashion - a lesson that the great Marxists liked to teach to previous generations. That is, that trade unions, while they are absolutely essential to workers under capitalism, are also **not sufficient** in themselves to defeat it in a period of deep crisis. Trotsky wrote the **Transitional Programme** in a period with many similarities to the present. That is why its fundamental analysis and slogans are just as necessary today as then.

STRIKE WAVES

The 1930s were no period of economic upturn or of business as usual, peaceful trade unionism. In the USA and France vast strike waves marked the years 1934-38. Countries that had previously had only small, craft-union dominated labour movements saw workers staging sit-in strikes and flooding into the unions by the million.

In Britain the situation was much less explosive, but even here the 1930s started with serious unemployed struggles and ended with a revival of the unions after the defeats of the post-1926 period. Against this background and with a perspective of approaching war

- and out of that war revolution - Trotsky nevertheless placed enormous emphasis in the **Transitional Programme** on the Trade Unions. Why?

ORGANISATIONS

Because for Trotskyists the trade unions are the most elementary and basic mass organisations of our class. Their origin lies in the essential need of workers to unite to sell their only abundant possession in this society - their ability to work. A house, a car, a few savings, even a few paltry Telecom shares don't alter the fact that a worker has only her or his ability to work nor that the capitalists and their state monopolise the means of production in and with which that labour can be employed to produce profits.

theory
programme
& practice

This sale of the ability to work is hopelessly unequal if the individual worker confronts the multinational corporation. The working class has created and has recreated their unions to perform the elementary function of enabling them to collectively confront the employers in this relationship and to prevent workers falling into competition amongst themselves as individuals for jobs, wages etc.

Of course once the unions came into being they took up other questions - conditions at work, the length and intensity of work and

then more and more issues affecting workers and their families outside the workplace. They helped the workers to think and act like a class. They helped the working class become aware of itself and its **collective** interests. In this sense they became what Marx and Engels called 'schools for socialism'. They mobilised workers at first to resist their individual employers. But they also learned the need to fight employers as a class, when the latter attacked the unions with the forces of the state and with anti-union laws.

CARROT

At the same time as using the big stick to smash effective resistance, employers have - since the mid-19th century in Britain - learnt to use the carrot as well. The carrot is for the union leadership by and large. If the union leaders were prepared to restrict workers' struggles to the economic level and to peaceful, legal and constitutional means then the employers would be prepared to legally tolerate these sorts of unions. To aid this they set out to promote and flatter the union leaders, giving them titles and jobs on various state bodies and commissions. They enabled them to consolidate as a caste with material interests actually different to those of the mass of workers.

The union leaders, repeatedly carrying out their pro-boss policies had to protect themselves against sections of their members furious at their frequent sell-outs and betrayals. Step by step they reduced the democracy and accountability in the unions, making their jobs lifetime ones, their elections indirect and infrequent. They raised their own salaries and soon they constituted a powerful and privileged bureaucracy - the masters of their members rather than their servants. In the twentieth century



Norman Willis

when the major capitalist powers had become imperialist exploiters of the rest of the world, this union bureaucracy became intertwined with the state, willing and able to **police** their membership in the interests of capitalism.

The bureaucratic leadership today wants, above all, to keep the unions within the limits of bargaining with the employers over wages and conditions. When capitalism is in one of its boom phases, as in the 1950s and 1960s they could by and large get away with this.

CRISIS

But in a period when capitalism lurches from crisis to crisis the only thing the bosses want to negotiate over is how many redundancies they need, and for either a stand-still or even a cut in real wage levels. The unions, trapped in the 'legal and peaceful' strategy come up against a brick wall. But the **members** of the unions, the rank and file don't just give up and take their dole cards. As the miners, the print workers and many others have shown, they fought back. They try to use the unions for a different, more militant struggle altogether. They do their utmost to break down sectionalism and appeal to other workers. They draw women and whole communities into their struggle.

It is this experience - this contradiction between rank and file and the bureaucracy - repeated time and time again that the **Transitional Programme** bases itself upon.

At the same time it points the way forward to a successful escape from the blind alley of pure-and-simple trade unionism. It points the way to the struggle for working class power.

Every strike that is won asserts our right to do this; whether it is a strike to save jobs or win a wage rise. But in periods where the employers are **systematically** throwing people out of work and allowing inflation to erode real wages, we need an answer more effective than the one-off pay increase or the factory/mine 're-prieved' for six months.

DEMANDS

The sliding scale of wages demand is a continuous answer to the continuous attacks of the bosses. Both this and the principal of 'work or full pay' point to the need for workers to set up their own committees to monitor the cost of living and to divide up work amongst the workforce when there is no demand.

These sorts of demands - demands that meet head on the destructive effects of a capitalism - are posed by the objective needs

of the working class here and now. The struggle for them will reveal to millions the need and the possibility of getting rid of capitalism altogether. They are what Trotsky and the communist movement of the early twenties called 'transitional demands' because the fight for them opened the perspective of a transition to socialism and a planned economy.

These new struggles, forced on us by the crisis and decay of capitalism, require not only new objectives but new methods of struggle and renewed forms of trade union organisation. To fight effectively we need to involve not just a few militants but the majority of workers in active mass picketing. We need strike committees elected by all the strikers or occupiers directly. We need councils of action in every area to link struggles and mobilise solidarity. But this great campaign needed to renew the unions - to demolish the antiquated caste and craft divisions, to bring into membership the unorganised, the unskilled, the women, the black workers, so often neglected by the unions in the past - cannot stop short at the question of who should lead the unions.

LEADERSHIP

A movement of the rank and file workers needs to be the one to establish or restore workers' democracy. It must start from the bottom certainly, because that is where the real fighters are and where the forces exist to change the unions. But it must not stop short of the question of leadership. A completely different sort of leadership is needed in the unions. We do not want **elected-for-life** bureaucrats policing our unions for the bosses and the state, but regularly elected and recallable militant fighters. But more than this they must be **class** fighters, committed to defeating the class and the system that condemns millions to poverty, unemployment and exploitation. In a word they must be revolutionary communists.

STRATEGY

Here we come up against the limits of trade unions yet again. For trade unions even of the most militant stripe cannot train and organise the communists necessary to lead, not only the union struggles, but all the battles against capitalism of the oppressed and exploited. Nor can they develop an overall strategy for achieving working class power. They recruit and should recruit **all** workers who are not scabs.

The organisation that can develop and defend a strategy for working class power is a **party**. Only a party can train the communist militants who deserve to be chosen as leaders by workers in struggle. Only a party can provide the swift, effective and centralised direction of its militants that will really be a match for the capitalist class and its agents within our ranks.

Revolutionary communists today do not constitute such a party. The small sects that call themselves such are simply making a mockery of the name. Trotskyists today must make the centre of their fight for such a party inside the ranks of the trade unions, fighting to maintain them, to build a movement of the rank and file to do this and to fight for the transitional demands combined into an action programme to drive back the bosses' and state offensive. And in this struggle they can and must also rally the politically conscious militants into the growing nucleus of a new revolutionary party. ■

by Dave Stocking and Paul Mason



The power of the rank & file

WALES PRINT

FIFTY NUJ AND 35 NGA members at the United Newspapers' South Wales Argus in Newport have been locked out since 10 December. An assistant editor produced a story through the new computer system for setting by the NGA.

The NGA had refused to operate the system because no agreement on it had been reached. This led to the suspension of the FOC. An overtime ban was then imposed by the NGA.

Meanwhile the NUJ chapel also held a half-hour meeting which

they decided to continue the next day. On arrival at work the next day, NGA members were locked out, while NUJ members were allowed to continue their meeting - but were then told to leave after half-an-hour or they would be considered to be trespassing.

During the dispute the **Argus** has continued to be produced with the aid of scab journalists and with SOGAT members refusing to honour picket-lines. All the locked-out workers are demanding is the right for joint talks on the introduction of the new technology.

The need now is to

get SOGAT out. They previously voted 51 to 9 to remain working after their FOC warned them that if they went on strike they would be sacked. Another SOGAT meeting must be convened, with speakers from the lock-out putting the case for SOGAT members joining the strike.

Messages of support
and donations to:

The NGA/NUJ Dispute Office
c/o European Labour Party
1a Albert Street
Newport
Gwent

by Alan Conchar

GORBACHEV AND THE CRISIS

GORBACHEV AND HIS closest henchmen have staked their reputations and political futures on their ability to openly confront and resolve the recurrent economic and political crises facing the USSR. They promise a shake-up, and they promise results. However, the mechanisms and agencies of change that they look to are both incapable of achieving the promised ends and are likely to increase social and political opposition to bureaucratic rule in the USSR.

The USSR that Gorbachev inherited bears all the hallmarks of the system created under Stalin in the 1930s. The Soviet working class has long been deprived of political power and collective rights to organise. The economy is run within the framework of centrally organised planning. Sitting on top of the system is a vast bureaucracy which administers every aspect of society and the economy.

In the KGB it has the necessary apparatus of terror to maintain the status quo. The bureaucracy lives out a privileged existence as a parasitic caste that politically expropriates the only force that can qualitatively expand and extend the planned property forms in the direction of socialism - the working class.

CONTRADICTIONARY

The Soviet bureaucracy is an extremely contradictory phenomenon. It owes its privileges to its control of post-capitalist property relations bequeathed it by a proletarian revolution. Its bureaucratic forebears led by Stalin eventually succeeded in betraying the revolution. It has no use for those property relations as a means of creating a socialist society, a society that could increasingly mitigate inequalities, eradicate the remnants of capitalism and struggle to internationalise the proletarian revolution. On the contrary it jealously guards its privileges and its monopoly of administrative and oppressive functions. It is an agent of inequality in wealth and power.

The bureaucracy lacks the coherence and conscious identity of self interest possessed by capitalist ruling classes. The very mechanisms of the market organise the capitalist class as a self-conscious functioning identity. It propels the capitalist class to attempt to maximise profit and efficiency. The bureaucracy is under no such immediate pressure from the nature of the property relations it presides over.

RUTHLESS

In the 1930s Stalin had to establish a ruthless Bonapartist dictatorship, not only to enable him to defend bureaucratic privilege against the workers, but in order to force that same bureaucracy to drive the economy forward and prevent it fragmenting into warring tendencies.

Kruschev lifted the yoke of terror from the shoulders of the bureaucracy only to find that it preferred the easy life to his industrialisation plans. It organised to oust him. Brezhnev was the bureaucracy's choice to leave it alone in exchange for it leaving him alone too. The parasitical, indolent nature of the bureaucracy was evident for all to see in Brezhnev's years of "cadre stability". The top functionaries grew more decrepit, corrupt and geriatric at their posts.

Left to its own spontaneous devices the bureaucracy proved itself equipped only to rule over a stagnating economy - gripped by growing corruption and mounting political cynicism. The potential for it becoming the object of overthrow either by imperialism or by

the long suffering Soviet working class was growing. It lacked any means of ideologically justifying its lifestyle and privileges to the masses. Instead it had, ever vainly, to try and hide its parasitical perks from those who produced the USSR's wealth.

The more the productive forces at its command have developed, diversified and become sophisticated so increasingly the mechanisms of bureaucratic planning have proved a less and less effective means of expanding those productive forces. It can develop no permanent means of raising the productivity of the labour of the workers it politically oppresses. Only the producers themselves, with full political power in their own hands could perform that task. The Stalinist bureaucracy is committed, by virtue of its position as a parasitic caste, to using any means to prevent such an outcome. A healthy workers' state stands in sharp contradiction to the material interests of the Stalinist bureaucracy.

A healthy workers' state would place every aspect of economic management in the hands of workers' councils. The problems of waste, of disproportion, of realising plan targets and so on, would be the subject of democratic debate and decision. The execution of the plan would then be monitored and modified if necessary. The needs of all would come before the privileges of the few.

The USSR, on the other hand, is a degenerated workers' state and such democratic organs are anathema to the bureaucratic caste who rule over it. Workers' councils would pose a threat to their strangulating control over the economy and every other aspect of life. Workers democracy would sharpen to an intolerable degree the contradiction between the interests of the bureaucracy and those of the masses. For this reason the bureaucracy is compelled to tolerate and even defend a system that has inefficiency built into it. Any other option would, in one way or another, pave the way for its own destruction.

REFORMIST

Periodically, however, the extent of inefficiency and waste compels sections or even dominant component elements within the bureaucracy to adopt reformist solutions to forestall the risk of a working class political revolution. Favourite amongst these, for a caste whose every instinct is conservative in the extreme, is to flirt to a greater or lesser degree with capitalist market mechanisms to boost the flagging fortunes of the bureaucratically managed economy. This has been most evident in the degenerate workers' states in Yugoslavia, Hungary and most recently, China. However it should always be remembered that Kruschev and Kosygin hoped to intensify the operation of market mechanisms only to see the Soviet bureaucracy's major components balk their plans.

The Soviet bureaucracy's general solution to economic stagnation, despite the chops and changes we have described tends, to be a combination of calls for stricter centralised direction and the augmenting of the existing planning apparatus with more market mechanisms. These solutions express both its contradictory nature and its historic bankruptcy. Tighter centralised bureaucratic control has proved no solution to economic decline but it maintains the political grip of the bureaucracy. Market mechanisms threaten to subvert the central bureaucracy's monopoly of power and fragment the bureaucracy into feuding groups. Their fuller operation strengthens the social base and resolve of consciously capitalist

restorationist forces. Either way the bureaucracy's privileges and rule are imperilled. Gorbachev is trying to combine both in order to save the Stalinist system the bureaucracy prospers from.

Groomed by KGB chief and butcher of Budapest, Yuri Andropov, Gorbachev came to power at the head of a section of the Kremlin hierarchy that was mindful of the crises that faced the bureaucracy's rule at the end of the Brezhnev period. The Soviet economy was proving less and less able to match the growth rates it could notch up at a more primitive stage of industrial development. The targets for the 1981-1985 eleventh Five Year Plan set a record for their modesty. Yet that period registered what, by Soviet standards, were extremely feeble results. There was a 17% increase in output over the five years and only an 11% increase in output per head. Declining world raw material prices - particularly for oil - threatened to cut off a previously lucrative source of hard currency income.

THREATENED

Such an economic performance threatened bureaucratic rule on two fronts. Internationally it made it that much more difficult to match the anti-Soviet arms drive that all the major capitalist powers are set on continuing. (Hence Gorbachev's strenuous efforts to secure an arms limitation deal with Reagan). It placed greater strain on the Soviet bureaucracy's ability to sustain economic support for regimes which, in its own interests, it has been prepared to buttress against imperialism in Indo-China, Afghanistan, Cuba and Africa. Domestically its inability to meet evident and marked social and personal needs threatened the regime with declining morale and increased alienation from the regime and its ritualised bombastic propaganda machine. It raised the spectre of open rebellion.

Andropov stood at the top of a secret police network well tuned to monitoring grievances expressed in queues, factories and apartments. While the KGB is permanently mobilised to break all manifestations of open opposition its chiefs were also aware that certain aspects of bureaucratic rule were threatening to undermine the entire edifice of the caste's political power. Most notably they were aware that the blatant flaunted privileges of the bureaucracy and its offspring aroused real resentment amongst Soviet workers. So too did the special shops with speedy service and plentiful supplies, closed to the long queuing, long suffering Soviet masses. As evidence of corruption, nepotism and excess mounted so those around Andropov and Gorbachev grew alarmed at the destabilising potential of such behaviour for the entire regime.

Similarly the officially optimistic world of the Soviet media was beginning to have negative effects. The Soviet media's portrayal of an ever improving world of plenty, constructed under the benign leadership of Brezhnev and then Chernenko, had ever less relation to the real society inhabited by an increasingly sophisticated Soviet citizenry. It led to many of working class youth positively identifying with all that the Soviet media stigmatised as negative. It meant that broad sections of the intelligentsia distanced themselves from the regime in search of their own, usually individualistic and often mystical salvation. It encouraged widespread apathy and deep cynicism amongst industrial workers.

A failure to deliver an adequate quantity and quality of consumer goods threatened to compound the crisis. The USSR is the world's largest producer of both steel and cement yet the housing stock was hopelessly inadequate. Factories were only half-built yet the media complained of a cement shortage! Supplies of food and clothes barely improved and shopping conditions remained appalling.

Gorbachev has tried to act on all these fronts. His closest supporters have been moved into the key positions of power. Half of the Central Committee were replaced at the last Party Congress. The vital Central Committee secretariat apparatus has been overhauled. At the time of writing only Ukrainian Party boss Shcherbitsky and the veteran Gromyko, of Brezhnev's close associates, still retain their Politburo places.

CORRUPTION

Along with this shake-out of office holders Gorbachev has launched a highly publicised campaign against corruption in the bureaucracy, the police and recently even the KGB. The press now regularly denounces a list of officials dismissed, jailed or executed for corruption. Open criticism has been launched of bureaucratic privileges in the press with Gorbachev's new Moscow boss Yeltsin claiming to be closing down all special shops in the city.

It is on this issue that we can see the dilemma Gorbachev faces. To revamp the standing of the bureaucracy he is forced to take measures which threaten both to split the bureaucracy itself and to arouse popular expectations. When *Pravda* opened its pages to readers' comments on bureaucratic privilege a Kursk Party member since 1940 could write in:

"Let a director join everyone else in going to an ordinary store and standing in lines with everyone else - perhaps then the lines that everyone is sick of would be eliminated more quickly. But the 'enjoyers of special benefits' would hardly give up their privileges - what is needed here is a law and a



thoroughgoing purge of the administrative apparatus."

Yet at the same time Party ideological chief Ligachev denounced *Pravda* for opening up the debate while Politburo member Aliev defended special shops "because a Party worker sometimes has to work 24 hours a day". Clearly a campaign against privilege threatens to stoke up the forces of conservatism amongst the bureaucracy and the egalitarian anti-bureaucratism of the masses. To this extent Gorbachev is walking on a dangerous tightrope.

The 'cleansing' of the bureaucracy is fraught with other dangers for Gorbachev. He still faces important pockets of resistance to his plans from within the bureaucracy. The latest Central Committee plenum to discuss cadre policy - i.e. who gets what jobs and new rules for those who have them - was cancelled at least once, suggesting that Gorbachev could not get his way entirely. Even more ominously the ousting of Brezhnev's corrupt ageing pal Kunaev in Kazakhstan last December precipitated riots and street fighting in and around Alma Ata. This is a clear warning that intra-bureaucratic strife can overflow outside the caste's closed circles and onto the streets themselves. When the



OF THE PLANNED ECONOMY



bureaucracy falls out it can lose the initiative. It also revealed the depths of hostility that the oppressed nationalities of the USSR feel to the Great Russian chauvinist bureaucracy and its satraps.

Gorbachev and his supporters, in order to revive the regime's credibility and raise society's morale, have launched a campaign to open the Soviet press, media and cultural life. A press that initially stayed mum as Chernobyl nearly melted down, now regularly reports accidents, deficiencies and the hounding of corrupt officials. Previously "non-Soviet phenomena" such as youth alienation, AIDS and drug addiction are now admitted to exist in the USSR.

OPENNESS

But there are problems for the bureaucracy here too. Openness (glaznost as Gorbachev's buzz word is known in Russia) has served to woo important sections of the intelligentsia to identifying themselves with Gorbachev. However the honest reporting of Soviet reality produces a description of inadequacies that beg the question - who is responsible and why? These are questions the bureaucra-

cy cannot answer. For example the Soviet press has now produced figures for the grain harvests of the early 1980s that were too embarrassing to print in those years. Health statistics show that 26 out of every 1000 live births die before their first birthday. It is one thing for the regime to win time by admitting such shortcomings. It will be a far different thing to actually overcome them. 'Openness' implies a promise to do something. It is a promise that cannot be fulfilled. Similarly the very real relaxation of censorship that has taken place opens the prospect of issues and questions being raised about Soviet history and culture that, if honestly answered, challenge the entire legitimacy of bureaucratic rule. There are signs that after the cover-ups of the Brezhnev years there is renewed discussion about Stalin and his victims. However despite promises and rumours the overtly anti-Stalinist film *Repentance* by Georgian film maker Makharadze is still waiting to be shown on general release in Moscow. But it is playing to packed houses already in Georgia. Recently *Moscow News* published an article concerning Lenin's opposition to Stalin's great Russian chauvinist nationalities'

policy and his campaign to secure Stalin's dismissal as General Secretary. This could be read as a warning from certain quarters to Gorbachev over his high handed appointment in Kazakhstan, and as a warning that the legitimacy of Stalinism is being questioned again. Once again Gorbachev is potentially unleashing a storm within the bureaucracy in his struggle to win the hearts and minds of the Soviet intelligentsia. This is a threat far more dangerous than that posed by the release of Sakharov from his exile in Gorky.

REPERCUSSIONS

From the vantage point of Gorbachev the only guarantee against any such profound anti-bureaucratic repercussions lies in the 'openness' and anti-corruption campaign winning support for economic reforms aimed at revitalising the flagging Soviet economy. Gorbachev's promise is to double production by the year 2000 with an increased proportion of that output taking the form of consumer goods and services. The present (twelfth) Five Year Plan has been amended to achieve targets of between 19 and 22% growth, slightly more than that achieved by the eleventh plan. Growth is due to increase more rapidly during the 1990s after reforms in the planning mechanisms including a massive injection of new technology and a major restructuring of the workforce. Gorbachev intends to push these through in the immediate period ahead.

At the heart of Gorbachev's intended economic reforms lies an attempt to streamline and slim down the central planning bureaucracy as an agency of quality control, need articulation and distribution coordination. To that end ministries are being merged, with certain agglomerates boasting a shake out of well nigh 50% of their functionaries. This smaller, high powered technocratic apparatus is designed to be the bureaucracy's watchdog over the economy.

INDEPENDENCE

Under the tutelage of this apparatus the individual enterprises are to be given far more independence to adopt their own strategies for plan fulfilment, to dispose of the profits of over-fulfilment and decide on sources and outlets for raw materials and finished products. To make this a reality key enterprises are to be allowed direct access to the world market while unprofitable enterprises will be allowed to go to the wall. The winds of the world market will be allowed that much more freedom to blow within the Soviet economy if the bureaucracy succeeds on entering GATT. The motor of market forces will be strengthened within the USSR as exchange prices and targets are more closely tied to profits calculated by market criteria.

Here Gorbachev and his cronies, despite all their new broom image reveal their real nature as creatures of the Stalinist bureaucracy. They want to tighten the grip of the central apparatus over its bureaucratic underlings. They want to refine the mechanisms for doing so and achieve Stalin's effects without the bloodshed. They want to make the bureaucracy work. At the same time they want to encourage the market mechanism without destroying the cohesion of bureaucratic rule. The attempt to marry these contradictory objectives reflects the historic paralysis of the Kremlin bureaucracy. Behind its projected dynamic image lies a bankrupt force that hopes that the bureaucratically overseen introduction of capitalist market mechanism will revive the USSR's flagging economic spirits. Gorbachev is not attempting to restore

capitalism in the USSR but he is intending to introduce a model that will considerably strengthen the social base of those who would consciously struggle for such a goal.

Gorbachev is also looking to market forces to increase consumer services. In agriculture Gorbachev is talking of contracting out to work teams and even families with far greater freedom to dispose of the product of their work. Licences are now due to be available for those wanting to establish a family run restaurant or cafe. Most importantly however the regime is set on dramatically increasing the amount of services that the Soviet worker will individually pay for out of his or her wages. This is due to grow by 30-40% by 1990 and by 110-130% by 2000. Put bluntly this means eroding as far as possible the social wage that provides several vital services and goods at subsidised prices. Market prices will now determine who can and cannot avail themselves of services.

The logic of this is taken furthest by top economic advisor Aganbegyan who called at last year's Party Congress for the abolition of subsidies to maintain cheap basic goods so that money wages would have real value both on the market place and as an instrument of control over the workforce. There are those, particularly in sections of the bureaucracy responsible for branches of the economy threatened with most to lose at the hands of market criteria, who oppose Aganbegyan. But the overall direction of Gorbachev is to follow the route he has signposted.

UNEMPLOYMENT

The economic reforms do not simply threaten to attack the working class' customary social wage. They hold up the very real spectre of unemployment for a working class that has historically enjoyed relative job security. At last year's Party Congress Gorbachev praised the Belorussian railways for shedding 12,000 workers and pointed to redundancies in the heavy industrial Zaporozh'ye oblast. Soviet economic journals contain regular advocacies of the need for management to have firing rights if they are to effectively render their enterprises profitable.

Similarly there is increased advocacy of management's right to use wages to both reward and discipline the workforce. While there may be a campaign against excessive privilege there is also a campaign against what is called 'levelling', ie egalitarian aspect of wages policy. In order to strengthen the regime's support amongst the intelligentsia the pay of engineers, technicians, scientists, designers, teachers and medical staff is due to be increased. Under the banner



of emulating Stakhanov, collective wage payments to work brigades are being opposed in favour of individual wage payments. Under the former system the workers shared the brigade's takings between them. Under the latter, management will be able to reward loyal and diligent workers above their workmates and thus help solidify a layer of more prosperous, reliable workers. That there are enough goods for them to buy at a quality worth shelling out for is vital to the effectiveness of this strategy. Without better consumer goods their extra rubles will prove worthless to them.

REMODELLING

Hoping to rest on the intelligentsia and a revitalised labour aristocracy, Gorbachev and his cohorts like Thatcher and Baker, are remodelling their education system in order to create the workforce they need. There has been much talk in the Soviet press recently of the over-education of Soviet youth. Growing instances of youth hostility and alienation are put down to youth having expectations beyond their stations and to an excess of Soviet teenagers exercising their right to complete academic secondary education over society's need for such numbers of educated youth. Accordingly the regime is setting in motion shorter, secondary, vocational-technical schools for most children with a minority selected for academic secondary training as a stairway to higher education. This is seen as a means both of moulding the managerial-technocratic strata of the future and a workforce not tainted with what the intelligentsia so smugly sneers at as 'overeducation'.

In addition the working class finds itself at the sharp end of a renewed labour discipline crack down, much of which is conducted under the pretext of campaigning against alcoholism.

In attempting wide ranging self reform the Gorbachev group within the bureaucracy are taking very real risks. Their promises are hostages to fortune. Their calls for openness and criticism threaten to turn against them. But they have no alternative than to try to break the USSR's bureaucratic inertia because to fail to do so would historically weaken the bureaucracy. However in breaking that inertia they risk causing very real fissures within the bureaucratic caste itself along the lines of rival programmes and of nationality.

ATTACKS

Far more importantly the realisation of their programme requires systematic attacks on the Soviet working class. It is known that workers are opposing the individual payment schemes in many places. It is sure that there will be widespread opposition to redundancy plans. Far from Gorbachev historically proving to be the saviour of the bureaucracy he is presiding over it at a time when the spectre of working resistance turning into a political revolutionary challenge is all that much the stronger.

To realise this potential of political revolution - so vital if the tyranny of Stalinised bureaucratic rule is to be removed and the basis for real socialism in the USSR laid - the militants involved in every struggle that takes place must seek to generalise them beyond their likely sectional origins and into a conscious challenge to the bureaucracy's political power. It is in such struggles that a real, revolutionary communist party in the land of the great proletarian revolution, can be rebuilt. ■

LESSONS OF THE STRIKES

OVER THE LAST two months, militants all over the world have been excited and encouraged by events in France. Massive struggles by students and workers have forced the right-wing Chirac government to back down. The lessons of these struggles are vital for workers in France and throughout the world.

The student strikes and demos in December were a catalyst for actions by workers resisting Chirac's attacks. Through December and early January there were major strikes in the electricity and gas industries, on the airlines, among the seamen, and on the Paris metro and the railways. The message was plain. The victory of the students had shown the way and workers - especially in the public sector - were keen to take up the challenge.

None of these struggles proved as successful as that of the students, but none of them resulted in a victory for the bosses either. The changes in higher education were an important element of the government's programmes but they

were by no means fundamental to their strategy. Far more important was their plans to keep down wages, under the pretext of 'the fight against inflation'.

CHIRAC

Chirac could afford to give in to the students: the bosses' interests were not too badly damaged. However, to concede to public sector workers' demands for pay increases - salaries have been frozen for over 18 months! - would have been far more dangerous. So, on this question Chirac stood firm. In this he had the full backing of the 'socialist' President - Mitterrand. In his New Year message to the nation, Mitterrand insisted on the primacy of wage restraint, but urged Chirac to settle the disputes by changes in working conditions and the withdrawal of proposed changes in seniority increments.

Chirac took the advice, and either shelved the development of

restructuring plans (railways, seamen), gave certain small benefits to key sections of the workforce (Paris Metro) or opened negotiations (electricity). However the main demands of the workers were not met.

Why did the strikers go back to work? The key dispute in December-January was that of the railway workers. It was the longest strike in the history of the SNCF, the French railways. Management wanted to get rid of the seniority procedures and introduce a new pay structure with increments being based on 'merit'. This was a thinly disguised programme of increased productivity. The railway workers had shown themselves to be highly combative over the last year, with a series of one-day strikes paralysing the rail network. However, these one-day events were instigated by the unions - especially the 'communist' controlled CGT. The December-January strike had its origins in rank-and-file anger.

The strike began after a petition circulated to all depots calling

for action against the SNCF proposals. The unions said nothing, but workers came out anyway, beginning with the Gare du Nord in Paris. Within a few days no more trains were running. France was paralysed. Regular mass meetings took place in all depots to decide to keep the strike going. Although union militants played a decisive role in influencing their non-unionised colleagues (who form the majority of workers) the union bureaucrats were definitely not in control of the movement that started the strike.

After weeks of hard fought action, the strikers returned to work. The key factor propelling them to stop the strike was that the government was increasingly able to get scab trains running. Attempts by strikers to occupy stations, signal-boxes and lines were met with the full force of state power in the shape of the murderous CRS riot police. The railway workers were not sufficiently organised to be able to take on the CRS and win. Skirmishes virtually always

resulted in victory for the cops.

As the SNCF had already withdrawn the proposed pay structure, the return to work was not a defeat. The failure to win a number of demands did not break the fighting spirit of the rail workers. Chirac's plans on pay had at least been partially checked.

Although rank-and-file action - through both mass meetings and two minority 'National Co-ordinating Committees' - was important in the strike, the role of the unions was decisive, both at national and local levels. The moderate Force Ouvrier (FO) and the CFDT union federations argued for the strike to end. The Stalinist led CGT, once it had decided to back the strike, did so in a typically bureaucratic manner. The strike was up to the workers. The union would support whatever they wanted. Whilst this sounds very 'democratic', it was in fact, a way for the union leadership to avoid their responsibilities to lead. If the strikers had won, the union could claim the credit. If it lost, then it was the fault of the workers.

STUDENTS' VICTORY

THE STUDENT STRUGGLES of December were not only a catalyst for the recent strike wave in France. They were an impressive victory in their own right.

In France students who have passed the 'Bacc' exam have the right to a place in the university of their choice, regardless of their grades. A bill introduced by minister Devaquet aimed to take away this right, introducing greater selectivity, privatisation and increasing fees (which students have to pay themselves through, part-time working).

Faced with this threat the mass meetings of students elected strike committees and established

a National Co-ordinating Committee. It organised the December mass demos and the resistance to the murderous attacks on the demos by the CRS riot police. The killing of a black student, Malek Ousseki, by the police - this time the motorcycle cops, the PVM - strengthened student resolve. They did not lie down and give up. They did not link arms and sing songs. They fought back, matching the police blow for blow.

The prospect of a re-run of 1968, when student battles sparked the 10 million strong general strike, terrified Chirac. He appeared on TV to announce the withdrawal of the Devaquet bill.

The students nonetheless called another demonstration for the following Wednesday to hold the government to their word and in remembrance of Malek Ousseki. British students were also present to show solidarity as were large numbers of French workers. Victory was assured.

CUT-BACKS

Just like in France, the Tories here are trying to get students to pay the price for the failure of their economy. Schools, FE colleges, poly's, universities have all

been subject to an ever-deepening series of cuts. Courses are being cut-back or even axed. The number of places available at colleges has been cut-back hitting working class, black and women students hardest. The government still plans to replace student grants with loans.

Finally as a sinister backdrop to these economic attacks the Tories are waging a propaganda war on the youth. Positive images of lesbians and gay men are to be driven out of the education system, and when the British Education Bill becomes law it will be illegal for student unions to ban fascist speakers from holding public meetings in the colleges. The National Front, the British National Party and other fascists will be able to peddle their poison under the full protection of law.

Students in France have shown that a militant campaign involving mass demonstrations, occupations, and crucially, winning solidarity strike action from trade unions can win.

Far from trying to build such a movement in Britain, the NUS under the leadership of the National Organisation of Labour Students (NOLS) has argued that we must avoid militant action and concentrate on getting a Labour Government elected instead. This cannot be the answer to the attacks we face now.

Workers Power calls for the forms of action that are necessary to win. We look to the example of France and are confident that masses of students can be won to this strategy and can move quickly from apathy to militancy.

ACTION

- Argue amongst students and in union meetings for a militant campaign against cuts and loans. Students must occupy their schools and colleges to force the government to back down.
- Argue for trade union members, staff who work in education and who are affected by the cuts, to strike alongside the students.
- Fight for solidarity with students and workers in struggle. Get speakers into your college and send messages of support. Take collections for those in struggle and send delegations to their meetings, demonstrations and picket lines.

If we want to follow the example of the French students we may as well start now!



USA

THE IRANGATE SCANDAL in the USA is the most profound and prolonged crisis the Reagan Administration has experienced. It has also revived the spectre of a failed presidency.

The confidence of American capital in Reaganism and its personification in the White House has been shaken by the scandal. However, nothing so far signifies a major challenge to Reagan's pursuit of US imperialism's global objectives by any significant wing of the bourgeoisie.

The revelations about the sale of arms and spare parts to Iran and the subsequent diversion of monies to the Contras have, nevertheless, become the obsessive focus of press and television news coverage. Certainly the New Right has its own explanation for this. The mass media, they claim, is firmly in the hands of a left-liberal clique which has bided its time waiting for the opportunity to bash a conservative president and in turn undermine confidence in the institution itself.

Bougeols papers of national standing such as the New York Times and Washington Post, in this paranoid scenario, appear bent on setting an ideological agenda which gives succour to the Soviets. According to some of the more extreme versions of this theory, the CBS television and radio network is also a fellow traveller, determined to undo a man who has gained two re-sounding mandates from the American people.

This notion of a media conspiracy against the government might seem a refuge for reactionary cranks. But the current attack from the New Right has been orchestrated by one Patrick Buchanan, White House Director of Communications.

While this view is preposterous, the media are reflecting disquiet, particularly amongst Reagan's middle-class supporters, that the President has done the dirty on them. In a sense Reagan has been hoist on the petard of his own jingoistic rhetoric. The middle classes find it hard to swallow that the man who authorised the savage bombing of Tripoli apparently willing to swap arms



PVM cops drive into demos



Stopping scab trains

The pressure from the unions and the influence that the CGT was able to secure within the rank and file were important factors in the strike's development. The necessity of both fighting for a massive campaign of unionisation and for the political and organisational transformation of the unions into genuine fighting organs of the class struggle was clearly demonstrated. The unions cannot be by-passed by the creation of 'independent', that is non union based, rank-and file bodies. The rail strike showed that. Despite the local committees, it was the official unions which had the decisive influence. We need to challenge

that influence, not ignore it. The result of the strike has been to increase support for the CGT, but not necessarily for the Communist Party (PCF). The electoral fortunes of the PCF seem to be in terminal decline, with the vast bulk of working class votes going to the Socialist Party. However, the PCF remains a fundamental feature of French working class life, through its influence in the CGT. Its current brand of 'militant' Stalinist reformism has a resonance amongst important layers of militants. It is amongst those layers that Stalinism must be challenged in France. ■

by Enile Gallet (Pouvoir Ouvrier)

CHIRAC'S PLANS

THE STRIKERS HAVE stalled Chirac's offensive, but they have not yet taken it off his agenda altogether. Within the next 14 months there will be a Presidential election in France. Chirac is desperate to win. In this period he is likely to temporarily hold his fire.

Following the student events, Chirac decided that a 'pause' was necessary in his 'reform' programme. This led to the dropping of a proposed winter session of parliament. The Assembly will now not meet again until April. He has also decided to drop his racist proposals over the Nationality Law, which had been the subject of a great deal of opposition, especially from the students. These facts show that Chirac prefers to wait until he has full power - the presidency - and a seven year term ahead of him before taking on the workers, students or black community for a decisive showdown.

PRIVATISATION

In the meantime important elements of Chirac's 'Thatcherite' programme are being pushed through. Denationalisation is going ahead, including the selling off of the equivalent of BBC 1 to Robert Hersant, the French Rupert Murdoch. State control over broadcasting has been tightened up with the appointment of RPR (Chirac's party) loyalists to the head of all the state TV and radio stations. Police violence and murders of youth, especially black youth, con-

tinue. Further, the electoral boundaries have been redrawn, in order to increase the representation of the Right.

But Chirac has been warned that French workers and youth are no pushover.

DETERMINATION

If he wins the Presidential election - which appears unlikely at the moment - he will be faced with major battles. He has made a decisive mistake by letting the students fight and win. Had he withdrawn the proposed law in the early stages, under the pretext of 'consultation' the working class might have been discouraged from taking him on. However, by trying to beat the youth, he has encouraged further resistance to his austerity plans.

Should Chirac decide to gamble his election prospects on a showdown before the presidential polls there will be no easy victory for the bosses. The determination of the youth, the power of the working class, the unbroken morale and rank-and-file organisation of both can prove decisive.

Over the last two months we have seen a glimpse of what our strength can do, and what our power will look like. French revolutionaries can and must profit from these events by building a Trotskyist party that can win the combative working class and youth to a programme for working class power. ■

BEHIND IRANGATE



Reviewing the memo he signed but did not read!

in exchange for negotiations with a regime accused time and again of sponsoring state terrorism.

This confusion within Reagan's middle class base has required some sacrifices (Oliver North and Admiral Poindexter for starters) and a deal of media attention to give the impression that there will be no cover-up. But the reason there have been no real moves against Reagan himself by any of the powerful sections of the US bourgeoisie or their politicians is that they agree with a key component of Reagan's strategy in this whole affair.

Iran, whoever is in power, remains a vital sphere of interest for US imperialism. Despite the 'mad mullah' rhetoric the US bourgeoisie has registered the fact that seven years after the Shah's fall Iran has not gone over to the Soviets. On the contrary, a series of power struggles within Iran have seen the wing of the mullahs who did lean in a Soviet direction marginalised. Trade with the West has strengthened those tendencies favouring a real, if tacit, reconciliation between Tehran and Washington.

The fact that Majlis speaker and key figure in the regime, Rasfanjan, is implicated with these tendencies indicates quite how powerful they are. Moreover, the continuation of the sickening blood-feud with Iraq has meant that arms from the US have become a vital necessity not an optional extra, for Tehran. In turn Iran can prove an additional wedge into the Arab states to weaken and divide them to the benefit of US imperialism and Israel.

The State Department's public statements about the arms sales do indeed suggest that the Administration was seeking to buy real influence in Tehran. Unhappily for the White House's current occupants, not all of the US public has the same grasp of the subtleties of imperialist hardball diplomacy. The actual execution of the overture to the pro-Western element in Tehran side-stepped constitutional restraints on the executive branch. Thus came a bipartisan chorus of shocked disapproval from members of Congress.

Irangate is only one aspect of the scandal, albeit the one

which has preoccupied prime time television news bulletins for nearly two months. The other genuinely unanswered question is where did the monies from the arms deal go and how did they travel. In other words: did the money go solely to finance the murderous activities of the Contras in Nicaragua? Did Oliver North have a personal slush fund in Switzerland? Or did some money go toward televised attacks against liberal Democratic critics of Reagan's militarisation of Central America?

To get to the bottom of these questions the scale of Reagan's anti-communism needs to be understood. Nicaragua under the Sandinistas is not a Soviet client state. However, key figures in the Reagan Administration are genuinely convinced that the Sandinista regime, which replaced the Somoza mafia after the 1979 revolution, continues to pose a real and immediate threat to US hegemony in Central America as a whole. Congressional support was waning for the long term war of attrition that seemed to be going nowhere and some domestic opposition has developed. In this context there can be little doubt that some members of the National Security Council were anxious to explore avenues beyond legislative scrutiny in order to ball out the rag-tag crew of thugs assembled by remnants of the Somoza supporters in the Nicaraguan bourgeoisie and the CIA. With unabashed arrogance, the Reagan Administration has asked for a doubling of above-board financing for the Contras in its trillion dollar budget proposals.

Needless to say the incoming US Congress is not full of left liberals with a Swedish social democratic enthusiasm for the Sandinistas. But the American ruling class is of two minds. On the one hand, there is decreasing support for Reagan's covert war, with notable exceptions amongst maverick millionaires

(or billionaires in the case of H. Ross Perot). Yet, on the other hand, their man in the White House has repeatedly staked his reputation on the destabilisation and overthrow of the Sandinista government. His single-minded determination shows few signs of achieving the goal of reversing a defeat for US imperialism but until now has been tolerated by more pragmatic minds amongst the USA's bosses. Thus the Contra angle to Irangate may well be used to rein Reagan in on the Nicaraguan front. It is unlikely to be used to kick him out.

Barring serious illness or death, Reagan should see out the end of his term. But his previous heir apparent, George Bush, has had his election chances severely damaged. The Administration may be buffeted by still further dismissals, though there is little reason to believe that Congressional Democrats are likely to go for the Presidential jugular.

Two considerations have constrained any Democratic desire to seek electoral gain from Iran/Contragate. One is a fear of Reagan's enduring personal popularity and thus the possibility of a backlash. The other is their concern not to question the very legitimacy of the Presidency itself. In the words of the *Washington Post* leader column, Reagan "has brought the Presidency back from the shame of Watergate". There are few in Congress who would risk yet another presidential legacy of impotence (Carter) or disgrace (Nixon).

On the whole, then, US capital will happily see Reagan muddle through his final two years in office and thank his Administration for successfully rallying substantial sections of the American middle and working classes behind the 'Stars and Stripes'. In turn he is using the flag to conceal the reality of large-scale chronic unemployment, growing inner city homelessness, the onslaught on pay and conditions in factories and the crumbling infrastructure of much of the country's heartland. Regardless of either Irangate or of which bourgeois party wins the next presidential elections, these are the issues that the US working class must be mobilised to confront. ■

by George Binnette



in brief...

GRENADA

In early December the US imperialists attempted to close the final chapter in their crushing of Grenada's revolution and the New Jewel Movement. Fourteen defendants charged with murdering Maurice Bishop and others were sentenced to death.

Ten of those to hang were members of the NJM Central Committee - including Bernard Coard (Deputy Prime Minister), Phyllis Coard, Lian James and Selwyn Strachan. Four others were soldiers in the People's Revolutionary Army.

The 'trial' conducted under the auspices of the US controlled stooge government of Herbert Blaize, lived up to expectations. The court was unconstitutional. The judge was shipped in on a renewable 3 monthly contract, paid courtesy of US aid to the "Caribbean judiciary". Many 'confessions' had been extracted under torture shortly after the invasion. The trial has been held virtually in camera, with critical journalists and newspapers not allowed in.

It has been conducted in the absence of 17 out of the 18 defendants. The jury was selected without challenge and included a father of one of the murdered civilians. The chief defence lawyer is now being charged with contempt after the whole team of defence lawyers withdrew in protest at the illegality of the trial.

The prosecution's case was that the Central Committee of the NJM had planned the assassination of Maurice Bishop and his supporters and ordered the army to carry this out after they had stormed Fort Rupert on Wednesday 19 October 1983. The defendants claimed this was not the case and that the soldiers were acting without orders.

The events of 19 October were the result of a deep crisis in the NJM. Perhaps fifty or sixty people were murdered, including most of the Bishop supporters in the Central Committee. This was a devastating act of treachery which paved the way for Reagan's invasion and the crushing of the revolution. Those responsible deserve to be tried in front of a People's Tribunal and punished if proved guilty.

We take no position on the guilt or innocence of Coard et al which has yet to be proven. What we must say however is that we denounce the result of the US show trial. It has been conducted throughout in order to discredit the NJM and Grenadian people's struggle against imperialism.

We give no rights to the invaders of Grenada or their stooges to try anyone. It is on this basis that the British labour and trade union movement should denounce the show trial and campaign against the imperialist's determination to pursue their policy of judicial murder of the NJM 14. ■

'CLASS STRUGGLE'

The current issue of CLASS STRUGGLE, the journal of the Irish Workers' Group is available from Workers Power. Send cheques/postal orders for 70p to: Workers Power, BCM 7750, London WC1N 3XX

WAPPING BALANCE SHEET

WP: Could we begin by looking at the Fleet Street Support Unit, how did you see its purpose when it was first set up?

Larry: I saw its purpose to be drawing resources from branches that wouldn't normally have contact with each other to bring influence to bear on the dispute. It was successful in some respects, like making people aware of Murdoch's pre-prints from Bemrose and in organising the pickets of the Press Association. Also it was successful in agitating for mass meetings - even if they didn't always produce the results we wanted... for example, the election of a strike committee.

George: To me, it was set up to combat what was happening in the strike... it was being packaged to only affect News International. The rest of Fleet Street weren't to be involved. We saw that as a deliberate policy not only of the national leadership but of the London leadership as well. We set out to get people to realise the News International dispute wasn't just for the 5,500 who were sacked but the future of SOGAT in the London area generally. Also we were supposed to be in a national dispute but Murdoch's products were being used all over the place... the Bemrose pre-prints for example. The other point, just as important,

was the leadership. Here was Dean, elected for life and other officials in for life, in reality they weren't too concerned what kind of settlement came out of the NI dispute. If they could have got good compensation terms they would have felt that was a victory. So, those were the simple aims of the FSSU.

WP: Do you think that traditional union methods like blacking and solidarity action would have been enough to win?

George: Of course not. To be honest I don't think all of Fleet Street coming out would have been enough to win the strike, so obviously just blacking wouldn't - but it would lead on, it would involve more people and spreading the strike, if possible to the rest of Fleet Street, then we would have more authority with other unions, say like dockers, to stop the newsprint and things like that - and that would have had a fundamental effect on Murdoch.

Larry: That leads back to the question of the position of the FSSU when it argued for escalation in its leaflets and so on. There were moves against individuals by the London leadership, people were tried within branches over who they represented, who produced the leaflets and so on.

That method was used against George and me in our branches - as a warning, 'we've got our eyes on you' so to speak.

WP: How would you characterise the relationship between the London leadership and the national leadership then?

Larry: London has been in opposition to National for some time, not only in this dispute. Now we are seeing a move to dissolve the traditional role of the branches within London. I'm not totally opposed to that because I'm against the way branches are structured and the way they manipulate the members.

George: Yes, there is opposition but really it's not about policy, more a matter of self-survival. It's been a major problem in the dispute - if the London

branches and leaders had all taken a firm line and been willing to oppose the national position they could have been an alternative leadership. But, as often, they were disunited, that's why I'm not altogether opposed to changing to one or two branches. It might help to develop solidarity.

WP: Could we talk about the Biennial Delegate Conference (BDC) last June? What happened there?

Larry: The BDC decision was

not to take any action that might jeopardise union funds, in other words sequestration. A lot of people didn't understand the way that this was a sell out and how it was made at conference. The London leadership capitulated to national at that conference... I think that's why they stopped the mass meetings after that.

George: That was the biggest defeat of the lot. It had a major effect on the strike, nobody can deny that. We should have had the London leaders making clear calls to their members and instructing them not to handle Bemrose's scab material and the rest. Instead they went softly, softly - but now they'll reap the consequences. If this dispute goes down then national leadership will be in a strong position for amalgamating the London branches and removing many of the officials.

WP: What explains the London leaders' capitulation? Why did they do it?

Larry: Simple, if they didn't they'd have to escalate the dispute and go into a confrontation with the law. That would be inevitable and I don't think the leadership we've got in London was prepared to do that. Individuals say they would in private, but they hide behind that BDC resolution in public.

George: The other point that's not understood by a lot of strikers was that it said everything had to be done constitutionally. One of the main things we'd fought for was mass meetings - but they were unconstitutional, so the resolutions that went to them were unconstitutional. So they had to be squashed. The resolution talked about escalation but it really meant the strikers were no longer going to have any voice.

Once you capitulate to the likes of Brenda Dean, she can use it. She used that resolution to put down the opposition in London, she just said, "You were there, you voted for it". Since then we've seen the strike struggle on really only because of the spirit, you might say the naivety of the strikers. They keep going down to Wapping, and they take other actions - the guerilla raids or hit squads at the depots and all that.

WP: Do you think the hit squads are a response to the lack of fight by the London leadership?

George: Yes. I think it comes from the fact that they see no initiatives being taken in the normal trade union way - blacking, picketing and so on. So they've looked for an alternative. In a way it helped to keep the strike

alive, although I'd prefer to see it alive in a trade union way. I wouldn't condemn them for what they've been doing - but I do think some of them are going to end up with very heavy prison sentences and I'm afraid the official union will disown them.

Larry: I'm not against flying pickets as such but it's clear that they actually think they can win the dispute by this kind of activity. Now, we've always argued that only the politics of industrial strength can win this dispute. Personally, I think that because some people in the union were not prepared to take up the political fight they have used people and given them an alternative. These actions have been like a safety valve, in that people might otherwise possibly have aligned themselves with the Fleet Street Support Unit if they hadn't been offered this alternative.

WP: Has there been any change in the tempo of the dispute since the election of some of the London Lefts to the National Executive?

Larry: I can't think of any, there were great promises to represent the strike, but we've seen nothing since. Of course one of them's been banged up but they've made no impression, they didn't get anywhere on the sub-committees for example.

George: The truth is the NEC is much the same as before. All the same the imprisonment of Mike Hicks has to be deplored - but again it shows the weakness of the national leadership. Here you are, you've got a member of the executive banged up in prison and all you get is a few mealy-mouthed phrases in response - no action. And there is another problem there - we've had a political grouping trying to get maximum credibility for themselves out of this dispute, the Morning Star and their people have used it in a cynical way, knowing that the policies they put forward could never win. And they're still claiming that carrying on down the road will see Murdoch on his knees. After a year to be still saying those untruths is cruel and wrong.

WP: How do you see the position now at the end of the year?

George: It's no use pretending we're all going to get our old jobs back in Wapping, or that SOGAT and NGA will have their traditional roles inside Wapping. We need to think what can be won, not just for us and SOGAT but for the trade union movement and the working class. I feel that the 24th will be the last major demo, it will be seen by many people as a chance to show solidarity - and you won't see them down at Wapping again. We need to learn the lessons for the future so we can cope with the pressures that are coming throughout Fleet Street and the whole trade union movement. ■

AEU

CHANGES LIKE YOU'VE NEVER SEEN BEFORE

IN THE NAME of solving a mounting financial crisis the right wing leadership of the Amalgamated Engineering Union (AEU) is planning major surgery on the union's structures.

An article in the Guardian (29.12.86) reported that these plans included a wage freeze for all full-time staff and elected officials, making 60 out of 200 full time officials redundant, abolishing the seven posts of National Organiser and the widespread merger of branches and districts.

The mergers and procedural changes are aimed at further undermining all expressions of rank and file militancy in the union all the better to prepare it for merger with the EETPU. In fact the leadership has kept a veil over falling membership rolls. As late as July 1986 Gavin Laird was denouncing press coverage of the union's chronic financial plight. Now the financial state of the union is being used as a pretext to tighten the right's grip on the union.

The common denominator of all the proposed changes is to remove any control exercised by the rank and file members, branches and districts and consolidate power in the hands of the Executive Council. Branch meetings are monthly instead of bi-weekly. District committees meet less frequently. The executive Council is demanding increased control over issues discussed at District Committees. The EC has increased control over the making of strikes official. In divisions that they dominate they have been vetoing resolutions calling for strikes to be made official. In addition the final appeal court has been ignored with the Executive Council refusing to implement its decision.

Union President Jordan and the executive have been blocking moves to improve the benefits available to union members. At the same time they have been prepared to spend thousands of pounds encouraging their members to get into debt with the Halifax or Sun Assurance. They want to prove the worth of union membership by the financial services they can offer

cheap, not by the gains they can secure for the workforce at the bosses' expense.

There will be more rule changes to come if the AEU is to be changed into a suitable partner for the EETPU. Jordan said as much when he addressed EETPU's Annual Conference last May. He warned the members not to let the:

"molehills of our structural problems prevent the formation of a partnership of power to give them the strength to climb the mountains they face each day." (Guardian 16.5.86)

By "molehills" Jordan means the fundamental principles on which the union was formed. To get round these he has gone so far as to suggest a rule book be drawn up from scratch for a new union.

OPPOSITION

As the union is constituted at present there is considerable opposition to amalgamation with EETPU, its leaders, its practices and its policies. Hence Jordan and Laird have drummed up their campaign about finances and begun to move against the most important centres of opposition.

Mergers of branches and districts and the non-replacement of officials because of retirement or death has been going on for some time apparently in accordance with the rules. However in many instances so-called geographical rationalisations are a cover for the cynical gerrymandering of districts, to the advantage of the Right.

By "culling" the left at district and divisional level, the Executive can reduce the chances of "oppositional" elements getting onto the policy making National Committee.

The Executive is yet to unveil its precise plans for re-organisation but it seems that so-called Special Organisational Committees are going to be set up to carry out the re-organisation of the union.

Some district officials are not having their contracts renewed and district elections are being halted half way through. In the NorthWest an assistant Divisional Organiser

is not being replaced. Information from the West Midlands indicates that the left Wolverhampton East District is to be merged with the Wolverhampton West District without proper consultation between the Executive and the branches or District Committees. Some branches are to be transferred to Birmingham districts which are right-wing controlled. The Cannock branch is to go to the North Staffs DC, an outlandish seventy mile round trip for any working delegate!

The closure of left-wing branches in the Birmingham area is also imminent.

As AEU members do battle for their jobs on the Wapping picket lines their own President is hob-nobbing with that same EETPU leadership that stole their jobs. He has denounced shop stewards who resist flexibility as no better than "company unionists" while offering the services of his slimmed down officialdom to the employers. It was the AEU's Gavin Laird who was the first Union General Secretary to proudly deliver a fraternal address to the CBI!

AEU members must continue to resist the Executive's attempts to restructure the union, alter policy and therefore effectively "gag" the National Committee. We must fight against the Standing Orders Committee's manipulation of the NC agenda. It should produce an agenda that reflects the policies submitted by Divisional Committees.

Shop Stewards' Committees must continue to oppose the manoeuvres of the Executive as they did the CSEU sell out. Resolutions should flood the districts and divisions opposing any lash up with the EETPU.

Militants must pool their resources and co-ordinate their resistance. To that end the Broad Left within the union must call a democratic working conference which can thrash out a line of march to stop the plans of Jordan and Laird. ■

by an AEU member



Mike Hicks, Wapping leader, jailed. Free him now!

BIG BROTHER IN THE SCHOOLS

"I TAKE GREAT encouragement from the debate . . . The Government's defence of the Bill was feeble in the extreme . . . If we can maintain the pressure of the campaign, and particularly if our members can appeal to peers on all sides of the House of Lords, I believe there is a real chance that we can secure amendments to the Bill . . . There is certainly far more chance of us achieving this by an approach of this kind than by industrial action which, at this stage, is totally counter productive." (Fred Jarvis, quoted in the Teacher 19.1.87)

Such is the response from the NUT leadership to Baker's latest attempt to impose his own pay and conditions package on teachers. Baker plans to take away the powers of Burnham and CLEA, which previously allowed teachers to negotiate pay and conditions separately with the employers, and this is all Jarvis can say.

CAPITALISM

Since Thatcher was first in power scarcely a month has gone by without a new initiative to take power away from teachers and local authorities while strengthening the role of central government.

Faced with capitalism's need to restructure its workforce, the Tories have looked to restructure education the future workforce receives. In the years of expansion of the 1950s and 1960s it appeared to be in the bosses' interests to have a comprehensive system of education that seemed to offer opportunities for young people to acquire a range of skills. Hence the move away from the tripartite system that had previously operated.

As the fortunes and nature of British capitalism have changed so too have the employers' educational requirements. With the growth of unemployment, the decline of manufacturing industry and the rise of the service sectors there is less and less need for young people to be educated. Instead of encouraging pupils to become rounded and inquisitive adults Baker, on behalf of the bosses, is out to change the educational system to create the future workforce the bosses need.

MARKET FORCES

British employers are set on copying the Japanese model of a 'core' of skilled workers, supplemented as and when needed, by a peripheral, low wage, low skill workforce. Youth are to be 'educated' to be part of that system. To that end distinct layers of that new workforce must be identified and separated from their peers. Hence the development of new 'initiatives' like the Technical and Vocational Education Initiative (TVEI) and the Certificate of Pre-Vocational Education (CPVE). Similarly the local authorities, starved of central funds, are increasingly looking to use schemes the Manpower Services Commission (MSC) is funding. Its courses will become more and more structured to meet the direct need of the employers.

The most recent move in this direction is the planning of new

City Technical Colleges. Their rigid timetable for a 35 period week will have 7 periods of science and 3.5 each of Maths, English, CDT, one language, 'understanding industry' and humanities (history, geography or economics). Only the most able pupils could hope for exam success with such a low input per subject. Equally startling is the plan's provision for a mere 3.5 periods for all other subjects including the creative arts, PE, personal development, social studies etc - precisely those areas where pupils can learn to express themselves.

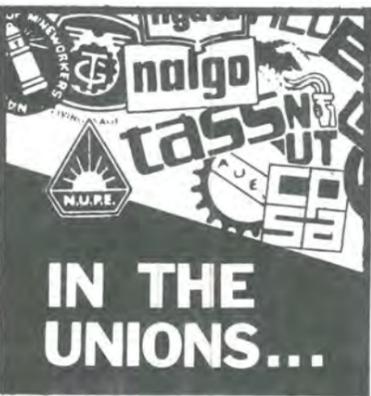
On a national basis, the implementation of a core curriculum coupled with an examination system based on criteria referential will mean that every child can be precisely 'placed' in terms of each other. This new approach to examinations has now made even the 'programmed' implementation of the GCSE a weapon in the hands of the Government. Every pupil will be sitting the same exam in the subjects deemed appropriate by the government of the day. Big Brother is really here.

In order to push these changes through, the Tories have needed to break the resistance of the teachers' unions, in particular the NUT, and undermine the power of the local authorities. To this end they are opening up schools to 'market forces' and pouring forth a barrage of reactionary propaganda against progressive education. Senior staff are now increasingly identified as managers with Cambridgeshire having given Headteachers complete financial control of the school budget.

HYPOCRISY

Baker recently announced in his speech to the North of England Education Conference that he wished governing bodies to take total control of school budgets and hinted that this would eventually include teachers' pay levels. This is leading to schools fighting each other for pupils in a situation of falling rolls. Rather than fighting to defend and improve conditions many union members have fallen into the trap of colluding with their hierarchy to poach pupils.

The Tories have attempted to mobilise 'parent power' against 'left wing loonies' ever eager to indoctrinate their sensitive charges with extremist ideologies. Hand in hand with their sickening hypocrisy about Victorian values and attacks on sex education they are trying to make parents identify teachers as "the problem" rather than as potential allies in the fight to



defend and extend education in working class areas.

In the face of this attack the NUT leaders have been out to show that they can be relied on to do a deal with the local authorities and thus somehow speed the return of a Labour government. This has meant that they have totally capitulated. Their headlong flight into new realism has led to the sort of attitudes expressed by Jarvis in our opening quote.

The NUT have ducked any serious fight with the employer over cuts and have been quite prepared to see thousands of jobs lost through "natural wastage" during the last few years. Instead of forging alliances with other public sector workers and coming down firmly in favour of class struggle positions, they have consistently played the "profes-

sional" card. This has served to isolate teachers from other workers who see us as purely defending our sectional interests and it has left teachers open to charges of "unprofessionalism" when they take action.

All is not lost providing NUT militants launch a serious fightback against these misleaders who currently run the union. The fightback must be launched on several fronts. First schools and associations must be won to action not just against Baker, important though this is, but for decent pay and conditions. In other words they must be seen to be taking action against the sell out agreed to by the union leadership. All schools and associations should hold meetings to re-affirm the commitment to fight for the full claim, to no return to cover and no linking of

pay and conditions. Secondly, the militants in the union, notably the Socialist Teachers' Alliance, must use the suspension of ILTA Council as a springboard for a major fight to democratise the union. For years now rule 8 (which prohibits action in areas unless previously sanctioned by the Executive) has been used to prevent strikes and suspend, and in one case even expel, militants from the union.

Thirdly we must fight to wrest leadership away from the present pack of betrayers. This will be done not by merely capturing positions but by winning over the membership to an anti-capitalist class struggle perspective. The key to such a campaign will be the building of a genuine, democratic, rank and file movement. It is to that project that Workers' Power is committed. ■

by Adrian Swaine



DEFEND THE ILTA COUNCIL

ON 13 JANUARY an estimated 6,000 teachers took part in an unofficial one-day strike. The strike, called by the NUT's Divisional Council in Inner London (ILTA) was against the Baker Bill, which is currently being debated in Parliament.

The NUT Executive have stressed the "peaceful persuasion" approach in their "campaign" against the Bill. However, it appears that they are prepared to act more aggressively when it comes to their own members.

A week before the strike took place the Union's Executive suspended all ILTA Council Members present at the meeting which issued the strike call. Certain ILTA officers wavered and wanted to call the strike off. However a meeting of ILTA reps two days later voted overwhelmingly to go ahead with the strike.

The Executive's next move was to issue letters to all the Inner London membership, instructing

them to stay at work.

In spite of this intimidation (added to by an employer's letter which informed head teachers that there would be no strike!) it was the largest ever unofficial strike with 6000 ILTA members taking action.

Over 2,000 teachers marched along the Thames. The rally at the end of the march unanimously passed a motion which called on the Executive to step up the action against the Baker Bill. It also called for a national one-day strike on February 19 and condemned the Executive's suspension of members of the ILTA Council.

The response to the strike call and the attendance at the rally show a renewed determination to fight on the part of the London teachers. Even after a long dispute over pay, teachers recognise the threat which Baker's Bill poses in terms of pay, conditions and union rights. If we are to counter the threat then we must step up and

spread the action.

This means we must:

- Get into schools and fight for motions calling members out on the 19 February.
- Secure a commitment to take the action regardless of the Executive's response.
- Make 19 February a national strike.
- Bombard the Executive with resolutions calling for ILTA Council's immediate reinstatement. (Copies to the address below.)
- Build for the lobbies of Hamilton House protesting the suspensions. Send in petition sheets - available from:

ILTA DEFENCE CAMPAIGN
c/o 25 John Campbell Road
London N16 8JY.
Tel: (01) 254 9956

by a suspended member of the ILTA council

NUR

THE NUR'S "VICTORY" on Wednesday 14 January, when they suspended a London tube strike was described by Jimmy Knapp, NUR President, as "a major achievement to have moved from a position where the union was being brushed aside to a situation where a firm commitment has been made to abide by the spirit and intention of the negotiating machinery".

What bankruptcy! Knapp called off a strike simply because the bosses agreed to talk to him. For their part London Regional Transport (LRT) immediately denied making concessions on competitive

TUBE SELL OUT

tendering and were naturally 'delighted' at what they described as a victory for "common sense".

Conditions could not have been better for the strike. 7,426 voted in favour with only 1,541 against in a 75% turn out. The will to fight was there. Already services were severely disrupted by the weather, our action would have crippled management's hopes of getting any kind of scab workforce

together.

If, after the token day of action, management refused a real agreement renouncing competitive tendering and the proposed 35% reduction in 'costs', then, inspired by the first strike, we could have extended the strike into an indefinite one. We could have built alliances with other transport workers under attack on the buses and the rail. It is precisely because

of this potential of all out action that the 'fat cats' at Unity House abandoned the strike.

The bureaucrats strategy for the union is based on the premise that we are now entering a new era which will be markedly different from the 'old days' of trade union militancy. What is needed now, they say, are welfare unions that will be able to work hand in glove with management. They 'understand' that some members' jobs will have to go and that there is not enough money or profit to go to their members' wage packets. All they plead for from

the bosses is the 'right' to their survival. That is the right to preserve their hefty salaries, flash cars, media limelight and rewards from the bosses of peerages and knighthoods.

It is vital that we organise against these craven lackeys in order to defend our jobs, pay and conditions. That means organising the militant minority in the rail unions across the unions into a fighting force to challenge Knapp and Co. and transform unions into mass, democratic, class struggle organs of working class power. ■

by an LRT worker

Workers power

10% - NO STRINGS!

THE STRIKE BY British Telecom engineers must be won. It is a test-run for every industry that Thatcher has auctioned off to the financiers and speculators.

The engineers are in a traditionally 'moderate' union. Following their defeat in the battle to stop the Mercury communications firm using BT cable in 1983, Telecom workers have been hit by the privatisation of their own company.

Moreover the victory of hard right-wingers like John Golding (the architect of the witch-hunt against Militant when he was a Labour MP) seemed to indicate that the 1983 defeat had demoralised not only the left in the union but also the rank and file. Once again, however, the reports from all those pessimists who said that the rank and file's will to fight was dead and gone, have been shown to be premature, to say the least.

Faced with the vicious attacks of an arrogant management - drunk with its success over privatisation - the rank and file have taken the initiative in fighting back. The immediate issue at stake in the strike is jobs. BT plan to cut the workforce, using drastic changes in conditions and work practices as well as redundancies and "wastage".

JOB LOSSES

The four major BT unions started negotiations for the annual wage claim in April 1986. BT's eventual offer of about half the NCU's 10% claim was made conditional on acceptance of a wide ranging package of strings. For the engineering grades the purpose was to improve labour flexibility whilst cutting down weekly pay and blocking traditional promotion out-

lets. BT is desperate to lose another 24,000 jobs in addition to the 21,000 lost since privatisation.

Strong, if traditionally craftist, union organisation has meant that the Telecom engineers have made extensive gains in terms of pay and conditions. The privatisation of the company was a prelude to today's attempt to claw back these gains in the interests of even greater profits for the handful of City sharks who control the bulk of Telecom's shares.

British TELECOM

Now that you are seeking to return to work, it must be understood that in doing so, you are prepared to work normally as directed on any work proper to your grade to meet the needs of the service and that you are willing to work overtime and to attend at such varying times on weekdays and Sundays as the needs of the service demand.

Please sign below and return this letter to indicate your acceptance.

The bosses plan to abolish the nine day fortnight (equivalent to an extra day off every other week) in favour of a working week spanning six days. Job demarcation between fitting, repairs and maintenance would be eradicated. A smaller but more flexible workforce - on call at any time from 7am to 7pm Monday to Saturday - is the objective.

In the pursuit of these aims BT's post-privatisation management has embarked on a policy of provocation. In response to a union overtime ban, imposed in protest at the stalling tactics in the pay negotiations, management started to pull rabbits out of their hat. As if by magic engineers who had not seen an overtime sheet in

years were ordered to work on Saturdays. When they refused, they were suspended without pay. Across the country NCU(E) branches responded by walkouts and 24-hour stoppages. The only area that seemed exempt - luckily for the financial institutions that own most of BT - was the City of London.

The 24-hour strikes were clearly expected by the bosses. Management had already prepared letters which they tried to force returning workers to sign before allowing them to report for work. These pledges to work 'normally' included references to overtime and Sunday working. Attempts to insist that

the engineers in question had never been given weekend overtime, let alone crossed a picket line, and that these were not therefore normal activities were brushed aside. Thus the lock-outs began.

Meanwhile the engineers covering the City, remembering managements divide and rule tactics in the 1983 dispute and others, voted at a mass meeting for an all out indefinite strike. This action, unexpected by management and commentators alike, lit the fuse for the all out national strike by the whole NCU(E). It was a victory for solidarity, and an example of how militant action can force even the most right wing of union leaderships to fight. Of course Golding will be out to settle quickly. But the rank and file action has provided the means - via mass meetings - to stop him. Strike committees must be built in the next period to consolidate the strength of the rank and file strikers.

STRUGGLE

But there will be defeats as well as victories. The UCW, covering telephone operators and duties such as doorkeepers and canteen workers, settled their claim well before the engineers' overtime ban. The NCU(E) has agreed nationally to allow UCW workers through their picket lines. This has meant that

THIS YEAR'S 'Bloody Sunday' commemoration march in Britain falls on a Saturday, in Sheffield. But that is about the only break with tradition that the main march organisers - Labour Committee on Ireland - will contemplate.

The LCI leaders (in the main supporters of Socialist Action) decided they did not want to involve the 'sectarians' (ie Workers Power, IFM etc) since their commitment to clear anti-imperialist slogans and defence of the IRA would prove an embarrassment to the LCI when they were trying to pacify David Blunkett (Sheffield Labour Council leader)

STRIKER SPEAKS

WORKERS POWER spoke to one of the NCU(E) men suspended in the Sheffield area by BT during the overtime ban. These suspensions played an important role in convincing workers that action had to be stepped up if management plans were to be beaten.

WP: Why were you suspended?

■: We were actually suspended for not working overtime - that is in line with our union agreement, an overtime ban for our pay deal. We were ordered to work last Saturday and told that if we weren't at work we would be sent home come Monday morning.

WP: And then there was an immediate walk-out in the office?

■: The union stated that if anyone was sent home there would be an immediate walk-out and by ten past nine the majority of Sheffield area was out because the three of us were sent home.

WP: Are you having regular mass meetings and is there an action or strike committee?

■: Well we had a meeting on Monday and we have another one tomorrow night to actually work out where we are in this industrial

action and then hopefully we'll have something by then about what's happening nationally.

WP: What would you want the national union to be doing at the moment?

■: I would like to have seen everybody called out on Tuesday when most of the area was brought out.

WP: Do you think management miscalculated the mood and extent to which people are prepared to take action?

■: Yes, I think they have. I think they actually picked special groups out, mainly married people with families, to ask them if they were going to work Saturday and put them in a position where they wouldn't turn it down. I think it had been engineered, but I don't think they realised the extent to which it would escalate so quickly.

WP: What do you think all this tells people about privatisation?

■: It just tells you how bad it is to start with. In all the years of the NCU, which was originally the POEU, we've never had industrial action to this extent. It's the attitude of the management that has meant that the men walked out.

management has been able to take for granted the smooth running of office and exchange buildings and concentrate on smashing the engineers.

The STE settled at the worst possible moment. Just as the NCU(E) action was taking off nationally, management dropped the strings from their separate offer to the STE. Rather than link their claim to the struggle of the engineers the STE executive jumped at the chance to avoid a fight. BT simultaneously took pressure off themselves and struck a psychological blow at the engineers. Although the agreement is supposed to prevent STE members from doing the work of striking NCU(E) members there is little doubt that organised scabbing has been made ten times easier by this stab in the back.

FIGHTING UNITY

The NCU(C) is only theoretical part of the same union as the NCU(E). Formed by a merger of two separate unions the NCU continues to function as two autonomous halves. Thus although pickets on the ground have been arguing for all NCU members to respect their picket lines, no support for that call has come from the leadership of either NCU(C) or the NCU(E). Fighting unity at rank and file level is being sabotaged in favour of a mutual 'hands-off' pact at the top. No attempt is being made to link the claims and defeat management's divide and conquer strategy. Whilst the UCW and STE deals have undoubtedly played into management's hands, a joint strike of both clerical and engineering wings of the NCU could bring them to their knees.

The success of this struggle will depend not just on keeping the strike solid, but in extending it to the NCU(C) and on effectively countering management's scabbing operations. Light picketing, aimed at sympathetic fellow engineers,

THE BT UNIONS

STE - Society of Telecom Executives. The junior management union at British Telecom.

NCU - National Communications Union. Two wings, virtually autonomous, organise the Engineering - NCU(E) - and Clerical - NCU(C) - workers in BT.

UCW - Union of Communication Workers. Organises telephone operators, doorkeepers, canteen workers, etc.

must be strengthened to stop other union members crossing. Whilst management control the exchanges they are able to scab, to determine what emergency cover they will provide, and what lack of cover they will blame on "heartless trade unionists". They will prioritise repairs to the City and leave hospitals unattended.

THE WAY FORWARD

Whilst picketing and propaganda may undo some of the damage management scabbing can do, occupation could decisively cut the knot. With their expensive assets in our hands the major shareholders will no longer be so eager for a dirty fight in which only we get hurt. Of course the private exchanges that the City houses will have to be stopped by picketing, but occupations can hit BT's key installations. Our hands not theirs, must be on all the relevant switches that control communications.

- Make the strike solid. For mass pickets and occupations of the exchanges.
- For union control over emergency cover.
- Spread the strike to the clerical branches. Link the claims - no more sell outs.
- Renationalise BT and Mercury under workers' control.

by a Telecom worker

D.H.S.S. STRIKE

37 CPSA MEMBERS and one SCPS member have been on strike since 15 December in Caerphilly, South Wales. The strikers walked out when casual workers were introduced. They are demanding permanent jobs for the casuals and more staff.

Workers at almost every DHSS office in Britain are now stretched to breaking-point. Many offices are employing 'casuals' who are given no contract and are therefore dismissable at a week's notice. Management want to divide workers into a small relatively secure core and larger periphery of temporary workers to be taken on and sacked as the workload fluctuates.

Garry Hunt, the sole SCPS striker, told Workers Power,

"Casuals are being used to break the unions. Management say 'These kids are on the dole; let's give them some work' and the soft left fall for it. But they're used as cheap labour, and since both unions officially oppose casuals the unions are undermined."

The strike has been given official CPSA backing, but must be quickly spread if it is to be won. Although SCPS members from Cardiff Regional Office and elsewhere have refused to 'volunteer' and break

the strike, the office is still running on scab SCPS and non-union labour. Management will sit it out - as they did at Barry DHSS two years ago - unless more offices can be persuaded to come out with their own demands now!

The strikers have taken the initiative by picketing Merthyr, Bargoed and Aberdare, and a ballot for one-day action is to be taken this week. Also Telecom engineers at the depot next door have been supportive (e.g. parking their cars 'strategically' to block the car-park). These links must be strengthened as they too go into struggle. Claimants have also been leafleted and are generally sympathetic, though without any local unemployed workers' organisation their support remains passive.

Civil Service militants must campaign to spread the action now! Do not let management pick us off one at a time!

by Jeremy Drinkall (SCPS)

Messages of support and donations to:

CPSA Hardship Fund
c/o Mark Serwotka
57 Glan Road
Aberdare
South Wales

LCI AND BLOODY SUNDAY

and other Labour notables. It will be remembered by our readers that it was Blunkett who, in the wake of the Harrods bombing in December 1984, rushed to ban the 1985 Bloody Sunday march from the streets of Sheffield.

Workers Power will be on the march demonstrating our commitment to Troops Out Now! Self-determination for the Irish people as a whole! In addition, in the context of the last twelve months which has seen more show trials of IRA fighters and the London-Dublin accord, we need to highlight the call to defend the IRA against the British army and to break up

the Anglo-Irish Agreement. During this year we will be fighting within the LCI for these positions, and in particular trying to take these issues into the trade unions. We call on all those committed to the cause of Irish freedom to join us and to build for the LCI trade union conference in November.

IRELAND: A SOCIALIST SOLUTION Debate with speakers from Workers Power, Socialist Organiser and Workers Revolutionary Party. Conway Hall, Red Lion Square Friday 30 Jan. 7.30pm Adm.50p