Imperialism in Vietman.....

The road to peace

NEGOTIATIONS are once more under way on arms control. Anything that lessens the danger of nuclear conflict is to be welcomed. But nothing agreed between the superpowers merits the trust and confidence of socialists.

The US is a brutal imperialist power. This scarcely needs to be said on the left. But many on the left think that we should align ourselves with the USSR and with its gambits in arms diplomacy. They believe that condemnation of the USSR implies cold-war bigotry and jingoism, like that expressed in the memorable phrase of one of Reagan's scriptwriters about 'The Evil Empire'.

Socialists have no time for this chauvinism. But we should have no time for dishonest cant either. Or for the ignoble thought that we should not bother too much about the evils of the Russian system because we want peace with that system at all costs. Socialists want peace; but socialists who make political and ideological peace with the vile oppression of the working class and of subject nationalities which is Stalinism are selling their socialist birthright. We should be as bigoted against oppression in the USSR and by the USSR as we are bigoted and irreconcilable against the oppressions of capitalism at home and abroad.

For what is the superpower conflict about? Our world is dominated by two power blocks — one led and loosely dominated by the US, and the other tightly dominated by the USSR. Nothing less than the future of humanity depends on the prevention of all-out nuclear war between these blocks.

Nuclear peace has been preserved for four decades on the basis of a balance of nuclear terror. Wars between the blocks have been confined to Korea and Vietnam, and have involved not the USSR but North Korea and China, and North Vietnam. Conflict has otherwise been confined to the struggle for influence and dominance in the Third World.

The US's typical ally in this competition has been the right-wing military-based regime linked to archaic and corrupt local oligarchies and ruling classes. The USSR's best allies have been the local — usually peasant-based — Communist Parties and their military formations. Those Stalinist movements have channelled, and organised into powerful forces for social change, nationalist grievances as well as the social discontent of workers, peasants and urban petty bourgeois.

But the superpower conflict is not a contest between progress

and reaction. The international Stalinist movement, linked to the USSR, has shown itself to have a dual character. It is sometimes capable of being revolutionary against capitalism and pre-capitalist systems — but always it is simultaneously counter-revolutionary against the working class. Mobilising peasants and, sometimes, workers to gain power, it imprisons the working class in a totalitarian vice once it has succeeded in gaining and stabilising control.

During and after the Second World War, the Russian Stalinist bureaucracy demonstrated first that it could survive, then that it could expand, and finally that it could replicate itself in countries as distant and as different as China and Cuba. The bureaucracy has shown itself to be more stable and durable than Trotsky, who saw it as a transitory and aberrant freak, believed possible. The pattern of the bureaucracy's rise is perfectly plain in retrospect.

In the decade between the final crushing of the working class Left Opposition in 1927 and the Moscow Trials of the mid '30s, the Russian Stalinist bureaucracy took to itself all the worst characteristics of a ruling class. In 1928 it faced down the revolt of resurgent capitalist forces — the kulaks and the NEP-bourgeoisie — and, as Trotsky later (1940) put it, made itself the sole master of the surplus product. Slave-driving the working class, and converting many millions of workers and peasants literally into slaves in labour camps, the USSR rapidly industrialised. Surrounded by hostile imperialist powers, the bureaucracy manoeuvred and fought for advantage, and began to compete with those powers on something like equal terms.

In mid 1939 it signed a pact with Hitler's Germany which freed the hands of the Nazi regime to unleash the Second World War, and gained for the USSR partnership with Hitler in the partition of Poland and Nazi acceptance of Russian annexation of Latvia, Estonia and Lithuania, the three Baltic states since incorporated into the USSR. Various other spheres of joint activity were discussed between the Nazis and Stalin, including invasion of then British-controlled India. One of the reasons why they fell out was a dispute over whose sphere of influence Bulgaria was in.

The sudden Nazi invasion of the USSR in June 1941 came close to toppling the Stalin regime, but by 1943 the tide had turned and Stalin's armies began a relentless march west, to the very heart of Germany. At Yalta in 1944, Russia's control of Eastern Europe was acknowledged by the big capitalist powers. There followed two or three years of interregnum during which Stalin's armies, allied to largely (though not entirely) manufactured local CPs, established iron totalitarian control in occupied Eastern Europe and Germany. Stalin had been forced by US pressure in 1946 to evacuate the northern part of Iran, which the USSR had invaded in 1941; and his plea to the UN that the USSR should be given 'the Mandate' over former 'Italian' North Africa (Libya) was unsuccessful. But by 1948 Stalin's system had extended itself to incorporate vast areas of Europe and about 90 million people.

.....Imperialism in Afghanistan

That is where it is today, acting as a brutal occupying power. It used military force to repress the German workers in 1953, the Hungarian people in 1956, and the Czechs in 1968. It used the threat of it to limit and ultimately destroy Poland's Solidarnosc in 1980-1.

This, too, is an imperialist system, and one which today holds far more people in direct subjugation than any other imperialist power now existing. Even within the USSR's own frontiers a majority of the people belong to oppressed nationalities — like the 50 million Ukrainians, for example, who are subject to a relentless 'Russification' policy.

The argument used by most Marxists against defining the USSR as imperialist goes something like this. Imperialism in the 20th century means monopoly capitalism and its drive to expansion. Russia is not monopoly capitalist, therefore it cannot be imperialist. But this is using categories, definitions and labels not to facilitate thought but to prevent it; not to make sense of the facts, but effectively to deny them. If this approach is pursued consistently, it must result in the denial that there has ever been in history an imperialism other than monopoly-capitalist imperialism; and that would still leave the Stalinist USSR to be linked in history with a vast number of imperialisms which were not based on monopoly capitalism, thereby defining monopoly-capitalist expansionism as some sort of aberration. That is decadent logic-chopping, not Marxism.

This nonsense passes for Trotskyism, or even 'orthodox' Trotskyism, on this question. But in fact Trotsky himself had a different position. In 1939 he recognised the 'element' of imperialism in Stalin's policy, and he did so in words that leave little doubt about what he would have made of the gigantic fact of the USSR's post-war expansion.

Writing when the USSR's expansion was as yet insignificant, Trotsky insisted that in Marxist literature imperialism meant monopoly capitalism. Even in 1939, however, he indicated the Russian bureaucracy's place within the overall historic picture of imperialism:

"The driving force behind the Moscow bureaucracy is indubitably the tendency to expand its power, its prestige, its revenues. This is the element of 'imperialism' in the wider sense of the word which was the property in the past of all monarchies, oligarchies, ruling classes, medieval estates and classes".

The USSR did expand, and for over 40 years it has managed to hold on to what it got, in the face of every pressure from capitalist imperialism short of all-out war. After the defeat of Hitler's Germany the USSR was the second strongest military power in the world, overshadowing Europe and matched only by the US. In response to the USSR's settled control of Eastern Europe the US and its allies resorted to cold war and preparations for a third world war. The USSR's power neutralised the early US monopoly of the atom bomb, balancing the threat of the A-bomb's use with the threat to take Western Europe should it come to war. By the time Western Europe had been built up economically and militarily so as to have some chance of standing up to Stalin's armies, or at least for long enough for the US A-bombs to tip the balance, the USSR had broken the US monopoly and had its own nuclear bombs. Instead of world war 3 there was prolonged cold war, supplemented by the Korean

and Vietnam wars.

On the other side, the old colonial powers, France and Britain, came out of the war enfeebled and weak. Powerful nationalist movements confronted them in the colonies, some Stalinist-influenced or controlled. The Chinese Stalinists won power in the biggest semi-colony on earth in 1949, and the Vietnamese in the north of their country in the mid-'50s. The US aspired not to set up its own colonial block, displacing France and Britain, but to win hegemony in the non-Stalinist world on the basis of its great economic strength. It prised open the old exclusive trading blocks and nudged Britain and France towards the dissolution of their colonial empires. A powerful wave of rationalisation and integration of the capitalist world developed, and a growth of almost free trade under the economic hegemony of the US giant. The cold war unfroze in the '50s, and not even the Vietnam war brought it back to the icy level of the late '40s and early '50s.

Then, in the 1970s, the US's unchallenged hegemony in the capitalist world came to an end. It was defeated in the Vietnam war, and faced with intense and vigorous competition from Europe and Japan. The USSR expanded its influence in Africa, and at Christmas 1979 it invaded Afghanistan to stop the defeat of its client regime there. The invasion alarmed the capitalist world and simultaneously allowed it to justify a renewed military drive to US and international public opinion. Seven years of renewed intense cold war have followed, accompanied by hot wars in Afghanistan — 'the USSR's Vietnam' — and in Central America.

Peace will not be helped by pretending that either of the two bloody superpowers is other than what it is. The real road to peace lies not in negotiations between capitalist and bureaucratic imperialists, but in a different direction — the direction of consistent democracy in international affairs and the overthrow of the imperialists by the working class, East and West.

That road to peace was mapped out in a magnificent document addressed to the peoples of the world — and in the first place to the working class of every country — by the Russian Bolsheviks on 8 November 1917, the day after the Russian working class took power. Naturally some of the specific conditions have changed, but in its fundamentals this programme is as fresh and as adequate today as it was when the Congress of Soviets — that most democratic, and at the same time most revolutionary, of representative assemblies — proclaimed it to a blood-drenched and war-weary world 70 years ago. Excerpts:

"The Workers' and Peasants' government created by the revolution of 6-7 November and backed by the Soviets of Workers', Soldiers', and Peasants' Deputies calls upon all the belligerent peoples and their governments to start immediate negotiations for a just and democratic peace.

By a just, or democratic, peace... the government means an immediate peace without annexations (i.e., the seizure of foreign lands, or the forcible incorporation of foreign nations) and indemnities...

In accordance with the sense of justice of the democracy in general, and of the toiling classes in particular, the government interprets the annexation, or seizure, of foreign lands as meaning the incorporation into a large and powerful state of a small or feeble nation without the definitely, clearly and voluntarily expressed consent and wish of that nation, irrespective of the time such forcible incorporation took place, irrespective of the degree of development or backwardness of the nation forcibly annexed to, or forcibly retained within, the frontiers of the given state, and finally, irrespective of whether the nation inhabits Europe or distant, overseas countries.

If any nation whatsoever is forcibly retained within the boundaries of a given state, if, in spite of its expressed desire -- no matter whether that desire is expressed in the press, at popular meetings, in party decisions, or in protests and revolts against national oppression — it is not permitted the right to decide the forms of its state existence by a free vote, taken after the complete evacuation of the troops of the incorporating or, generally, of the stronger nation, without the least pressure being brought to bear upon it, such incorporation is annexation, i.e., seizure and coercion.

The government considers that it would be the greatest of crimes against humanity to continue this war for the purpose of dividing up among the strong and rich nations the feeble nationalities seized by them, and solemnly declares its determination to sign immediately conditions of peace terminating this war on the conditions indicated, which are equally just for all peoples without exception...

While addressing this proposal for peace to the governments and peoples of all the belligerent countries, the Provisional Workers' and Peasants' Government of Russia appeals in particular to the class conscious workers of the three most advanced nations of mankind, the largest states participating in the present war, namely, Great Britain, France and Germany.

For these workers, by comprehensive, determined and supremely energetic action, can help us to bring to a successful conclusion the cause of peace, and at the same time the cause of the emancipation of the toiling and exploited masses of the population from all forms of slavery and all forms of exploitation.

The Workers' and Peasants' Government created by the revolution of 6-7 November and backed by the Soviets of Workers', Soldiers' and Peasants' Deputies, must begin immediate negotiations for peace.

Our appeal must be directed both to the governments and to the peoples. We cannot ignore the governments, for that would delay the possibility of concluding peace, and the people's government dare not do that; but we have no right not to appeal to the peoples at the same time. Everywhere there are differences between the governments and the peoples, and we must therefore help the peoples to interfere in the question of war and peace. We will, of course, insist upon the whole of our programme for a peace without annexations and indemnities. We shall not retreat from our programme; but we must deprive our enemies of the opportunity of declaring that their conditions are different from ours and that therefore it is useless to start negotiations with us. No, we must deprive them of that advantageous position and not advance our terms in the form of an ultimatum. Therefore the point is included that we are ready to consider all terms of peace and all proposals. We shall consider them, but that does not necessarily mean that we shall accept them...

We are combatting the duplicity of governments which in words talk of peace and justice, but in fact wage annexationist and predatory wars. There is not a single government that will say all it thinks. We, however, are opposed to secret diplomacy and will act openly in the eyes of the whole people. We do not, and never did, close our eyes to the difficulties. War cannot be ended by refusal, it cannot be ended by one side only...

In proposing the conclusion of an immediate armistice, we appeal to the class consious workers of the countries that have done so much for the development of the proletarian movement. We appeal to the workers of England, where there was the Chartist movement, to the workers of France, who have in repeated insurrections displayed the strength of their class consciousness, and to the workers of Germany, who waged the fight against the Anti-Socialist Law and have created powerful organisations.

The government and the bourgeoisie will make every effort to unite their forces and drown the workers' and peasants' revolution in blood. But the three years of war have been a good lesson to the masses; Soviet movements in other countries, the mutiny of the German fleet, which was crushed by the Junkers of the hangman Wilhelm... The workers' movement will triumph and will lay the path to peace and socialism".

No, we are not beaten!

Have the Tories seen off the British working class? They think so; and they can make an impressive case. Two of the strongest battalions, the miners and the Fleet Street printers, have been heavily defeated. Trade union membership has declined from 12 million in 1979 to some 9.2 million today. Strikes have declined even more. In no year since 1980 have there been many more than half the number of strikes in 1974; last year, 1986, there were fewer than one-third as many. Since the 1983 print dispute at Warrington, and the miners' strike, the Tories' array of anti-union laws has taken a firm grip.

'Flexible' working — part-time, temporary, sub-contracted — has steadily increased. Today a full third of the workforce are 'flexible' workers.

Profits have risen steadily since 1981. In 1985 the net rate of return on capital (excluding North Sea oil) was higher than in any year since 1973; and this year "Each week has brought announcements of company profits well above even the City's expectations" (Sunday Times, 15 March). The percentage of national income taken by wages and salaries has dropped from 60% in 1980 to 55% in 1985. Output per worker in manufacturing industry rose 29% between 1981 and 1986: three workers in 1986 were producing nearly as much as four in 1981.

Some sectors, at least, of industry have been growing fairly briskly since the big slump of the early '80s. Consumer goods output increased by a respectable 3.3% from late 1985 to late 1986.

Labour's vote dwindled to 28% of the electorate in 1983; and its recovery since then has been feeble.

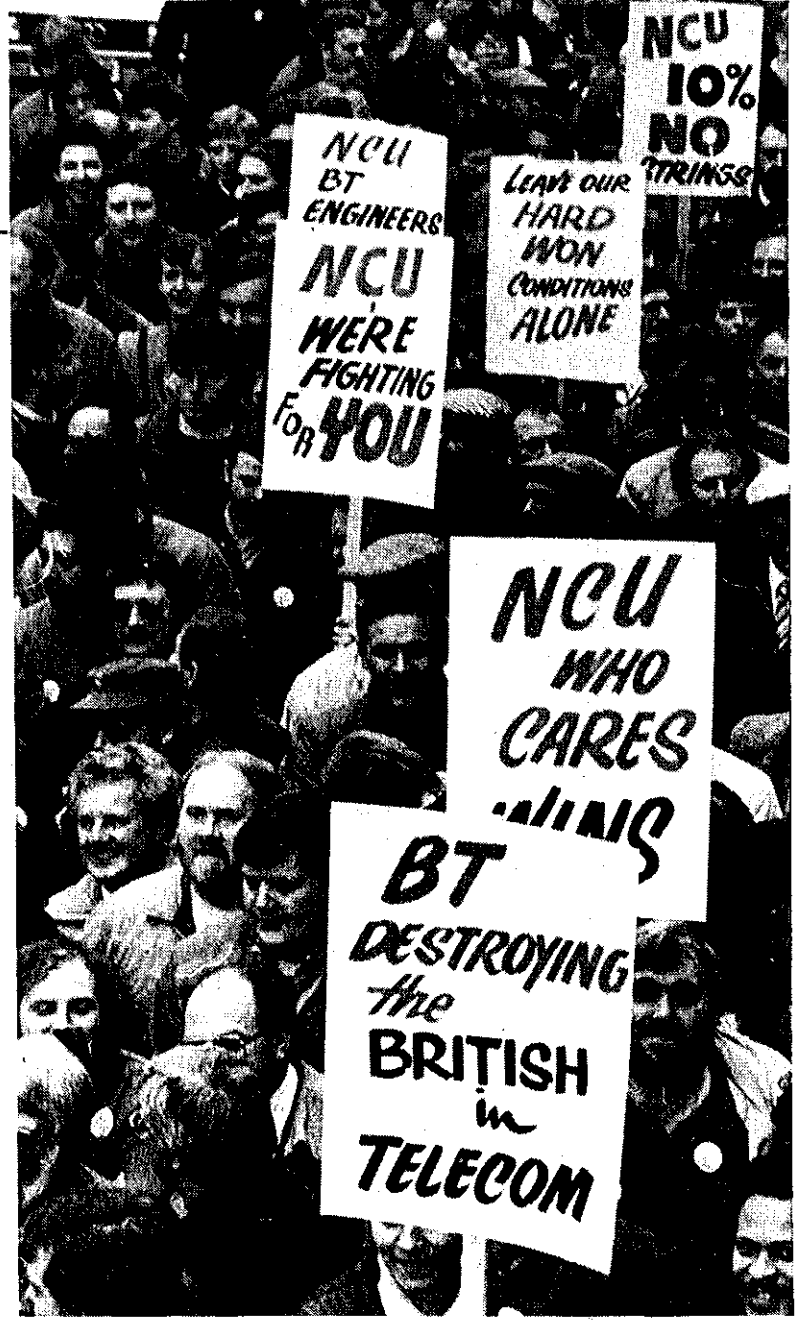
Undeniably the working class has suffered severe defeats. These defeats have come together with changes in the structure of the working class — sharp declines in traditional bastions — which have doubled their effect.

But it is premature for the Tories to cry victory. It is certainly premature for socialists to give up on working-class struggle and to suppose that any hope for the future lies in a coalition of peace protests, youth street-rioting, and municipal reform!

Many times, in other countries, the working class has recovered from defeats far more severe than those we have had recently in Britain. Since 1973 the Chilean working class has had its militants massacred or forced to flee, its organisations battered, and its base undermined by terrible slumps; yet now the Chilean workers are on the streets again, and the Pinochet dictatorship is tottering.

Besides, the defeats in Britain may not be as total as they seem. Consider the dockers. By 1984 they looked like a spent force: their numbers had dwindled, and traditionally well-organised ports like Liverpool had lost out to new ones like Felixstowe. Yet the dockers' strike in 1984, alongside the miners, was a serious threat to the Tories. And to this day nothing has come of the Tories' talk of scrapping the National Dock Labour Scheme.

The dockers, admittedly, had never been heavily defeated in a full-scale confrontation. But the telecom engineers had been —



Telecom strikers. Photo: Ian Swindale.

over Project Mercury and privatisation. Still they were able to mount a powerful strike this year.

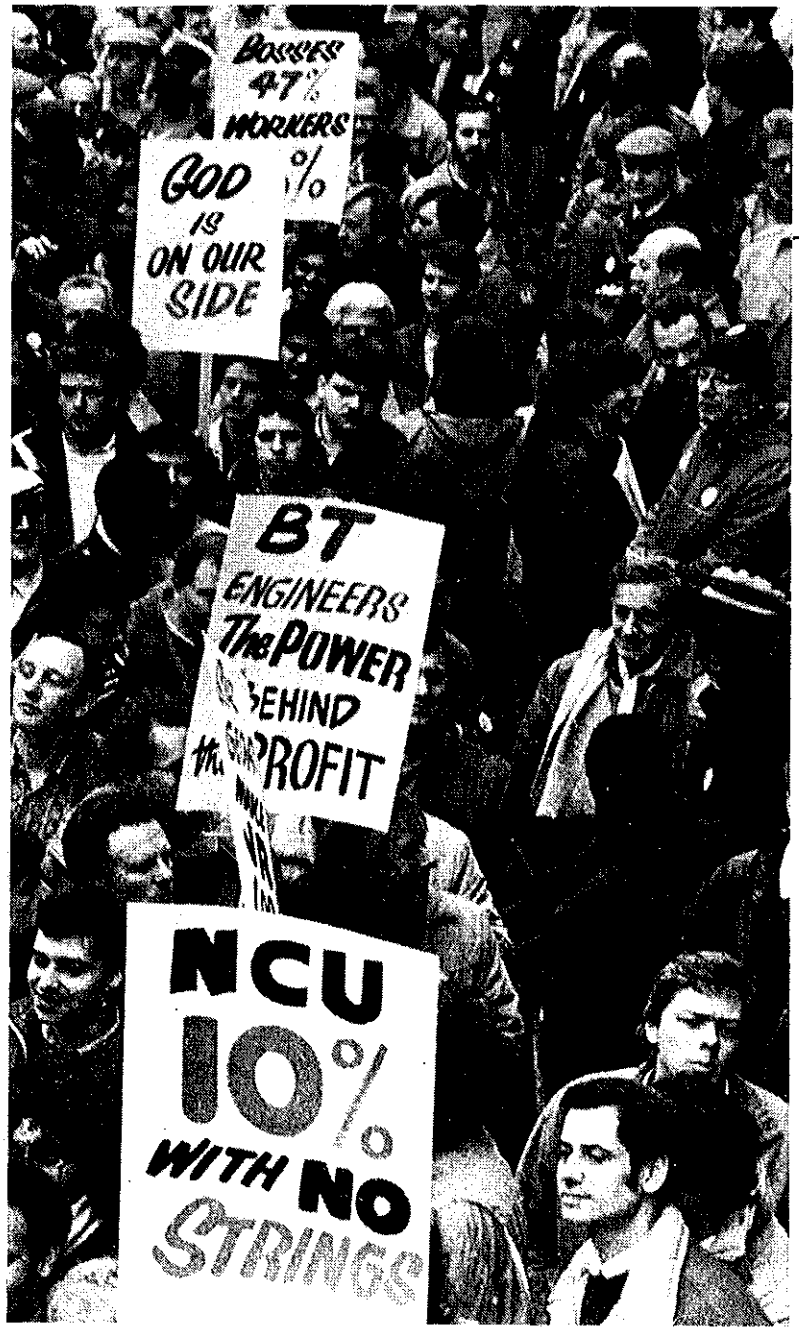
Another index is pay. Although profits have risen faster than pay, major pay settlements have been regularly 2 or 3% above the rate of inflation. The Financial Times reckons that the biggest factor here is shortages of skilled labour, but warns its readers that the unions are not a "busted flush".

The structural changes in the workforce have weakened the labour movement. But a closer examination shows that this weakening may be temporary.

Employment in manufacturing — which was the core of militant trade unionism — has declined drastically. At the peak, in 1965, over nine million people worked in manufacturing. The workforce has declined to 7.26 million in 1979 and 5.15 million in 1986.

This decline in manufacturing accounts for much of the decline in strikes and in trade unionism. From 1974 to 1980, inclusive, 75% of all striker-days in Britain were in manufacturing. Then strike activity in manufacturing went down from an average of 9,100,000 striker-days per year in 1974-80 to an average of 2,100,000 striker-days per year in 1981-86. Strike activity outside manufacturing actually went *up* from an average of 3,000,000 striker-days per year in 1974-80 to 7,600,000 striker-days per year in 1981-86.

The averages here are very artificial because the strike figures for non-manufacturing are so much dominated by the great miners' strike of 1984-5. But if that, and the miners' strike of 1974, are taken out of the calculation, then strike activity out-



side manufacturing seems to have been level — an average of 2,200,000 striker-days per year both in 1974-80 and 1981-86.

This picture is confirmed by the latest Workplace Industrial Relations Survey ('British Workplace Industrial Relations 1980-84: the DE/ESRC/PSI/ACAS surveys', by Neil Millward and Mark Stevens). Millward and Stevens surveyed a sample of over 2000 workplaces. They found that more workplaces in public services had strikes in 1984 than did in 1980: for example, 50% of workplaces in public administration had strikes in 1984, but only 17% in 1980. But in manufacturing fewer workplaces had strikes in 1984. For example, only 23% of vehicles factories had strikes in 1984, whereas in 1980 67% had strikes.

Millward and Stevens also found that the percentage of manufacturing workplaces where manual workers were unionised fell from 76% in 1980 to 66% in 1984. They reckon that this is because of the closure of larger and more unionised plants. In contrast, the percentage of public service workplaces where manual workers were unionised *rose* from 80% to 94%.

In short, a large part of the 2.89 million decline in trade union numbers since 1979 must be accounted for by the 2.1 million decline in the manufacturing workforce. Shop stewards' organisation is also weaker in what remains of manufacturing, whereas in many sectors outside manufacturing it has held its own or even increased.

Amidst the huge general decline in manufacturing there has been some specialised growth. While manufacturing employment declined 25% in Greater London between 1981 and 1986, and 35% in Yorkshire and Humberside between 1979 and 1986, in East Anglia it went *up* 15% between 1983 and 1986.

Capital is moving to new geographical areas where union organisation is weak, and also, to some extent, into new product sectors. The use of microelectronics is spreading fairly rapidly, though the microelectronics industry itself in Britain is quite small. Job losses directly due to microelectronic technology (and job gains directly due to it) have been small compared to the vast overall shifts in the workforce.

The new factories are usually smaller than the old ones — partly because microelectronics makes it easier to work with smaller factories, and partly for political reasons (employers know that smaller workplaces are more difficult to unionise). Different surveys have produced different results, but most researchers reckon that new technology has a low rate of union organisation.

The picture of the typical modern factory as a gleaming semi-automatic plant staffed only by yuppie technicians is, however, false. The proportion of administrative, technical and clerical workers in manufacturing industry actually went *down* from 29.3% in 1981 to 27.34% in 1985. The new factories present a challenge to the labour movement, but so did the old factories in their day. The car industry, for example, now figures as a declining traditional bastion of trade unionism: but it took a long, hard struggle to unionise the car factories. The new factories can be unionised too.

Mostly, however, British capital has moved not from old manufacturing to new manufacturing, but to services or to manufacturing outside Britain. A National Economic Development Office report in October 1986 calculated that net fixed investment in British manufacturing industry had been below zero continuously since 1980. According to government figures, fixed capital expenditure in manufacturing industry in 1985 was still 10% below its 1980 figure. One of the reasons why there are shortages of skilled workers in British manufacturing, driving wages up, is that companies are not prepared to invest in training. The capitalists are still not convinced that the Tories have made Britain safe for exploitation. And the big increase in manufacturing productivity in the '80s is mostly due to closure of more inefficient plants and to speed-up rather than to new technology.

Since 1979 British capital has vastly expanded its stock of overseas investment, and British capitalists now have more net foreign assets than any other capitalist class except Japan's. Over the same period the long-term tendency for a bigger proportion of workers to be employed in services has accelerated.

This drift to services needs closer examination, for 'services' is a catch-all label for everything which is not manufacturing, agriculture, mining, construction or utilities. An analysis by the Bank of England shows that the increase is almost entirely in *social* services (health, education, etc.) and in *producer* services (consultancy, contracting, banking, etc.).

Consumer services (catering, transport, etc.) have expanded only modestly in the UK, from 8% of the workforce in 1950 to 11% in 1980; in the US they have *declined* from 12% to 10% of the workforce. The Bank of England researchers note that "the private car has tended to replace bus and railway travel, washing machines have replaced laundries, and television has replaced the cinema." *Distributive* services (retail, wholesale, and freight transport) took a smaller proportion of the workforce in 1980 than in 1960 both in the UK and in the US.

Even in *producer* services the increased share of the total workforce is partly a quirk of the statistics. "It is probable that purchases of services such as telecommunications, advertising, accountancy, consultancy, etc., by other sectors have risen...- Part of the increasing share of producer services in total output may, however, be attributable to the contracting-out of services previously performed within firms, and is thus the result of a reclassification...rather than an increase in the activity itself."

Probably more basic than the drift to services is the drift to 'white-collar' work. The two trends are closely connected,

because service jobs are more white-collar than industrial, and the proportion of white-collar workers within manufacturing is falling.

By 1985, about 55% of all workers in Britain were white-collar workers. In 1911, the white-collar share of the workforce was only 19%; in 1971, 43%. The increase in white-collar work has gone together with an increase in women's wage-work. From the 1850s through to the 1950s, women were about 30% of the waged workforce, or a little more; now they are 45% of employees in employment. (The impression of a sudden recent influx of women into public labour is however a bit exaggerated; in the 19th century a big proportion of waged women were domestic servants, and all through the 20th century there has been a shift of waged women out of domestic service and into public labour).

White-collar trade unionism has increased relative to blue-collar. In 1911, 13% of trade unionists were white-collar; in 1978, 39%. But white-collar workers are still less unionised than manual workers; and they strike less.

A detailed survey was done by the Department of Employment on relative strike rates of manual and non-manual workers in 1966-73. Non-manual workers had about ten times less strike activity than manual workers. When the figures are broken down further, some categories of white-collar workers are shown to have had higher strike rates than some categories of manual workers: 'clerical and related' had a higher strike rate than 'processing, making, repairing (metal and electrical)', and 'professional — science, engineering and technology' had a higher rate than 'painting, assembling, packaging, inspecting'. Also, white-collar workers use forms of industrial action other than strikes (work-to-rules, boycotts, etc.) more than manual workers; and such slight evidence as there is suggests that white-collar strikes are increasing relative to manual strikes.

White-collar workers have become more unionised and more militant, and more similar in their forms of industrial organisation (shop stewards, etc.) and action to manual workers. On average, however, they are still considerably less organised and less militant. And while NALGO and the NUT have affiliated to the TUC, neither they nor the CPSA have affiliated to the Labour Party, or are likely to affiliate soon. White-collar unions which are affiliated to the Labour Party, like ASTMS, have very high rates of opting-out from the political levy.

As the workforce has become more white-collar, the average strength and militancy of union organisation, and the strength of class identification and solid Labour voting, has declined: that has been the main trend of recent decades, accelerated in the Thatcher years.

Will the trend continue? Will the class-conscious working class end up as a small, desperate minority in a population which regards itself as middle-class and cares nothing for ideals of solidarity and cooperation? Do socialists therefore have no realistic alternative but to turn to the new middle-class majority on its own terms, junking the old collectivist politics and appealing to whatever progressive attitudes can still be found?

Those who push that message today are often the same people who used to say, as recently as during the big battles of the early '80s in the Labour Party, that socialism is something foisted on the working class by middle-class semi-intellectuals, and manual workers care nothing for such ideals. Now we get the opposite story: socialism was admittedly deep-rooted in the traditional manual working class, but all the new white-collar workers care for is mortgages, video recorders, and wine bars.

The new story romanticises traditional manual working-class organisation as much as the old story underestimated it. Manual workers have 'middle-class' aspirations too! The drive to form unions is so universal in the working class as to be almost automatic: but the political coloration of trade unionism depends on more specific political and ideological factors. In roughly similar economic situations, trade unions can be explicitly pro-capitalist (US 'business unionism'), religious (Italy, France, Belgium, etc.), syndicalist, Labour-reformist, or revolutionary. It depends on the 'vanguard', the active minority who shape the semi-automatic drive of the working class into specific channels. Economic militancy creates better chances for a socialist active minority, but no guarantees.

The Labour affiliation of the manual unions in Britain was not an automatic product of economic evolution. It was a product of huge struggles. It will take equally huge struggles to shape a conscious political road for the rising white-collar unions.

A socialist road *is* possible. 'White-collar' covers a vast range of people, some of whom, enjoying high living standards and considerable autonomy in their work, are closer to the old petty bourgeoisie (small shopkeepers, self-employed craft workers, etc.) than to the working class. Partly because of real differences in work situation, partly because of employers' policy, white-collar/manual has been one of the biggest divisions in the working class. But the real basis for that division, and the division itself, are declining. The mass of white-collar workers are *workers*, divorced from the means of production and having to sell their labour-power, in a situation not very different from manual workers. With the introduction of the word processor and other microelectronic office technology, the office worker is increasingly a slave of the machine no less than the factory worker.

About 55% of white-collar workers are women. Up to now women have generally been less militant and less left-wing than men. But that is changing, and there is plenty of evidence that once they get moving women workers can be more militant and more radical than men.

As long ago as the 1860s Marx wrote: **"One works as a manager, engineer, technologist, etc., the other as overseer, the third as manual labourer or even drudge. An ever-increasing number of types of labour are included in the immediate concept of *productive labour*... And here it is quite immaterial whether the job of a particular worker, who is merely a limb of this aggregate worker, is at a greater or smaller distance from the actual manual labour"** (Capital vol.1 p.1040. It seems here that Marx regarded even managers as part of the working class, so long as they were salaried employees rather than owners. But elsewhere [Capital vol.3 p.338] Marx describes the manager in a joint-stock company as 'the functioning capitalist').

What about workers who are unproductive in the capitalist sense — i.e. do not produce surplus value — like public service workers? About workers in commerce, the main category of 'unproductive' workers in his day, Marx wrote: **"The commercial worker produces no surplus value directly. But... what he costs the capitalist and what he brings in for him, are two different things. He... adds to the capitalist's income by helping him to reduce the cost of realising surplus-value... (His) wage tends to fall, even in relation to average labour, with the advance of the capitalist mode of production. This is due partly to the division of labour in the office... Secondly... the progress of science and public education..."** (Capital vol.3 p.300).

The labour movement needs to look for new, additional methods of struggle in public services, where straightforward strikes save the employer money rather than costing; we need to campaign to unionise the new factories and the new army of part-time workers; we need to strengthen white-collar union organisation; we need to make the movement more accessible for women.

But this does not mean rejecting strikes, or replacing the red flag by pastel shades. The new sections of the working class have the same bread-and-butter needs for militancy as the old sections; they too need bold leadership to galvanise them and are demoralised by timidity. They are potentially a new battalion of gravediggers for capitalism. If we do not take our revenge on the Tories for the recent defeats, it will not be the working class that has been wanting, but the left.