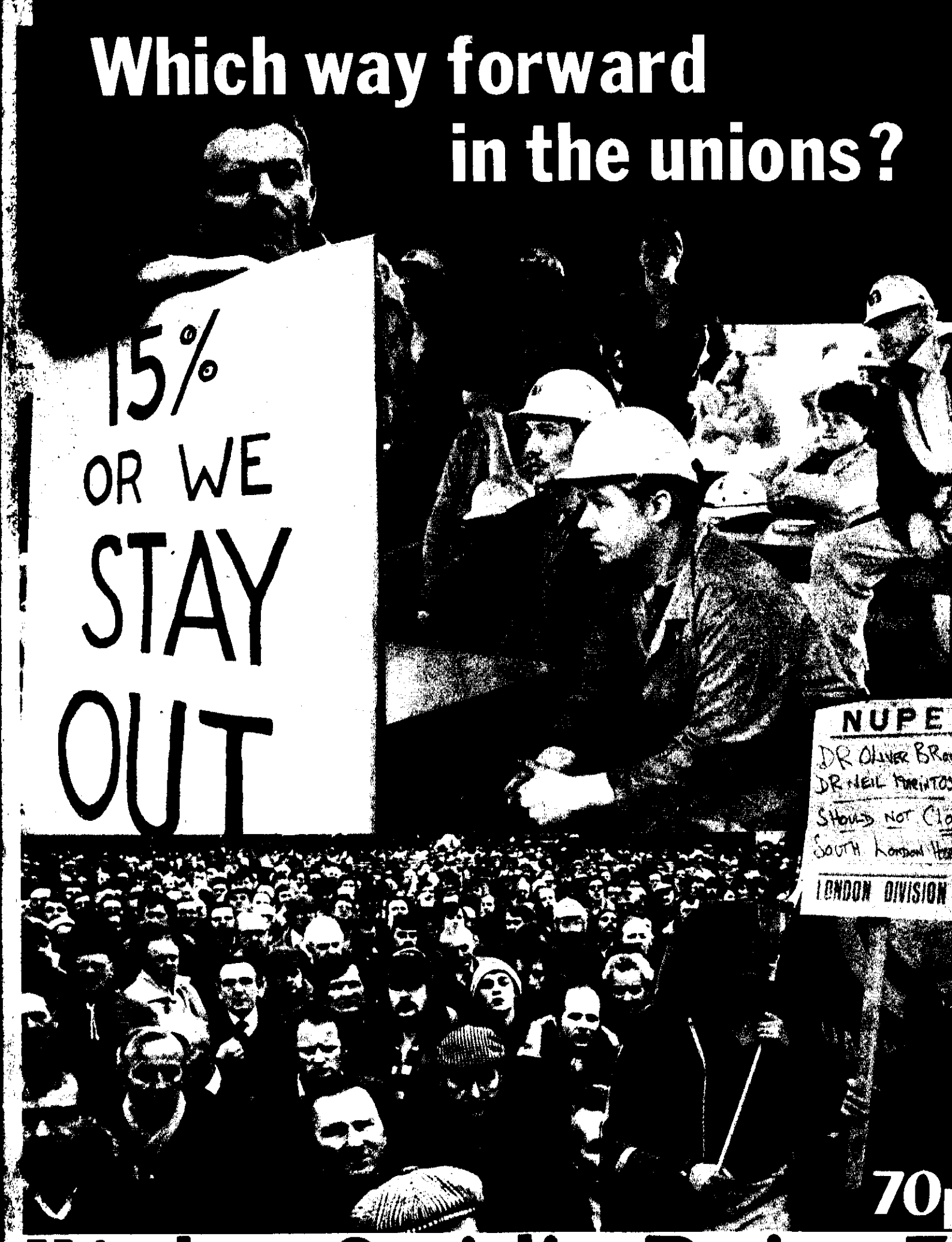
Which way forward in the unions?



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WORKERS SOCIALIST REVIEW 3

Unions central to Labour Party struggles

John Lister reviews the interactions between developments in the unions and in the Labour Party

TODAY'S situation in the Labour Party is the outcome of a series of interconnecting processes of development in the workers' movement and in British capitalism since the mid 1960s.

In the context of the end of the post-war boom and the substantial decline of British capitalism on the world markets, the established reformist leadership of the British working class — in the Labour Party and in the trade union movement from shop steward level to the full-time bureaucracies — has consistently lagged behind the requirements of the situation, clinging obstinately to the methods and often the policies of the past.

Thus we saw in the 1960s the Wilson government employ a succession of ineffectual reformist and outright anti-working class policies — including wage controls, strike-breaking and attempted anti-union laws — in their efforts to manage and sustain a decaying British capitalism.

Eventually, under pressure from a powerful and militant shop floor movement which had emerged and consolidated its strength in the boom period — and on which some sections of the bureaucrats had built their power base — sections of "left" union bureaucracies of the time (TGWU, AUEW) were forced to a degree to challenge these attacks and mobilise some opposition to them in order to keep control of the movement. Yet even during their shows of protest, these same TUC lefts were seeking ways and means to compromise with their right wing colleagues and with the Labour leadership.

The strength of the shop floor movement and the radicalisation of the trade union rank and file became the main component of the industrial opposition to the Heath government of 1970-74. As Heath plunged into ill-prepared confrontations with the miners and with the trade union movement as a whole, through the Industrial Relations Act and state con trols on wages, the pace of opposition was set by the left within the unions (though we should also recall the defiance of a few Labour councils — most notably Clay Cross — to Heath's "Fair Rents" Act).

An indication of the spill-over of this radicalisation came in the Labour Party conference of 1973 which swung to the left, leaving Wilson to run for and win office on a manifesto far more militant in tone than he would ever have chosen.

But 1972-4 summed up the basic political problem for the British working class. There were huge direct-action struggles,

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Foot

coming close to a general strike in 1973, blocking and crippling the Tories' attempted solution to the crisis of British capitalism, and finally forcing the Tories into an election which they lost. But insofar as the strike movement was political — i.e. had a conscious alternative at the level of the general running of society — its political expression was 'Kick the Tories Out', i.e. a Labour government.

And that Labour government, despite the left manifesto, was to introduce the social contract, execute cuts more drastic than the present government's, and implement the biggest drop in real wages for decades.

The only conscious political alternative possessed by the great militant strike movement — which *implicitly* posed fundamental questions of class power — was a *bourgeois* workers' party, operating in a period when bourgeois society allows little scope for reforms.

1974 and after posed brutally and sharply to the British workers' movement the task of *changing* its politics, i.e. changing itself. Since then the movement — or at least a section of activists within it — have been attempting that task: crudely, inadequately, in a very limited way so far. This acute crisis of reformism is the basic thread running through all developments since 1974.

In a bid to head off pressure while maintaining the same basic thrust of reconstructing British capitalism, Wilson made a few initial cosmetic changes. Heffer was brought into the government, and Tony Benn was used as the figurehead for the Industry Bill through which proposals for the wholesale rationalisation of industry with government subsidies through the NEB and systematised class collaboration were to be pushed through Parliament and the trade union movement.

Concessions were made on pay to the still striking miners, to secure a return to work. Under threat of a national engineering strike, the Labour government two months later began the repeal of Heath's Industrial Relations Act.

But Heath's wage controls remained in force — trapping health workers and others who had looked to an increased settlement. The Shrewsbury builders' pickets remained in jail; and the Clay Cross councillors penalised for their stand on rents remained unchanged.

As the economic crisis increasingly tightened its grip, once again the Wilson/Healey leadership resorted first to threats to use "Tory policies" and then to wage controls. In this they were now able to draw on the collaboration of a rightward-moving Jack Jones and the majority of the trade union bureaucracy who were visibly embarrassed and feeling threatened by the militancy of their members. An unholy, wage cutting alliance was formed spanning from the right wing of the PLP through both "right" and "left" of the TUC hierarchy and including the tacit acceptance of the Communist Party, reluctant to jeopardise its position with the union bureaucracies: the line permeated down to many layers of convenors.

With the full weight of the labour bureaucracy brought to bear on any section seeking a fight, it was not until the firefighters press-ganged their leadership into an all-out strike against Phase 3 of wage controls in 1977-78 that this began to crack.

But with inflation still in double figures and Healey declaring in the Summer of 1978 for another wage cutting 5% limit, the anger and resentment at the record of the Labour government — which had driven up unemployment, cut back health and education, and slashed living standards — spilled over into a movement sufficiently strong to tip the scales at the TUC Congress and find a strong echo in the Labour Party.

Wilson's undisguised contempt for conference decisions in general and the left wing policies of the 1973 manifesto in particular had created conditions in which

the question of accountability and of rank and file control over the Labour leadership gained a concrete significance for wide sections of the workers' movement. Labour's squalid record in its second term of government had confirmed to many trade unionists that they did not wish to subscribe to yet another reactionary Labour government.

Then the rejection of Healey's Phase 4 by the TUC Congress and — by union block votes — at the Labour Party conference saw the union bureaucrats split on the main lines of economic policy, with sections under heavy pressure from their members to take a firm stand in defiance of the right wing PLP leadership.

As the hammer blows of the strike wave throughout the "Winter of Discontent" demonstrated the gulf between the practice of the Labour leadership and the demands of the trade union rank and file, and destroyed the government's pay policies, the conditions were created for a Tory victory on the election and a prolonged political fight in the Labour Party.

The Labour defeat in the May 1979 election also set the scene for the reemergence of Tony Benn from his period obediently closeted in the Labour cabinet. He began to spell out an increasingly detailed critique of the previous Labour governments in which he had served, and championed the left wing's demands for democracy and accountability in the Party.

Some of those bureaucrats who had been driven to vote against Healey's Phase 4 in 1978 were aggrieved by the unresponsiveness to them of the Labour government. In parallel to the Labour rank and file, but from a different perspective, they came out for greater trade union control over the Labour leadership.

This combination created conditions in which a campaigning left acquired a real weight reaching into the unions and hope of winning victories against a previously dominant right wing leadership. This change helped stimulate a revival in the rank and file activism and recruitment in the CLPs, and encouraged those taking up Labour Party issues in the unions. The whole process was advanced by the campaign waged by Tony Benn and the fighting left wing forces grouped in the Rank and File Mobilising Committee. The left in the CLPs were in many cases inspired to go further and pursue local struggles for the removal not only of right wing MPs but also councillors, and pursue left policies at local level.

But significantly the "left" rhetoric of the union leaders was confined to the largely propagandist arena of the Labour Party in opposition. This was shown particularly sharply as the TUC leaders united to isolate and restrict the steel strike of 1980 and to duck out of any mass action to challenge Prior's anti-union Act of 1980. They have established a completely consistent record of retreat and betrayal since the 1979 election — a record which embraces both those bureaucrats who block voted *for* Labour democracy and those who have consistently opposed it.

Thus — although support in the trade union rank and file for Labour Party democracy has not visibly slackened — union leaders like the TGWU's have been able, as they desired, to limit the Labour Party democracy fight. Successive betrayals and setbacks, massive redundancies and growing demoralisation and cynicism among shop floor workers denied leadership has produced a slackening of rank and file pressure upon the bureaucrats as part of a general decline in struggles. Each successive sell-out has strengthened the bureaucracy.

At the same time the fear engendered in the union hierarchy by the signs that the Labour Party democracy question was — particularly during Benn's campaign for Deputy — spilling over into demands for *trade union* democracy, began to be a powerful influence over bureaucracies — most notably the TGWU, whose inner divisions and lack of internal democracy were exposed for all to see.

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Benn

In addition, a rise in Labour's electoral popularity, coupled with Benn's powerful showing in the Labour Party seemed to raise the spectre for some of them of a returned Labour government led or strongly influenced by Benn, in which left policies might be taken beyond the conference floor into the class struggle, with a consequent stimulus to the trade union rank and file and sharpening of conflict with the employers.

Though sufficient union support was swung in support of the Wembley "status quo" to prevent the subsequent reversal of the electoral college formula achieved by the left, the right wing began openly marshalling its forces, while the TUC "left" was alarmed by the successes of the SDP and the spread of the democracy issue into the unions.

Indeed while the split of the SDP appeared politically and numerically to deplete Labour's right wing PLP leadership, it also piled new pressure on those who stayed behind in the PLP and on the union leaders. Committed above all to hopes of returning a new Labour government, they dreaded further losses of right wing forces — while some Labour right wingers plainly hanker after longer-term coalitions or alliances with the SDP along the lines of the Lib-Lab deal.

Hence the 1981 conference, amid a growing clamour from the right for a witch-hunt, brought the narrow defeat of the Benn campaign, and reverses for the left on the NEC, with the emergence of a centre/right wing majority in which both components were prepared to mount a witch-hunt.

By January 1982, under pressure from the right wing — in particular the trade union right — and after the defeat of the deputy leadership campaign, the left, headed by Benn, pulled back to declare support for the Bishop Stortford "truce" in which the only hostilities which ceased was the offensive of the left. While the right wing sharpened their knives daily in the Tory press, the left declared time and again their loyalty to the existing leadership and commitment to "unity".

The dismissive response to this from the best elements of the CLP rank and file was summed up in Peter Tatchell's joke in a Socialist Organiser interview, where he asks "who is this bloke Bishop Stortford anyway?" Despite the setbacks, the rank and file were still pressing home their fight — submitting an astounding 600 resolutions of protest at the NEC's non-endorsement of Tatchell, deselecting some right wing MPs, replacing some retiring right wingers with left wingers, standing firm in Bradford and Hornsey, and voting solidly for left wing policies at conference.

But the flirtation of the Tribune circles with the Bishop Stortford deal was followed by increasing evidence that the Stalinist influenced elements in the LCC and Clause 4 were prepared to join a witch-hunt of the left provided they could mask this behind a suitable facade.

By the 1982 conference, the consolidation of union votes in the right wing camp appeared to have gone a long way forward on internal policy questions: it was the union vote which — with few, notable exceptions — mobilised to force the register through and instal a hard right majority on the NEC. But even then the political bloc was not restored to that of the bad old days. Contradictory formulations on wage controls indicated that future attempts by Shore to enforce a new social contract will not be any simple repeat of those under Wilson. And the pressure of the rank and file could also be seen in the massive vote on unilateralism which is likely to prove a major embarrassment to the right wing PLP leaders. A gauge of the changed climate even in the unions was the episode which led to the resignation of Sid Weighell for misusing the block vote in a way that has gone on behind the scenes for decades, and now the victory of Jimmy Knapp, the candidate backed by the left, against Weighell's man, Charlie Turnock, in the election for a new general secretary.

Though the right wing in the PLP and the unions are tightening the screws they have by no means crushed the activists, restored things to what they were or created ideal conditions for a purge.

What happened to the stewards' movement?

Alan Thornett looks at how the official leadership has sabotaged union resistance to the Tories; why it has been able to; and how we can tackle the problem.

Duffy, Evans (above), Hawley (below centre): "their first concern is to preserve the viability of the capitalist employer"

FOR MANY years the shop stewards' movement in Britain was the envy of militant workers all over the world. Yet since the late 1970s it has suffered severe setbacks, and in some sections of industry its organisation has substantially broken down in the face of the management offensive.

How did this happen? Why has such a powerful movement offered such comparatively weak resistance? What were the weaknesses which left the stewards' movement prey to the sell-outs by union officials?

A clue is offered by the vanguard of the employers. Interviewed recently on BBC television (Newsnight, Wednesday March 23), Michael Edwardes, fresh from his successes in BL, was asked if he had regarded himself as anti-union.

Although he would obviously deny such a self-evident truth, his reply was very interesting and very candid. He not only denied that he was against the unions, but stressed that he had developed a very close relationship with the *General Secretaries* of the unions in BL. In fact, he said, he had been fighting their battles as well, by taking the power away from the shop stewards and giving it back to the officials!*

Edwardes' cynical admission of the way he exploited the divisions between the shop floor movement and the full time union bureaucracy points to the central component of the employers' strategy and that of successive governments.

For the union leaders as much as for the employers, the most important and alarming -- feature of the growth of the shop stewards' movement in the industrial unions in the 1950s and '60s was the degree of independence it achieved from the full-time officials and the top leaders of the trade unions.

Edwardes went on to describe how he had been let loose on BL workers by the last Labour government. He voiced his great respect for Industry Secretary Eric Varley, who he said had kept right out of the way and given Edwardes total freedom on tactical decisions and on appointments to the Board. He contrasted this to Tory Patrick Jenkin, who had "intervened" on tactical decisions.

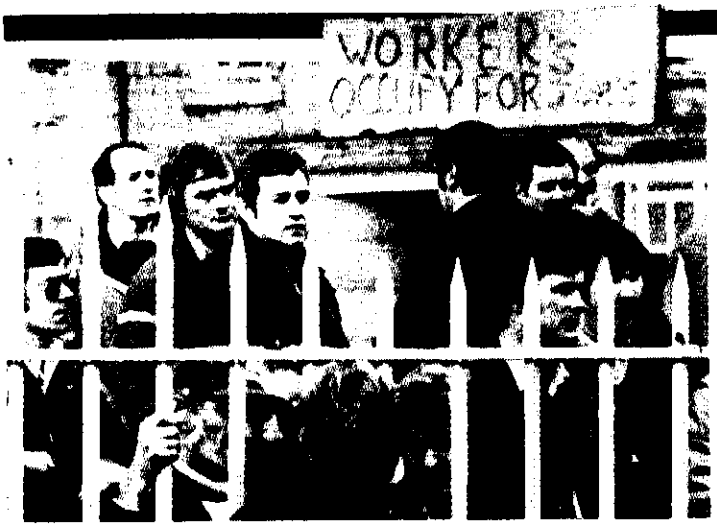
Edwardes also stressed that he had been opposed to state ownership "from day one" of his takeover at the head of the corporation, and had always intended to sell off BL as soon as it became profitable.

In the strongest organised industries, like cars in the 1960s (particularly the second half of the 1960s), shop stewards' committees were effectively able to negotiate their conditions, call strikes and organise themselves effectively outside of the control of the trade union officials. There were defeats – such as in Fords in 1961 – but in general the shop stewards' movement extended its influence and achieved a considerable degree of control in the plants.

One factor which contributed to this favourable balance of forces between the unions and the employers was the prevailing conditions of economic boom.

From 1950 to 1970 – the period of the most important development in the shop floor movement in the industrial working class in Britain – world capitalist production expanded faster than in any previous period. Significant economic growth took place in every one of the major capitalist countries without exception. The average standard of living in the advanced countries as a whole *doubled* in that period. Workers won the right to regular wage increases, and increased their wages in real terms. Unemployment in the advanced countries was comparatively low. In many countries, like Britain, immigrant workers were drawn in to fill vacant jobs. Women -- despite discrimination -- were increasingly drawn into the labour force.

Although the boom in Britain was feeble compared with countries like Japan and West Germany, that period



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The situation now is marked by mass unemployment, loss of bargaining power on the shop floor, and destruction of the traditional methods of struggle which had grown up in the post-war period. Central to this is the decline of manufacturing industry. The all-time high of manufacturing employment in Britain was over nine million, in 1965. In the ten years between 1972 and '82, the workforce declined from 8,096,000 to 5,500,000, an overall fall of 31%. In the four years between 1978 and 1982 alone, the decline was 22%.

In the traditionally best organised manufacturing sections, which have a correspondingly high degree of shop floor organisation, we find the following decline:

	Decline '72-'78	'78-'82	Total '72-'82
Engineering	8%	20%	28%
Shipbuilding	4%	20%	24%
Metal manufacture	8%	37%	45%
Vehicles 5%	28%	33%	
Metal goods	6%	23%	29%

still saw the fastest growth ever known. Production per head grew at a rate of 2½% per year, as against 4% in the advanced countries as a whole.

Various factors combined to make the situation of the British economy significantly worse than the other advanced capitalist nations. In particular the development of British industry at an earlier historical stage left it ill-equipped to compete with other capitalisms which had either gained vastly in strength during World War 2 (the USA) or effectively reconstructed major industry using the latest technology in the aftermath of the war (Japan, West Germany).

The ending of the post war boom at the end of the 1960s, and the onset of a period of acute economic crisis for the world capitalist system brought particularly acute problems in Britain. Since then every government Labour and Tory alike has tried to tackle the crisis of British capitalism in basically the same way, by seeking to restructure and rationalise the most antiquated sections of industry and to drive up the rate of exploitation of the working class.

In each case this has meant austerity programmes incomes policies, factory closures, cuts in public services, increased unemployment and attacks on the structure and rights of the trade union movement. For wage-cutting governments and collaborationist union leaders alike the key obstacle to this was the shop stewards' movement. Yet in the event, as the offensive has pressed forward, and the union officials have revealed more openly their abject refusal to fight and their determination to sabotage struggles that do erupt, the shop stewards' movement has shown its inability to confront the problem.

One reason for this has been that the attack has been pursued simultaneously on many fronts. On one level, the efforts of Wilson's first government - the Royal Commission on Trade Unions, the 'trouble shooting' of Jack Scamp, the Prices and Incomes Board and Barbara Castle's 'In Place of Strife' - failed to contain the rank and file, so too did Heath's heavy-handed anti-union legislation and state pay laws.

But more effective means of undermining the power of stewards were taking shape. Employers (with the support of key union leaders) began to force in new flat rate methods of payment - such as Measured Day Work - designed to break the grip of sectional stewards on pay negotiations; and at the same time the fight was stepped up for national level rather than plant level bargaining, thus doubly strengthening the hand of union officials remote from the shop floor, and reducing the scope for action in individual plants. The effect has been to hold pay and other struggles back to the level of the weakest plants in a combine, and dramatically weaken the role of stewards and the rank and file in dealings with management and with their own, less and less accountable, officials.

Participation and collaboration

Elsewhere, management has adopted the opposite tactic, and – as in steel, the water industry and the NCB bonus scheme – attempted to scrap or override national negotiations in order to pick workers off section by section, force in productivity deals and break up hard-won agreements.

Perhaps the most insidious damage to the stewards' movement was the political corruption introduced in the period of 'participation' ushered in by Wilson's National Enterprise Board and the Ryder plan for British Leyland in the mid 1970s. By sucking a whole layer of convenors, shop stewards and union officials into a framework of collaboration with management, this set-up stuck a major blow at the independence of the

Year	Number of strikes	Striker days (thousand)	Unofficial striker days (thousand)	Unofficial as per cent of total	Manufacturing striker days (thousand)	Manufacturing as per cent of total	Total number of strikers (thou)
1966	1937	2395	1224	51			
1967	2116	2783	2391	86			
1968	2378	4719	2506	53			
1969	3116	6925	5291	76			
1970	3906	10,908	7614	70			
1971	2228	13,589	3506	26			
1972	2497	23,923	5694	23			
1973	2873	7145	5132	72			
1974	2922	14,845	7735	52	7498	51	1626
1975	2282	5914	4785	80	5002	83	809
1976	2016	3509	3015	86	2308	70	668
1977	2703	10,142	7630	75	8057	79	1166
1978	2471	9405	5353	57	7678	82	1041
1979	2080	29,474	5962	20	22,552	77	4608
1980	1330	11,964	1883	16	10,896	91	834
1981	1338	4266	308*	9*	2292	54	1513
1982	1454	7916			1864	24	2382

*** The breakdown into unofficial and official strikes covers only the first nine months of 1981. Since then the Department of Employment has stopped giving figures.**

shop stewards' movement from the bureaucrats and the management.

Though many of the trappings of participation were scrapped following the advent of Edwardes in BL, the damage lingers on. And it has been compounded by the pervasive nationalist agitation by union and Labour bureaucrats for import controls, which has brought whole layers of the stewards' movement to see the fight for jobs and wages as bound up with the preservation of their 'own' British employer against 'foreign' competition.

It is in this general context that we must see the particular role played by the Thatcher government, whose election in 1979 represented a major new stage in the attack on the unions.

Thatcher began to tackle the problems of capitalism in a more ruthless, consistent, and, from the viewpoint of the fundamental interests of capitalism, a *more effective way*.

She immediately introduced a harsh monetarist strategy, aimed at depressing the economy still further and designed also to force the least efficient companies into bankruptcy – creating conditions where the only way the individual employers can survive is more effectively to attack their workforce.

By applying this policy harshly to the basic industries such as steel, shipbuilding, engineering, car production and now coal mining, she is bringing about a restructuring of British industry with a much reduced industrial base.

This is linked to the imposition of harsh *cash limits* on public services which are severely damaging education and health and welfare care. Privatisation policies are being introduced throughout the public services and nationalised industries.

The net result of these policies is to create something which is fundamental to monetarism – *mass unemployment*.

Everyone knows that under the Tories mass unemployment is *deliberately* created as an act of calculated policy. For them it creates the best conditions to restructure industry and drive up the rate of exploitation of the working class and also the best conditions for the other fundamental plank of Tory policy – an all-out attack on trade union rights.

Edwardes: greeted by a standing ovation

Four years of Thatcherism have seen a massive, coordinated, consistent campaign against the trade union movement in Britain and (it must be said) with a high degree of success.

Anti-union laws have restricted picketing and made solidarity strikes and strikes which are "mainly political" unlawful. The unions face law suits and massive damages in the event of such strikes. The closed shop is being undermined. The new provisions put forward in Tebbit's latest Green Paper are likely to force changes in union rule books and make postal balloting before strikes compulsory. Now they are considering making strikes in the public services illegal. On top of this they propose to cut the financial links between the unions and the Labour Party by forcing workers to contract in to rather than out of the political levy. These legal moves, however, remain to be fully exploited by the government and the employers. At the moment by far the most serious aspect of the Tory attack has been the way they have organised the employers for an all-out offensive at shop floor level. The spearhead of this was Michael Edwardes and Ian MacGregor on the board of BL.

Labour's appointee Michael Edwardes, greeted in office by a standing ovation of BL convenors led by 'Communist' Derek Robinson, became the Tory government's leading representative in industry, and BL was made a testing ground for Tory industrial policy. Edwardes was given unlimited money to fight strikes, and MacGregor was moved to BSC to do the same job. Now MacGregor is to go on to the NCB. In other nationalised industries like British Rail, such methods are already well advanced.

In every industry, public and private, the advantages of hardline management forcing through rationalisation are being tested out. Ford is the latest example.

A result of the Tory successes is that the number of stewards has declined. Their facilities to operate have been severely restricted in many industries and protective agreements have been scrapped by management.

So why has there not been an effective fightback against Thatcher?

It must be said straight away that this is not due to a reluctance of the working class to fight. Of course it is not true that every section of workers is sitting waiting to walk out on strike against the Tories. That is not the case even in the most militant periods. Nor does it mean that every vote for strike action will be won (although many of them have been). It means that throughout the period of this government, the combativity and militancy of the working class has been sufficient to defeat the government, had leadership been given.

Repeatedly since Thatcher came to power, she has had to face mass action by powerful sections of workers – but almost every time they have been defeated by the actions of their leaders.

The 1980 national steel strike was left deliberately isolated. The 1981 BL strike was sold out. The 1982 ASLEF strike was ruthlessly smashed by the TUC, who threatened to expel the union if they refused to go back to work.

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Over the past three years, average gross earnings have more or less kept in line with inflation as the latter has declined. Between 1979-80 and 1982-3, the average working man's gross earnings rose 39 per cent, while prices also rose 39%.

The picture for previous years is: pay ahead of the retail price index in 1975, behind in 1976 and '77, ahead in 1978 and '79.

In fact the living standards of employed workers have been eroded. The rise in the cost of living has been higher for the working class than for the better-off (for example, rents have risen sharply while mortgages have become cheaper because of increased tax relief). And the effect of the Tories' tax changes has been to make a married man on average earnings with an unwaged wife and two children 4.3 per cent worse off on real take-home pay than in 1979-80.

Meanwhile the Tory tax changes have made those on £20,000 to £30,000 a year some £400 a year richer. Those getting over £30,000 a year were "much better off", according to the Financial Times (23.3.83). And pay rises for top managers have been averaging 10 to 15 per cent, well above the figure for workers.

However, those in work are still relatively well off compared to a growing hard core of unemployed who are, to use the US monetarist jargon, 'peripheral to the labour market'. Today six million people in Britain live below the official poverty line, 1.5 million more than in May 1979.

The 1982 8-month action by health service workers was defeated by the refusal of the leadership to call an all-out strike when such an action was possible.

While the water workers' strike was a significant partial victory, the defeat of the NUM over closures by the vacillation of the left leadership of Arthur Scargill more than redressed that advantage.

The position of the top trade union leaders has been clear. They have remained politically opposed to bringing the government down by the mass action of the working class. Meanwhile every time the Tories have been given a victory over a section of workers, it has been used as the authority to press home the advantage at shop floor level to tear up agreements, victimise militants, refuse pay increases, or even demand reductions in pay in order to 'save jobs'.

The ideology of the trade union leaders has been revealed as the Achilles heel of the working class. Faced with mass unemployment the officials have no answer and no alternative. Faced with closure after closure, and redundancy after redundancy, they have nothing to say except to negotiate on redundancy pay. Most will not even go so far as to question the figures trotted out by employers to 'prove' the case for sackings.

Their answer to closures, cuts in services, or the problems of the capitalist economy itself, is *compromise*. "You can't get blood out of a stone". If you fight you will make things worse.

Perhaps the most classical and succinct expression of this political attitude came recently from an American steel union leader, Joseph Odorcich. Explaining away his agreement to a 41-month pay deal which will *cut* his members' wages by 9%, he argued:

"To have a union you have to have a company – and that company has to make money". Instead of starting from the needs of the workers, and the defence of their interests, he sees first the problems of the employers. It is no coincidence that this view is expressed by Odorcich from a political standpoint of supporting one of the twin political parties of US capitalism – the Democrats. There is nothing socialist or anti-capitalist about such a reformist position, no matter how much it may be garnished with rhetoric.

The same view guides the actions of the British trade union and Labour bureaucracy, and explains their repeated betrayals of the interests of the working class. Their first concern is to preserve the viability of the capitalist employer and the system as a whole: only within that framework do they seek reforms and concessions for the workers.

The problem is that *politically* the shop stewards' movement is predominantly the same as the trade union leaders. Like the officials, they have no answer to the 'viability' argument and closures. Like the officials, they have no independent working class programme with which they can give a lead.

It is true, of course, that the shop stewards' movement is different from the official bureaucracy. It is closer to the members, more exposed to their pressure and influence; it is not bureaucratised or corrupted in the same way (although many convenors *have* become bureaucratised, particularly in the period when they had the most power). The basic motivation of most shop stewards has been to defend the workers against the management.

Nor can most stewards avoid the pressures of the class struggle in the ways open to full-time officials (hiding out in union offices, avoiding meetings with the rank and file). Stewards may retreat, resign office, or be bought off by management: this happens to many of them. But equally stewards face the material struggles which can drive them towards political development and a consistent fight against the employers, which is not the case with officials.

Workers share the reformist politics of their leaders, but not in the same hardened way. They can learn very quickly in the course of a struggle (as they did in the steel strike, the ASLEF strike, the water strike, and the South Wales miners' strike). Once they begin to fight, they are not limited in the same way as the hardened reformist.

Given the chance to struggle and policies which point in a politically anti-capitalist direction, workers can make a break with reformism, and their political consciousness can develop rapidly.

So long as the bureaucrats succeed in keeping the lid on struggles by the shop floor membership, such possibilities remain latent rather than actual. From the appearance of events under such conditions, the working class can seem deceptively weak and passive, and there is a danger that the potential for the development of a new, militant shop floor leadership can remain untapped. This is indeed one of the reasons why the union bureaucracy is so determined to prevent an escalation of struggles against the employers and the Tory government.

Yet for all the efforts of the Tories and the TUC hierarchy, the recent period has not proved by any means entirely negative for the development of shop floor leadership. Last year's health pay dispute produced a new development of shop stewards' committees; similarly, the few weeks of the water strike saw the rapid emergence of a strong layer of militant stewards as a new force in a section of workers that has not taken national action since 1926.

Even as we go to press the eruption of a mini-strike-wave against speed up in Ford and in BL's Cowley, Longbridge, and Jaguar plants, and struggles in the print and on the docks, underline the combativity of sections of workers who have suffered at the hands of the employers' offensive, and shown the necessity for the development of a new, revolutionary leadership at shop floor level.

The harsh reality is that to give consistent leadership in a period of economic crisis and decline requires a revolutionary perspective. It means consciously starting from the defence of the interests of the workers, and the need for political independence from the employers and the union bureaucrats.

Only a leadership which beings from this basis, and which is *organised* to fight the massive pressures of the capitalist class and the official union appara-

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In January 1980, 5 per cent of BP was sold, reducing the government holding to 44.6%. The National Enterprise Board was told to sell off holdings in profitable companies – the major sales were ICL, Ferranti, and Fairey. The government's share in British Aerospace has been reduced to 48.43%. 49.36% of Cable and Wireless has been sold. The National Freight Corporation has been sold. British Rail hotels have been sold, and the government wants to put the rest up for sale along with Sealink ferries and all BR's remaining property holdings.

The government is also selling the Transport and Docks Board, Amersham, and the oil production interests of BNOC. It has the power to compel British Steel and British Telecom to set up joint private/public subsidiaries and then sell them off. It has postponed the sale of British Airways, BL, the warship yards of British Shipbuilders, and the gas showrooms.

While the government has been able to go much further with the nationalised sectors than with the public service sector, they have certainly not proceeded as far as they had wanted to. The majority of changes have taken place through the straight transfer of shares from the state to private concerns. The one area in which they came into direct conflict with the unions was over the sale of gas showrooms, with a job loss of 30,000. A very effective one-day strike saw the sale deferred.

JOHN HARRIS

Wages are made up of a number of different elements: basic, shift, overtime, etc. There is a growing tendency for the proportion of the basic to decline, and the variables to increase.

In the ten highest-paid male manual industries, these variables average 31.9% of the wage. However, for a large section of the working class, and women in particular, this mechanism for increasing wage levels is not open. Women, with a few exceptions, are not allowed to do night work, and they work in jobs with a fixed rate of pay which excludes bonus earnings etc.

Since the Equal Pay Act, women's earnings have remained around three-quarters of male earnings. The proportion now is 1 per cent lower than the 1975 level. If the basic rates continue low, this can only have the effect of further depressing wages of women (and all who work on fixed rates).

The most dramatic changes in earnings are taking place among youth. Up until this year youth earnings had held up well as a proportion of adult rates. The government now employs directly or indirectly through their various schemes 500,000 youth, a massive share of the labour market. This September, traditional apprentice schemes will end, the barrier between youth on government schemes and those directly employed will have been broken down. The going rate will then be £25 across the board, as youth wages are levelled down to that of the government training schemes for boys and girls between 16 and 18.

This scandal has been greeted as a victory by the TUC. The POEU, in negotiating their 8½% wage increase, excluded the apprentices who will start this year. Chapple has also signed industry-wide agreements on the same basis. Quite clearly, for these sections of the unions youth wages are bargaining points for the rest of the workforce.

tus can hold the line against retreats and compromise. Individual militants, no matter how dedicated, stand little chance of withstanding such pressures. This is why a disciplined revolutionary organisation – the Workers' Socialist League – is necessary in the fight for leadership on the shop floor.

In struggling for an independent policy to defend the working class, the crucial element must be to instil the necessary mistrust of the 'facts and figures' paraded by the employers to support their demands for redundancies, speed-up and closures.

This is why the demand for the *opening of the books* of the employers to inspection by elected trade union committees has such an educational and agitational value, directing attention to the profits and plans of the employers, their secret deals and the links which unite them against the working class.

In campaigning for the 'open the books' demand, we must argue also that the crucial question is not the plight of the employers, but the needs of the union rank and file. If order books are declining thanks to Thatcher's slump, and less work is available, the interests of the membership demand not redundancies but a reduction of working hours – *work sharing on full pay*. If the employer argues he cannot pay for this, it proves not that workers should give in, but that they must confront the employer – by occupation, supporting strikes, blacking and other solidarity action – to force him to concede their demands.

On a wider scale it is obvious that the needs of the working class (4½ million of whom are already denied even the right to a job) are incompatible with the needs of the crisis-ridden capitalist system. The only long-term answer is in the defeat of the Tory government and the fight for a *workers' government* which will *nationalise* the banks and major industries without compensation as part of a planned, socialist economy.

But such a development will not drop from the skies. A movement against the Tories must be built within the day-to-day struggles on the shop floor, and a revolutionary leadership must be developed to spearhead the fight. As the early Communist International spelled out, Marxists

"must put forward demands whose fulfilment is an immediate and urgent working class need, and they must fight for these demands in mass struggle, regardless of whether or not they are compatible with the profit economy of the capitalist class or not...

"If the demand correspond to the vital needs of broad proletarian masses and if these masses feel that they cannot exist unless these demands are met, then the struggle for these demands will become the starting point for the struggle for power" (Theses on Tactics)

From the *defensive* struggles to preserve jobs and living standards must come the leadership and mass movement that can challenge and overturn the government and the capitalist system itself.

The crisis that now confronts the shop floor in industry can only be resolved by the construction of a leadership based on this conception.

JOHN HARRIS

Public sector under the auctioneer's hammer

The Tories have set out to hammer the public sector. But, paradoxically, employment in the public services has been far less hard hit than in manufacturing; and union organisation has probably *increased*. Michael Kendall looks at the prospects for struggle.

WHILE THE manufacturing sector has declined dramatically, the picture in the non-manufacturing sector is different — paradoxically so, considering the Tories' expressed aims.

Between 1972 and 1980 there was an overall increase in the workforce in this sector from 12 million to 13 million (7 per cent). In the following two years it declined by 300,000, a 2% fall from the 1980 peak.

While the largest proportion of the 2% loss has been born by the public services, mainly the civil service, it has been achieved mainly through natural wastage and early retirement. Compared with the manufacturing sector, the public services are virtually intact. While hospital and school closures have had major effects on many communities, their effect on overall employment so far has been relatively slight.

There are no surveys on stewards' organisation in this sector. However, the general trend of unionisation from the late '60s onwards was for a massive increase in white collar unionisation in all sectors, and for an increase among manual public service workers. It is almost certain that there has been a further extension of shop floor organisation among public service workers. The worst unionised sector remains the private non-productive sector.

The effectiveness of the organisation that exists is, of course, another matter. However, it provides a structure within which to fight for policies and leadership. This can only be done concretely by attempting to make the various committees authoritative bodies, by making them relate to the shop floor.

The strike pattern in Britain has changed. Initially public service industrial action was generated out of the victories over pay in manufacturing industries and frustration at the government holding down pay. 1969, and again 1979, saw mass waves of discontent.

The NHS and water workers' strikes show that sections which feel aggrieved are now prepared to take action independently of the general trend of manufacturing or even the public sector. This shows a massive development of trade union consciousness and organisation over the last ten years.

It also confirms another trend. Action over public service pay must necessarily be on a national basis and official (except in circumstances where there is a national shop-floor framework which can call and organise action). Once again the questions are posed for the stewards and shop floor of a struggle against the official union structure to take action and make it effective.

One of the central aims of the Tory government has been to break down the public sector, redistributing portions to private concerns. They have, as yet, failed to make major inroads into overall employment in this sector. The main effect of the cuts has been the virtual impoverishment of a substantial section of the working class — a fact that has been hidden because the groups affected, the old, single parents, and the unemployed, have no collective voice.

Water workers lobby NUPE official Ron Keating

There have been two related problems about fighting the cuts to date. Firstly, we are dealing with sections of the class who have very little economic power when it comes to strike action. Secondly, the struggle against the cuts has in the main been divided from job loss. This is most graphically illustrated among local authority workers, where jobs have in many instances been preserved by local authorities only through rate increases and cuts in public services. The working class community as a whole suffers through a worse service and a greater burden on the rates.

There is a need for an authoritative body in the trade unions (e.g. London Region NUPE) to start a proper campaign against the cuts. This would necessarily have to take up the arguments against privatisation, challenge the notion of 'viability', and begin, through the militant stewards, a campaign on the shop floor. An essential part of the campaign would then be linking up with the left in the Labour Party and Labour Councils.

In this manner we could offer militants in the local authority unions a concrete programme of struggle, and take the campaign right into the workplaces.

Privatisation of the health service, local authority functions, and housing, represents one thread of the government's strategy. So far the effects have been relatively limited: however, important inroads have been made — the expansion of private hospitals and health care, the sale of council housing, and the selling of local authority services to private concerns. It is the latter which provides the direct conflict between an existing workforce with established pay and conditions, and the private contractor.

While this move towards the privatisation of services can be expected to continue, it is noticeable how few councils to date have taken up this option. One of the reasons is the fear of losing control of the service (once you have sold your dustcarts, then you are at the mercy of the contractors).

On the trade union side the trend has been to accept the employers' 'viability' argument — with officials floating schemes for cutting down costs or even sacking workers to maintain the service.

Where a struggle did take place, in Wandsworth, three things were noticeable: the failure of the leadership to make any serious attempt to generalise the fight (given that the fight was against one borough, it was difficult to spread the struggle — but without support from official leadership it was nigh on impossible); lack of organisation at the borough-wide level; and the massive loss of power for the workforce once the service had been sold off. These problems will be faced again and again by local authority workers.

NHS: lessons of '82 key to coming struggles

Ann Andrews examines last year's NHS pay fight and the battles to come

THE National Health Service is now fighting for its life. With the deepening crisis of capitalism and the onslaught of the present Tory government's monetarist policies, the welfare state is an expendable luxury in the eyes of the ruling class. The health of the working class is irrelevant to capitalism in crisis, and the NHS, the state system which attempts to keep people healthy, is under attack.

One of the easiest, and least 'public' ways of dismantling the NHS is to make the working conditions and pay so unattractive and unrewarding that it literally becomes impossible to staff it. Closing a ward here and a ward there through staff shortages is like eating the loaf crumb by crumb. No-one notices that it is gone until it is too late. Some people will argue that it is unlikely to be impossible to staff hospitals in a period when unemployment is running between 4 to 5 million and growing. However, low rates of pay, coupled with irregular, unsocial hours, dirty jobs and the rigid hierarchical structure of the NHS offer no incentive for unemployed workers to join the health service workforce.

As we entered the 1982 pay round, the figures were stark. Between 1975 and 1981 average earnings nationally rose by 133%. Nurses pay rose only by 118% and in real terms by 1981 had fallen by 3.5% Ancillary workers, already amongst the lowest paid workers in the country, had an overall percentage rise of only 96.8% between 1975 and 1981. The official government poverty line is a weekly earning of £82 (the point at which Family Income Supplement) is available). *Half of all full-time nursing staff earned less than that, and an incredible 73% of ancillary workers were on or below the poverty level at the start of the 1982 pay negotiations!*

The Tories, fresh from defeating major sections of industrial workers, decided to impose the 4% norm on NHS workers, despite the fact that inflation was running at 12%. At the beginning of the dispute no other major section of workers had settled for the 4%, the lowest settlement at the time being 7.4%.

The fight was clearly on from January 1982 when it became clear to activists that the health workers were fed up with getting settlements well below the rate of inflation and were prepared to take strike action for a decent wage. The feeling amongst ancillary workers was particularly strong, but the common settlement date negotiated the year before meant that nurses would also be coming up for a pay increase at the same time, and there was a lot of support for some kind of action even from the reactionary Royal College of Nursing. To the ordinary worker, fighting meant fighting the Tories; to the militants it meant fighting the Tories *and* the trade union bureaucracy who had no real intention or will to do battle in a year which was clearly a run up to a general election.

The last major industrial action in the NHS had been in 1979 — the 'winter of discontent' — when embittered ancillary workers went on strike but were forced back to work following sell-outs at national level and widespread scabbing by other grades at local level. The media had conducted a ruthless smear campaign in 1979 and the aftermath of the strike left bitter and seemingly irreparable rifts both between unions and between different groups of workers.

There was no attempt by the officials to analyse the lessons of that year and to try to build a cohesive and united stewards movement in the NHS. In assessing any dispute it is important to look at the trade unions in the industry and in the NHS it is a very complicated structure.

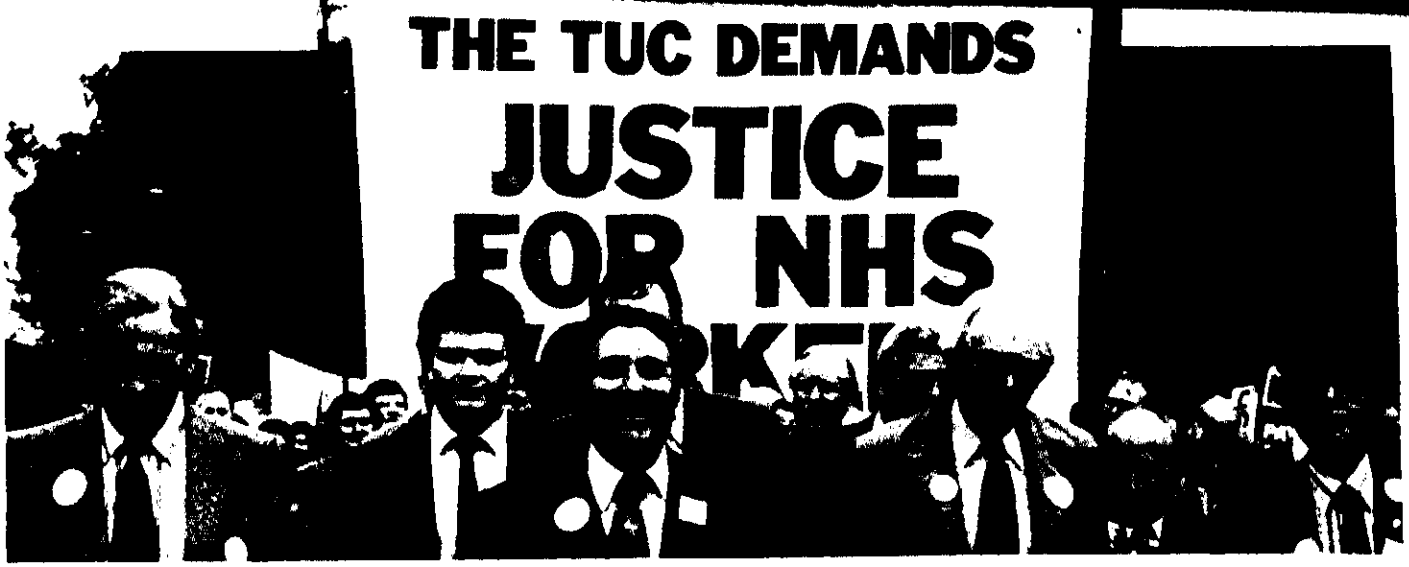
All negotiations on pay and conditions are on a national basis through Whitley Councils. These councils have a staff side and a management side. The staff side is composed both of TUC affiliates and so-called professional organisations which range from the substantial Royal College of Nursing to the tiny Remedial Gymnasts Association. However, on the nursing and midwives council all the 'professional groups' together can outvote the major TUC unions. The two major TUC affiliates are NUPE and the Confederation of Health Service Employees (COHSE).

Following 1979's strike it was apparent that much more could be achieved through one union, which would in reality mean an amalgamation between NUPE and COHSE. However, COHSE is a tra-

JOHN HARRIS

Now the fight against cuts: South London hospital

THE TUC DEMANDS JUSTICE FOR NHS WORKERS



JOHN HARRIS

ditionally right wing 'non-political' union and NUPE is more 'left'. A large number of COHSE members and most of the national officials would resist very strongly any suggestion of amalgamation. In fact for several years it was more likely that COHSE would join with the RCN and speculation around that reached its height, significantly, in 1980/81. So with no attempt towards unity from the top, the task of rebuilding links within the NHS, through stewards committees, after 1979 was left to committed stewards and activists.

The NHS unions were until the mid-seventies way behind other sections of workers in even grasping the importance and the functioning of joint stewards committees. COHSE only introduced the post of steward in 1970.

However, cuts and closures arising since the mid-seventies and the increasing threat of job losses in the NHS meant it was no longer a cushioned and safe place to work. Coupled with growth in trade union membership, this helped to increase the consciousness of NHS workers and shop stewards committees were started in several areas. Their success was patchy, but what became obvious during last year's dispute was that to build any opposition to both the bosses and the bureaucrats, Joint Shop Stewards Committees are essential.

In the more traditionally militant areas they were comparatively well established and provided a much needed lead for the rest of the country. In Manchester a half day strike was called before any 'official' action was taken. In South Wales the JSSC booted out the officials and took control of the Regional TUC committee which was coordinating the dispute. In Edinburgh the workers took indefinite strike action and were only forced back because of the lack of support from the national leadership; and in Sheffield and Leicester the JSSC gave a strong lead in organising action and in launching the initiative for a health stewards conference later in the dispute. It was clear from these areas and their strength in fighting that the way to win the dispute was in mobilising from the areas, through stewards committees and taking the fight and the demand for indefinite strike up to leadership level.

The TUC was also building its own version of unity. Once they realised that there was going to be a fight, their obvious course to take was the one which meant maximum control over the rank and file. This came through the TUC Health Services Committee. It is a committee made up of representatives from all the TUC affiliates which cover the NHS — and that even includes the Prison Officers Association! Its composition is such that the smaller unions representing only a frction of Health Service workers can outvote the major unions. Immediately then the scene is set for a battle over tactics and strategy which requires a clarity and sharpness from the more politically conscious unions, such as NUPE. What happened however right throughout the 8½ months was a fudging and blurring of the issues, particularly by NUPE, which led the dispute down the long road to the eventual sell-out.

The first action

It was COHSE, surprisingly, which initiated the first form of action when it declared official support for a work to rule from April 26. The settlement date was April 1, so already there had been 3½ weeks of waiting for action. It was to be the only real initiative COHSE made nationally throughout the whole period. NUPE, despite the national 'unity' propaganda, did *not* support COHSE in its work to rule until three weeks later.

But NUPE's real betrayal of the health workers was through the unwillingness of the leadership to push to implement the NUPE conference resolution calling for indefinite strike action. The resolution was worded in such a way as to give Alan Fisher (outgoing general secretary) a chance to make, possibly, one of the best and most militant speeches of his career. He came over as a real fighter — but that was because he knew he would never need to enter the ring and fend off the blows.

The resolution recognised the futility of two-hour stoppages and one-day strikes and resolved "to call for an all-out indefinite stoppage, commencing June 4th *involving all health service unions*, with accident and emergency cover". The phrase 'involving all health service unions' was the way out. It was clear that some of the NHS unions would not adopt that policy. The contrast between the NUPE and COHSE conferences was remarkable. An emergency resolution went to COHSE conference leaving out the unity phrase — and was viciously attacked by Albert Spanswick, the general secretary. He distorted what the resolution said, called it "totally irresponsible" — and it was lost. Had Fisher been presented with the same resolution he most certainly would have reacted in the same way.

As the dispute wore on and it became clear that one-day strikes and the TUC strategy was demoralising the workers and getting us nowhere NUPE now under the leadership of Rodney Bickerstaffe, young, ambitious and supposedly 'left' (but as unwilling as Fisher to turn words into actions) resolutely and consistently refused even to push for a vote on all-out action on the TUC Health Service Committee. Fisher's "we're not looking for an armistice. We're looking for a victory" statement was being more and more exposed to the membership.

"All out for 12%" became the slogan and the aim of the activists. With each announcement of a new one day strike the officials hoped that the strike would collapse and they could then wheel out the 'blame the membership' argument and settle for well below the 12%. But, against the overwhelming odds, the strikes were successful and the workers continued to look for the kind of action which would win. A setback in organising the rank and file was that there was no broad rank and file group crossing union boundaries and bringing together those most committed to building the call for all out action and pressing the national leadership into fighting.

The SWP had initiated Hospital Worker — a broad grouping — in 1972. It had a varied effect during the struggles of the '70s, but was the only established national grouping. In the '80s it had increasingly become a SWP vehicle and lost most of its unaligned or non-SWP contacts. However, it did have the potential through its publication called Hospital Worker to be a catalyst for calling together the NHS activists during the crucial period before and at the beginning of the dispute.

It is an indictment of the SWP's increasing sectarianism and lack of understanding of the methods of organising workers in class struggle that they

"Nurses, domestic and porters went out to the mine workers, steel workers, textile workers..."

wound up Hospital Worker, along with all their other broad groupings, in the winter of '82, at a time when militants were beginning the push to get a fight on low pay.

The WSL took the initiative to organise and at the beginning of May a loose grouping of activists called Health Workers for the Full Claim began to meet. This was the only attempt at any kind of organised coordination of the rank and file during the dispute. The group campaigned around indefinite strike action with emergency cover, as the only way to win the full claim. Health Workers for the Full Claim produced eight bulletins which were well received and had a presence at both the COHSE and NUPE conferences. The NUPE fringe meeting was one of the biggest fringe meetings ever held. There were clearly a lot of people looking for the kind of ledership which could challenge the bureaucracy.

Health Workers for the Full Claim called two lobbies at Congress House to pressurise the leaders into discussing all-out strike. Both times the trade union officials exposed their real feelings about rank and file pressure by calling the police to protect them from their members.

The leaders, unable to break the militancy of the workers through one day strike action, began to float the idea of arbitration as the way to win. The government refused to go to arbitration and the workforce consistently rejected the idea that anything significant could come from such tactics.

The TUC showed themselves to be totally bankrupt in responding to a real call to beat the Tories and quivered at the thought that the conditions for a general strike had never been so imminent since the steel strike at the beginning of the Tory reign. During the course of the NHS dispute, both the NUR and ASLEF took strike action. The water workers had a one-day strike against low pay, and the POEU had a one-day strike against privatisation. Yet incredibly the TUC consistently refused to link the struggles. In fact they clearly went out of their way to make sure that both ASLEF and the NHS workers were not on strike together. When ASLEF were ruthlessly sold out, they were ordered back to work on Sunday night — when the NHS workers were starting a strike on the Monday.

But the links were made despite the treachery. Nurses, domestics and porters went out to the mine workers, steel workers, textile workers and other sections of industry. It was the rank and file who organised the sympathy strike action. The extent of working class solidarity during the 8½ months was overwhelming. The miners were at the forefront but the extensive action by white collar unions, such as NALGO and CPSA was very strong and crucial to areas where industry has all but disappeared. The argument that the working class are in retreat and will not fight was turned on its head.

The Geraghty affair

The most significant solidarity action though was that taken by the London Press Branch of the EETPU led by Sean Geraghty. The print unions had announced that they would strike in support of the health workers. The Newspaper Publishers Association, led by Richard Marsh (ex-NUPE full timer and Labour Minister) threatened and then took out an injunction under laws introduced by Prior in 1980 to stop secondary strike action. All the militant speeches and hollow words of the TUC leaders opposing anti-union legislation suddenly evaporated in the face of the need to support Geraghty and stand up to the courts. In a typical betrayal of working class solidarity Albert Spanswick on behalf of the TUC Health Services Committee asked the unions to call off the action. This clearly showed the cowardice of the union leaders. The EETPU picketed all the newspapers and shut them down. Geraghty was taken to court. Health workers from all over the country came to demonstrate in support of him and against the Prior/Tebbit laws. None of the trade union leaders turned out and Frank Chapple, reactionary leader of the EETPU, disowned Geraghty. The courts in the knowledge that strike action in support of Geraghty would be overwhelming were he imprisoned, gave him a derisory fine. Despite the precedent it set, it was a clear victory for the working class against the Tories' union-busting laws.

Geraghty's action and the subsequent court proceedings raised the whole question of Tebbit's proposals in a way which would never have been possible otherwise. Workers saw first hand that the Tories were serious about smashing the power of trade unions, and they saw first hand that when the workers defend their rights they can win. It also raised the whole important question of the power of the closed shop amongst ordinary health workers who had been convinced by propaganda that closed shops somehow eroded individual rights. Workers who had stood day after day on picket duty outside hospitals seething with anger and frustration when scab workers crossed, saw the whole national network of newspapers closed down by a small group of trade union members.

As the dispute went on, stewards' committees grew stronger but were unable to budge the total intransigence of the TUC — and the Tories, riding high on the "victory" in the Malvinas — grew stronger. The billions spent on the Malvinas war, the 18% salary rise given to judges, the commitment of vast amounts of money to cruise missiles convinced even the most sceptical workers that there wasn't a shortage of money — but the Tories were only prepared to spend it on things which bolster their priorities, capitalist profit and imperialism.

Under intense pressure to do *something* the TUC at its annual conference called a national day of action on September 22. They were still not prepared to actually put out the call for a one-day general strike and limited their support to a day of action. The turnout was tremendous. Millions of people took some form of action. A march in London had more than 150,000 participating and took 4½ hours to finish. 15,000 marched in Sheffield and there was similar action in a dozen other cities. Despite the restraint of six months by the TUC, the health workers were absolutely solid and had the massive backing of the working class.

The will *and the strength* to win was apparent. Fowler was at pains to denounce the day as "irrelevant to working Britain". Millions of workers knew differently.

A lead from NUPE immediately after the 22nd could have changed the course of the dispute. Instead the TUC announced what turned out to be the death blow — a series of regional "days of action". Even hardened militants could not believe it. All the strength which had been there on the 22nd was dissipated into regions trying to organise with no enthusiasm, for local action. There was no further strong national action. A planned Transport Day of Action on November 8 was called off at the last minute to please ACAS.

At the end of October the TUC decided to ballot members of each union separately on the question of all-out strike action. Meanwhile ACAS stepped in and on November 9 a 'new offer' was produced. It offered only an extra half a percent for nurses and tied the unions to a two year deal. Suddenly the ballot on all-out strike became a consultation on the new offer. The rank and file fought right until the end for a yet vote for indefinite action. The most cutting betrayal came from COHSE. *Having opposed the call for action with emergency cover in June, the NEC recommended on the eve of a special conference that members should take indefinite action with no emergency cover.* The strike ended on December 15 when the TUC Health Services Committee voted to accept the offer. COHSE and NUPE voted against the two year deal and the differential settlement but were outvoted by the smaller organisations and Fowler won.

The defeat of the health workers was a blow as far as the working class was concerned. It was the latest in a long string of victories for the Tories, aided and abetted by the reformist leaders of the trade unions (the miners are the most recent casualties). Intent on building on that defeat immediately, the government is embarking on a strong bid to privatise whole sections of the NHS as part of its consistent plan to dismantle the health service and replace it with private medicine.

Just two months after the end of the strike the DHSS issued a circular entitled "NHS support services — contracting out". It singles out domestic, laundry and catering services as prime targets. It is no coincidence that these areas are the most militant and highly unionised sections of the NHS. Many areas were virtually paralysed as a result of strikes in the laundries during the dispute. The government is even prepared to pass a special Bill (1983 Finance Bill) which will make it possible for VAT (which at present makes contracting out less viable) to be refunded to health authorities as an incentive.

Meanwhile they continue to allow brand name drugs to be prescribed when generic prescriptions would allow savings of tens of millions of pounds, enough to keep all the present services operating and to expand the primary health care system. Obviously 'saving' money is seen as important; reducing the profit level of the multi-national drug companies is no part of Tory plans.

JOHN HARRIS

"NHS workers are relative latecomers to militancy. But we have learned a lot..."

The issue of contracting out has met with a lot of talk and hot air from the TUC but no action has been taken to oppose it. Yet the NHS dispute was never solely about pay. It was about saving the Health Service. The onslaught was begun by the Wilson/Callaghan Labour government as a condition of an IMF loan. It was increased and sharpened by the Tories. In London alone in the first 4½ months of Tory rule there were 12 hospitals and 2,000 beds lost. Coupled with the proposed closure of 4,000 more beds by 1984, London will have lost over 6,000 beds under the Tory axe.

Nationally since 1970 the number of NHS beds available has dropped by 16%. *It must be stressed that this did not involve a transfer of resources to care in the community and preventative medicine. It is a straight loss of services.* At the same time private health care is booming. In 1980 alone there was a 27% increase in the number of subscribers. This corresponds with growing waiting lists and shorter hospital stays as well as increased prescription charges as a result of Tory policies.

In october, the government arrogantly announced that any new building or new services will have to be paid for by 'savings elsewhere', another name for more cuts. How are the unions responding in the wake of the defeat on pay to these attacks on jobs, services and the health of the working class? The workers, despite the defeat on pay are fighting back. There are major campaigns being organised, using the links made during the pay dispute, to oppose the cuts and closures and the threat of privatisation. The bureaucrats however, are retreating as expected. Any real fight on cuts involving the struggle for all-out strike action, occupations, and the coordination of supporting struggles by other health workers and the wider trade union movement, will bring the unions into head-on clashes with the Tebbit legislation. COHSE has already issued a circular to its full time officials advising them not to support anything remotely in conflict with the legislation.

The importance in building the stewards' organisations during this period is primary. In other areas, for example, British Leyland, the continous attacks on jobs and on trade union rights has led to victimisations which the officials have not opposed.

In many areas the stewards movement is in severe crisis and the fight against the bosses is hampered time and time again.

However, in the NHS the stewards movement is growing. Links were made during the dispute and the lessons of the importance of JSSCs have not been lost. Some areas were weakened and demoralised by the defeat on pay, but overall, the move is towards strengthening and building joint stewards committees. Management are fighting this development. They are not allowing time off, giving no facilities and not recognising the committees for negotiating rights. But the trend is there. As the fightback grows there will be more victimisations and attempts to destroy the strength of the NHS unions. In order to fight these there has to be maximum unity and strength amongst all the sections of the NHS workers.

Privatisation and closures cannot be fought and won in isolation and the work force know that. The union leadership will not be keen to see JSSCs growing. They realise full well that such committees can and will fight with much more commitment than the TUC. JSSCs are a real threat to the officials.

NHS workers are relative latecomers to the militancy and wider politics of the labour movement. But, we have learned a lot from the lessons of other workers in struggle and a lot from he 1982 dispute. The groundwork is laid for a strong united initiative to defend the welfare state. The main lesson of the NHS struggle was that reformist bureaucrats do not fight for the interests of the working class. But the rank and file will.

Rosa Luxemburg said that "only the working class, by itself actively, can bring about socialism . . ." The primary organisations of the working class, the unions, have started that fight. Union members need to take control of their unions to make them into democratic, accountable organisations which will back the activities of the working class and win the struggles.

An Open Letter to SWP supporters

We must organise the rank and file resistance!

The Socialist Workers' Party has argued that the job of socialists is to rebuild at grass roots level: any more ambitious schemes are delusions. Chris Reynolds looks at the argument.

JOHN HARRIS

BL pay review: a lobby of negotiators organised by the Leyland Action Committee

IN AN article in the May-June 1982 'Socialist Review', and in articles in Socialist Worker, the Socialist Workers' Party (SWP) leadership has announced that it has abandoned the project of building rank and file movements. The industrial downturn and the decay of working class organisation is so bad, they say, that this project is impossible. The task of the day is to rebuild working class solidarity brick by brick, starting off on the smallest scale and with the most modest objectives.

For many SWP members and others who have worked hard with them to build rank and file groups, this is a kick in the teeth.

And we believe that it is wrong. The need for organising the rank and file still exists — and that successful work can be done is shown by groups like Health Workers for the Full Claim, the Mobilising Committee for the Defence of Trade Union Rights (against the Tebbit law) and the Leyland Action Committee, initiated or led by the revolutionary left, as well as by work in Broad Lefts in unions like CoHSE, the NUR, the CPSA, and the TGWU.

HWFC produced six issues of a bulletin during the NHS dispute. Each had a bigger print run than the previous one. It organised local groups of militants in several areas (some producing their own local HWFC bulletins), and held regular national meetings to coordinate plans and compare experiences.

It organised lobbies of the TUC Health Services Committee. At the NUPE conference, it played a part in getting the resolution for all-out action, and held the biggest fringe meeting ever.

The MCDTUR was launched from a trade union democracy conference on April 3 1982 jointly sponsored by Socialist Organiser and London Labour Briefing. It has produced thousands of leaflets and factsheets on the Tebbit law, most of which have been taken for distribution by trades councils, trade union branches, and shop stewards' committees.

It has mobilised for all the anti-Tebbit demonstrations. For June 10 last year it produced a mass-circulation leaflet urging other workers to come out alongside the dockers, and helped persuade workers at Cammell Lairds, Birkenhead, to do just that. It has committed dozens of Labour councillors to defying the Tebbit law.

A militant minority

The Leyland Action Committee has a longer history. Last year, for example, it was active in the Leyland Vehicles strike in Lancashire, producing regular bulletins. LAC supporters won a commitment from the BL combine committee to call an all-Leyland stewards' conference if only the LV stewards gave the word. Year after year the LAC has played a major part in the fight around the pay review and against speed-up in BL.

The examples could be continued. We have no illusions about these groups. They do not represent the whole rank and file, but only a militant minority. They are not mass organisations. They are limited. But they do an essential job.

The pressure of the slump, the experience of past defeats, and the barrage from the media, place difficulties enough in the way of militant working class action. Yet these are not the decisive difficulties.

The solidarity action for the health workers: the action of the health workers themselves; the water workers' strike; the DHSS action over jobs in Oxford and Birmingham; the miners' action spreading from South Wales; the rank and file response by ASLEF and NUR members in their disputes; and many other struggles, show that a will to fight exists. The trade union movement, for all its recent setbacks, has immense power. All evidence shows that a leadership willing to *fight to win* will get a response.

But, decisively, the existing leadership does not want to fight.

As with the TUC's sabotage of ASLEF, it openly opposes struggle – or, in other cases, it conducts a struggle in such a half-hearted way that the members can feel no confidence that the action they are called to is not a mere token with no serious intention of win-

ning.

In boom times, the option of unofficial action *disregarding* the union leadership was often feasible. But in the slump that sort of short, sharp, easily victorious, local action is rarely possible. The official leadership becomes a decisive obstacle.

True, the leadership does not drop from the sky. The conservative, treacherous nature of the leadership reflects apathy, backwardness, and lack of confidence in the rank and file. But it is *not* just 'the leadership we deserve'.

Again and again people are elected to trade union positions as militants, and become conservatives. For union bureaucrats live in a different world from the rank and file. Their conditions and daily activity tie them more closely to the state and the employers than to the membership.

And once a conservative leadership gets hold of a union, it is difficult to shift. By sabotaging struggles it can be an active force for demoralising the rank and file and thus recreating its own base. It is by definition the best-organised faction in the union. So long as the militant rank and file activists remain scattered in different workplaces and branches, without coordination and without a common understanding of the nature and techniques of the official leadership in heading off rank and file struggles, the conservative leadership will always have the upper hand.

That is why the rank and file militants must organise – both as broadly as possible in periods of mass struggle, and also (necessarily on a more limited scale) permanently. A *permanent* organisation is necessary otherwise there is no *permanent* challenge to the leadership.

A national link-up

Groups like the SWP (or the WSL) do some of this work themselves, of course. But something broader is also needed in the unions.

In a workplace we may find one in a hundred (at present) who will accept the whole world-view of socialist revolution, and be willing to devote her or his life to working for it. That's important but not enough if we are going to be more than propagandists. There will be many, many more who will shy away from full political commitment, but will agree to work with us on most of the immediate issues like militant struggle for wages and conditions, union democracy, combatting racism and sexism, etc. We need to organise these militants.

This is the familiar stuff of everyday local work for every socialist in the trade unions. But it needs to be more than local. Otherwise the national union leadership always has the advantage over the local groups of militants.

The national organisation we can build may be very limited at times. It's important to be realistic about what we can do – not to exaggerate, but not, on the other hand, to give up in despair when exaggerated pretensions collapse.

One of the criticisms we have always made of the SWP is that it exaggerated the rank and file groups it sponsored. It spoke as if these small groups represented the whole rank and file. It had delusions about their power – shown by the call from the November 1977 rank and file conference for a one-day strike on December 7. No-one came out: not because the working class had collapsed, but because to come out on strike workers need the confidence given by a mass organisation (not by a one-off gathering of 500 trade unionists).

JOHN HARRIS

NHS: "a different world" from the top officials

We can't bypass the official movement. We can't build our own new labour movement. We can organise the left to fight to transform and renew the existing movement.

Leon Trotsky once commented: **"Bolshevik intransigence is indissolubly bound to an understanding of the real process in the workers' organisations, to the ability to influence this process, to a flexibility in manoeuvring with regard to groupings and even individuals. Contrariwise, each sectarian wants to have his own labour movement. By the repetition of magic formulas he thinks to force an entire class to group itself around him. But instead of bewitching the proletariat, he always ends up by demoralising and dispersing his own little sect".**

These words – sharp though they are – seem to us relevant to understand the experience of the SWP. Together with the pretence of the SWP-sponsored Rank and File movements representing the whole rank and file – a pretence now plainly in collapse – there was the pretence of the SWP being the alternative mass party of the British working class.

There has been the frequent use of the Rank and File groups as backyards for the SWP; and by a process of repeated self-proclamation the SWP declared itself the sole real representative of the rank and file of the British working class. The self-proclamation did not change reality: the result was neither a proper orientation to the broad movement, nor proper rank and file groups, nor a proper party.

Cliff: collapse of Rank and File means collapse of rank and file?

Too often the SWP has watered down revolutionary politics with the argument that it was concerned with real rank and file action, not propaganda. But principled propaganda (of an intelligent, flexible, non-sectarian sort, not tub-thumping for the sake of our own satisfaction) is an essential task for socialists in *preparing* any mass action. Unfortunately the SWP often ended up with neither the propaganda nor the action.

As Tony Cliff (too late) puts it in Socialist Review: **"if you really represent the wide movement it is excellent, but if you represent nothing, but pretend you represent the wide movement, then it's a catastrophe. What that means is that you simply cover up your politics".**

The same approach that led the SWP to exaggerate the Rank and File groups (and now to interpret the obvious collapse of their pretentions as a collapse of the whole working class) has also expressed itself in the SWP's attitude to the Labour Party. (Also in the SWP's attitude to autonomous women's organisations but that's another story).

While thousands of activists have been concerning themselves with a fight to transform the Labour Party, the SWP has been desperately insisting that it is all of no significance. "You can't change the Labour Party", the SWP insists. But plainly the Labour Party *has* been changed. Not decisively, yet. Quite likely it *will* prove impossible to change it decisively: the right wing and soft left will manage to disperse or purge the serious left before that. But right now the fight is continuing and – whatever its immediate outcome – the forces of the left are being assembled and demarcated. Those forces of the left are decisive for the struggle for socialism in Britain.

For essentially the same sort of reasons that a rank and file movement is necessary in the trade unions, so also is it necessary in the Labour Party. And there is no Chinese Wall. Labour Party democracy (sometimes Labour Party affiliation) has been a major issue within

JOHN HARRIS

"We need to develop the struggle on all fronts" – against the Labour right wing as well as against the sell-out union leaders

unions recently. This has had a knock-on effect on the fight for trade union democracy (as Sid Weighell can ruefully confirm).

It is not unknown for local Labour Parties to have more trade union delegates than the corresponding Trades Council. By what sectarian quirk can we consider the Trades Council as suitable terrain for socialist work, but the Labour Parties as dens of corruption? By what logic does the fact that Labour Party branch meetings are frequently inward-looking and routine disqualify those branches as arenas for intervening to change things more than the equally frequent lack of life in trade union branches disqualifies the unions?

In fact, however, the SWP has also been playing down the internal fight in the unions. The new Broad Lefts have been mentioned only to dismiss them (sometimes quite inaccurately, as when the NUR Broad Left was made responsible for the actions of the Left on the NUR Executive, even though there is almost no overlap). The argument is that nothing much but workplace propaganda can be done, and those with more grandiose ideas are merely deluding themselves.

Socialist Worker on January 29 reported on the SWP National Committee's perspectives. The situation is one of setbacks and defeats. **"But these recent defeats have led a small number of individuals to question what has gone wrong. Not all are demoralised...**

"In the workplaces we need to argue with these individuals about all our ideas – and we need to involve them in the slow process of rebuilding strong workplace organisation".

In the meantime there is no point bothering much about the leadership. When right-winger Eric Hammond won the election for general secretary of the EETPU, Socialist Worker (January 8) commented by quoting an EETPU member: **"The union won't be changed by the election of individuals anyway.** [If only Frank Chapple had been equally fatalistic...] **The emphasis has to be on rebuilding organisation at a shop-floor level – and that needs to be done whoever is in office".**

Then on the miners' ballot over Lewis Merthyr, SW argued, **"The overall picture emerging from the ballot is that of a growing chasm between left wing executive members, and even branch officials, and the rank and file... Socialists in the pits have to accept that we've got to start organising from scratch. Electing a good official's no good if there's no base"** (March 19). And, astoundingly, after a dispute in which thousands of pickets campaigned for support, **"The mistake of the left... was to rely on officials, instead of organising pickets from South Wales to take the issues straight to the rank and file" (March 12).**

A similar argument is put on the Labour Party. The lesson of Bermondsey, SW argued (March 5), was that **"the left cannot deliver the goods electorally in the present period. And the Labour Party is an electoral party...**

"Five years of sustained effort enabled Peter Tatchell and the people around him to build up the individual membership of the Labour Party. But when the election came these socialists found themselves a small minority in the constituency.

"In electoral terms they counted for next to nothing".

Yet: **"The same minority of socialists who showed how ineffectual they are electorally in Bermondsey can be very effective indeed if they relate to struggle ... Many of the water workers, for instance, share the same prejudices as the electors of Bermondsey. But when socialists went to their picket lines... there was a warm welcome for us".**

For all the show of stern realism, there is mysticism at the core of this perspective. How will the working class be mobilised for socialism? A small minority (much smaller than the minority who voted for Peter Tatchell in Bermondsey!) will work away at "organising from scratch" and basic economic struggles, plus propagandising for "all our ideas". Somehow, some day, a new socialist movement will emerge out of this. In the meantime activists are urged (sometimes almost desperately, in SW's front-page leads) *not to concern themselves too much* with present-day politics and the internal struggle in the labour movement.

This is the same approach as the 'Economist' current in the Russian Marxist movement around 1900. The 'Economists' argued that while of course propaganda must be made for socialism, *agitation* should focus on economic struggles, out of which socialist consciousness would grow – and issues like general democratic rights could be left to the bourgeois liberals.

Lenin argued against the Economists that economic struggle does not spontaneously lead to socialist consciousness, but only to trade union consciousness. (The exception is when economic struggle, reaching the proportions of mass strikes as in Russia in 1905, breaks the limits of normal trade-union-type sectional action, and becomes both economic and directly political). All experience since – and especially the experience of the big militant economic struggles in Britain in the 1970s – indicates that Lenin was right. We need to develop the struggle on *all* fronts; we need a strategy to bridge the *gap* which the SWP bridges only by faith and hope, between day-to-day routine working-class demands within capitalism, and general propaganda for socialism; we need to fight, around transitional demands, to reorient the existing workers' movement towards socialism.

There is a grain of truth in the SWP's argument. Many labour movement activists do get caught up in committee meetings, resolution-passing, and electioneering, to the extent that they lose sight of the basic importance of point-of-production organising, agitation, and struggle. But there are also many thousands of workers who put tremendous energy into point-of-production struggles, but fail to broaden their activity out to an ongoing fight within the labour movement against the existing leadership – and so find their point-of-production efforts again and again stymied or sabotaged by that very leadership. To tell these workers – or for that matter to tell the Bermondsey activists, who run an outgoing, campaigning local Labour Party – to get involved in basic grass-roots organising and relating to struggles, is to tell them nothing that they don't already know.

The answer, surely, is to reject both sorts of one-sidedness.

When is a union not a union ?

Trade union rights are basic necessities for the working class everywhere. But the British labour movement has a blind spot. Jackie Cleary argues for breaking links with Stalinist state 'unions'.

"The struggle for the freedom of the trade unions and the factory committees, for the right of assembly and freedom of the press, will unfold in the struggle for the regeneration and development of Soviet democracy".

Transitional Programme

AFTER HE had created the rattlesnake, the cobra and 'the slimy toad', God scraped together the remains of the foul substances he had been using, and breathed life into the first scab. Or so the American writer Jack London said.

Scab, blackleg and strikebreaker are the nastiest epithets that can be thrown at the class-conscious worker or even the bread-and-butter trade-unionist. Class solidarity is the first value of even the most primitive of labour movements. Solidarity with trade unionists in other countries is understood to be a basic part of *trade unionism* — not of socialism, but even of trade unionism — by all but the most backward sections of the British trade union movement. Solidarity with struggling trade unionists in Chile, South Africa, or Argentina is reflex for the left.

Yet the British labour movement regularly and consistently betrays the most basic values of trade unionism and *scabs* on tens of millions of oppressed workers. This is not an episodic lapse but a permanent posture that has lasted over half a century. Almost all sections of the labour movement, from right to left, are guilty of it — but it is the special position of the *left*. Even 'Trotskyist' sections of the left, like the Socialist League (formerly IMG), are implicated.

We scab on the workers of the Stalinist states who are ground down, deprived of the most elementary civil rights — rights won by the workers of Britain up to two centuries ago — and forbidden to organise even trade unions to defend themselves.

The intensity of repression in the Stalinist states varies from the airless totalitarian state absolutism in the USSR to the 'pluralism' of Poland when state control was weakened there after 1956. Some of these states tolerate some small degree of intellectual licence and even 'independence' in the intelligentsia — Hungary for example. *None of them, even the most 'liberal', tolerate any independence for the working class.*

The working class is rightly seen as the main enemy by the bureaucrats. Any questioning of the bureaucrats' rights and prerogatives in the factories would, they know, quickly lead on to a questioning of their entire role in society. If the workers were allowed to organise trade unions, these would quickly concern themselves with politics.

The mass strike has repeatedly been the manner in which the bureaucratic regimes have been challenged in Eastern Europe. It was a builders' strike and demonstration that triggered the revolution in East Germany in 1953. Even after the military crushing of the Hungarian people in 1956, the national resistance to the Russian occupation took the form of a general strike and a struggle by the Russians and their satraps to win back control of the means of production.

In Poland in 1980 a wave of economic struggles led to a mass strikes which changed the face of Polish life for 18 months and put working-class power in Polish society immediately on the agenda.

In fact the uncontrollable explosion of Solidarnosc was triggered in mid-1980 when the regime accepted that adjustments to wages, within fixed limits, would be made by way of plant to plant bargaining. They thought they could thus be 'flexible', makging concessions to the militant plants, and relied on their monopoly of the means of communication to keep control and to atomise the working class. It blew up in their face.

Trade unionism is their enemy because the working class is. They fear trade unionism because they fear the working class. They know they have no room for concessions. Thus Jaruzelski did the work in Poland that Pinochet did in Chile. It was less bloodily done, but it was the same work. That the Stalinist regimes are not capitalist makes no difference to this.

As a result of the fundamental antagonism between the working class and the bureaucracy, what exists in the Stalinist states are not trade unions but *anti*-unions. This should be plain to even the blind from the attitude of the real Polish labour movement to the pre-1980 official unions and to the attempt to recreate them since December 1981. These are labour front organisations for controlling the working class.

Yet our own trade unions maintain links with these state 'unions'. The TUC maintained links with the Polish official 'unions' throughout the 1980 strikes! The attitude runs right through the TUC, from Bill Sirs on the right — who openly defended his 'colleagues', the strike-breaking official 'union' leaders, during the Polish strikes, to Arthur Scargill on the left — whose union has accepted the official Moscow line that Vladimir Klebanov, a miner and leader of an independent trade union group in the USSR, is 'mentally ill'.

The duty of trade unionists in Britain is to aid the emergence of real workers' organisations in the Stalinist states, and to help the workers' struggle by doing everything we can to strike at their oppressors.

Yet wide sections of the 'Trotskyist' left — of the USFI for example — rejected the Solidarnosc call for the working class to boycott Polish trade after the December 1981 coup, and called instead for 'massive aid' to the Polish state.

The IMG/SL, which in general favours self-governing trade unions in the Stalinist states, nevertheless *supported the scabbing TUC on the planned visit of its delegation to Poland in 1980. Earlier it backed a controversial TUC invitation to the Russian political pol-*

Tanks in Poznan, 1956

Workers' leaders?

iceman who heads the Stalinist labour front in the USSR.

Why? It is not entirely clear, but it is probably connected to the fact that there was a bourgeois anti-USSR propaganda outcry in both cases. Yet something fundamental was involved, compared with which all that was unimportant: the attitude we try to get our own labour movement to take to the struggle of our class in the Stalinist states, and to their oppressors. To fudge that class issue, worse still to argue that our movement should have and maintain links with the anti-unions of the Stalinist states, with part of the apparatus that oppresses our people there, *is to do the opposite of the work of Trotskyists – which is to fight for international working class solidarity with the real labour movements in the Stalinist states, or with their pioneers.*

In relation to Cuba it is worse. The bureaucratic regime there is undoubtedly far less rigid than the USSR's, and enjoys some popular consent rather than general hatred and fear. Nonetheless it leaves equally little room for *independent working class* organisation and politics. The SL rejects the programme of independent trade unions there.

For Nicaragua too – where the Sandinista unions now are real workers' organisations, but will become 'labour fronts' if the regime consolidates, and especially if the prediction that the Sandinistas will replicate the Cuban road, on which the USFI stakes everything, proves correct – they advance no programme for winning and maintaining the independence of the trade unions.

Thus many who would consider themselves anti-Stalinist revolutionaries fudge the issue.

They would feel uncomfortable at having to say on this question something like what Margaret Thatcher and Frank Chapple say. This is understandable, but it is a really trivial consideration in a situation where the workers of the Stalinist states need our moral and practical support. We have a duty as basic as not crossing a picket line to give it to them.

To allow the noise made by the Chapples and Thatchers to force us into silence on the struggle of a big part of the world's working class is to sink into a blinkered national narrowmindedness.

As people who believe, with Marx and Engels, that the emancipation of the working class can only be achieved by the working class itself, we would be obliged to support *any* independent workers' movement against the police states even if we considered its politics to be seriously mistaken and wrong.

In fact, any real or likely workers' movements in the Stalinist states are on a radically different wavelength from the Thatchers and Chapples.

To recoil from calling the Stalinists what they are for fear of chiming in with the reactionaries is to adopt the stance of those 'Friends of the Soviet Unions' who called Trotsky a reactionary for speaking out in the 1930s.

The programme for the independence of the trade unions against the state – even, as Lenin advocated in 1921, against a workers' state led by uncorrupted revolutionaries – is basic to socialism. 'Trotskyists' who do not fight for workers' political revolution in every existing Stalinist state are a disgrace to revolutionary socialism. Support for the right of the workers in the Stalinist states to organise is basic even according to the principles of trade unionism.

The British labour movement must break all ties with the Stalinist police state 'unions' and give every help to the real trade unionists in those states who are now being jailed and tortured by the regimes. We must stop substituting 'solidarity' with the regimes there for class solidarity with those oppressed by those regimes – and stop confusing defence of those states against imperialism with defence of their regimes.

Leon Trotsky would turn in his grave at the notion that attitudes such as those of the SL have anything to do with the politics he fought and died for. Trotsky argued that the USSR was a 'degenerated workers' state' which should be defended against imperialism. So does the WSL. But Trotsky took sides – and tried to get the international labour movement, whatever its political coloration at that moment, to take sides – squarely with the workers of the USSR against the totalitarian regime.

He never allowed the need to distance himself from the imperialist and pro-imperialist critics of the USSR to determine what he said. *The Russian reality and the duty to tell the truth to the labour movement did that.*

He did not hesitate to classify things and name them according to what they were. For example, for the last three years of his life at least he insistently repeated his belief that "Stalin's political apparatus does not differ [from that in fascist countries] save in more unbridled savagery" (The Transitional Programme).

Nor is it any different today, 40 years after an agent of that regime struck Trotsky down.

We must stop the British labour movement scabbing on the workers in the Stalinist states.

The Sandinistas: a workers' and peasants' government?

Workers' politics and national liberation

THE latest imperialist-backed offensive against the Sandinista regime in Nicaragua is evidence – if it were needed – of the threat which Reagan and the Pentagon chiefs see to the stability of Central America following the overthrow of Somoza in 1979 and the upsurge of guerrilla struggle in El Salvador.

But to draw from Reagan's opposition to the Sandinistas the conclusion that the regime is necessarily the type of regime which Marxists would advocate would be a serious mistake. Since the seizure of power by the FSLN, there has been a debate in the Trotskyist movement over the character of the petty bourgeois leadership, the limits of its struggles against imperialism, and its relationship to the working class of Nicaragua.

Involved here are also more general questions of how revolutionary Marxists should relate to 'anti-imperialist' movements and governments led by petty bourgeois nationalist forces. Should the political and organisational independence of the working class be subordinated to the 'anti-imperialist' leadership? Or do we not have a duty to champion at all times that independence and to insist upon the leading role of the proletariat in the revolutionary struggle?

The Workers Socialist League has consistently argued for the political independence of the working class. But a very different view has been put forward by the leadership of the American Socialist Workers Party (SWP). Embracing wholesale the political positions of Fidel Castro's Stalinist regime in Cuba, the SWP has extended uncritical support to the petty bourgeois Sandinista leadership and to the leadership of other cross-class 'fronts' in Central America.

In arguing their position, the SWP seeks to compare the Nicaraguan revolution with their picture of events in Cuba, and to contrast it with events in the Algerian revolution.

We reprint below the first part of a contribution examining these arguments, originally presented by John Lister to the 1980 international summer school of the Trotskyist International Liaison Committee. The second part, dealing in more detail with the Cuban revolution, will appear in our next issue.

In their Minority Theses on the Nicaraguan Revolution (which were rejected at the World Congress of the USFI) the SWP specifically compares and contrasts the Nicaraguan Revolution with' revolutions in Cuba and Algeria. They say:

". . . the revolutionary process now under way in Nicaragua bears many resemblances to those which occurred under the workers' and peasants' governments established in Cuba and Algeria . . ."

The Theses go on to stress the SWP's view that in both Algeria and Cuba the bourgeoisie was initially more confident than in Nicaragua; and that the revolutionary process was less developed in Cuba and Algeria than in Nicaragua. They declare that formally speaking their decision to designate the Sandinista regime as a "workers' and peasants' government" is supposed to mean that **"the outcome of the fundamental contradiction between the class character of the workers' and peasants' government and the capitalist state still hangs in the balance."**

As I will show later on, it is only a formal reservation on the part of the SWP. In practice the SWP position allots to what they call the "workers' and peasants' government" powers and capacities that would belong only to a genuine dictatorship of the proletariat.

In Algeria, the SWP explains, a

workers' and peasants' government under Ben Bella was rolled back under imperialist pressure to revert to capitalist control under Boumedienne. In Cuba, on the other hand, they say, **"despite the absence of a Leninist party, the anti-capitalist measures carried out by the revolutionary Castro leadership, relying on mass workers' mobilisations, could not have been rolled back short of a full-scale civil war . . . A workers' state had thereby been established."** (!)

Such an account (escaping any reference whatever to the role of world Stalinism in relation to Castro!) is clearly the outcome which the SWP anticipated for Nicaragua. They proudly inform the USFI World Congress that Trotskyists can watch contentedly, since (unlike the SWP) the FSLN has announced its intention to launch a vanguard party rooted in the masses." They go on to claim that the Kremlin's strategy for peaceful coexistence in Central America is being boldly resisted by the Cuban regime (neatly escaping the fact that without huge cash subsidies from Moscow Castro would be unable to offer any aid to anyone!)

And while stating that: "the presence of bourgeois figures in the Nicaraguan junta and cabinet is not a mere decoration, the SWP stress that **"it would be a blunder to conclude from this that progress . . . can be furthered by agitation around the slogan 'Bourgeois ministers out of the government!' "** This, they inform us, would be "infantile leftism" as would any move to **"promote the false idea that the government is a bourgeois coalition regime or that the FSLN is depriving the masses of their democratic rights in order to reconsolidate capitalist powers."**

Such democratic rights are unnecessary, suggest the SWP, and a call for a constituent assembly superfluous because the FSLN itself is already building a revolutionary party and **"a centralised system of democratic workers' and peasants' councils to assume governmental powers."** How do we know? Because the FSLN leaders have told us so! And the Sandinistas, according to the SWP, are far superior to any fuddy duddy Trotskyists seeking to implement their boring, old Transitional Programme: the Sandinistas, they suggest, are an exciting new breed of "revolutionists of action" emerging empirically by some miraculous (and undisclosed) process from the midst of the spontaneous mass struggles of the oppressed.

History will judge the Fourth International, the SWP proclaim, neither by its ability to build independent revolutionary parties, nor by its ability to chart an independent road for the proletariat in petty-bourgeois-led movements in order to advance the struggle to the dictatorship of the proletariat: all that is now unnecessary. Now the FI will be judged **"by our capacity to link up with these currents, to integrate ourselves in them, learn from them, and help (help!) steel them politically in the programme of Leninism."**

Hopefully as a result **"the door would be opened further to a process that would lead to the Castroist leadership, the FSLN, and other revolutionists linking up with the Fourth International in steps towards the building of a mass world party of Socialist revolution."**

It seems unlikely that the prospect of explicitly recruiting the SWP to his Stalinist Party after years of loyal service from them would be a very weighty factor in Fidel Castro's deliberations in Central America! But such crude expressions are clearly an embarrassment to the USFI majority, who threw out the SWP's undiplomatic phrases, while pledging the assistance of remaining "organised militants" in Nicaragua to the Sandinistas to lend a hand in "any FSLN project to build a vanguard party."

So it is from the practical and programmatic questions raised by the Nicaraguan revolution, and the need to respond to the abject political confusion and liquidationism of the USFI, and not from any abstract academic interest that we are driven in the period to look again at the question of petty-bourgeois nationalist movements and the kind of regimes they set up.

We must look at the question as one which has repeatedly arisen in the post-war period. Because the USFI continuously act and respond as if they were born yesterday, we are in no way obliged to follow their example in analysing the world from a piecemeal and subjective standpoint.

Limits of nationalism

In many of the most backward capitalist countries the material basis has not been created for a capitalist class to develop and entrench itself with any significant independence from imperialism.

The lack of domestic industrial development brought a corresponding restriction on the numerical growth of the proletariat as a distinct class in society, except as the workforce of multinational firms utilising cheap labour. The resulting plunder fuelled a nationalistic resentment that has been shared by the exploited peasantry, by the workers, by the small traders annoyed at their subordination to the multinationals and by would-be large-scale capitalists dependent upon the IMF and imperialist bankers for their finance and upon the world market for the sale of their goods. In many instances this mounting feeling also found its reflection in sections of the armed forces in which aspiring petty bourgeois sought a career denied them elsewhere in a backward and dependent economy.

These are internal material conditions in which petty bourgeois forces, as the most articulate and often most numerous exponents of an anti-imperialist nationalistic politics, in the absence of any developed alternative leadership from the proletariat, can emerge at the head of militant struggles which embrace a wide, cross-class alliance of forces which, while all fighting the imperialists are in fact engaged in pursuing fundamentally diverse objectives.

When such struggles take place in the context of a weakened imperialism, they have been seen to achieve a measure of success in inflicting setbacks on colonial exploitation and in asserting a certain measure of renewed

Castro in 1959: a model for revolution?

independence.

But while these material conditions can enable the petty bourgeoisie to place itself at the head of the struggle against national oppression and against imperialist puppet dictatorships, they do *not* change the unstable nature of the petty bourgeois as an *intermediate* vacillating stratum that emerges balanced between the two main poles of society: the strength of the proletariat and poorest peasantry, and the power of imperialist finance capital.

Though the petty bourgeois forces can conduct armed and political struggle, even to the level of taking power, they never acquire the same self-confidence and the same established weight of state machinery as the big bourgeoisie. They thus never acquire the same kind of ability to confront and crush the movement of the masses. For the petty bourgeois, the question is generally to find the means to manipulate, divert and defuse the struggles of the working class, rather than to engage in frontal collision. This is attempted by deliberately creating conditions that strengthen the alliance of the new regime with the peasantry with the military apparatus and with their petty bourgeois class brothers – the technicians and managers in the newly nationalised concerns.

Petty bourgeois regimes therefore combine a universal initial verbal leftism, to placate the rising militancy and aspirations of the newly liberated masses, with *practical* steps to shackle workers and peasants politically and organisationally within the bounds set by the requirements of the petty bourgeois rulers and their bourgeois masters. Talk of "socialism" in general is combined with continued links with capitalism for as long as this remains a possibility. And only in the case of Cuba has this option been definitely cut off – by the action of the imperialists!

In looking at some of the post-war petty bourgeois revolutions and regimes, therefore, I hope to be able to draw out more clearly some of the general lessons of such struggles, I will point to the fact that it is the rightward moving and pro-capitalist developments in post-revolutionary Algeria and not Cuba that have been the prime "model" for the evolution of such revolutions. It is the inadequacy of the existing leadership and their inability to create healthy workers states and not any abstract longing on our part for a role in the class struggle that proves the objective political necessity for the building of independent Trotskyist parties to lead the struggle.

What happened in Algeria?

So what happened in Algeria?

The Algerian war of independence was a protracted, barbaric and bloody affair. The national struggle in Algeria, whose roots go back to the 1930s, reached new peaks in the post-war period, encouraged by the weakness of French imperialism during the war, and sparked into anger by the meagre concessions offered by De Gaulle in 1944.

In May, 1945 an upsurge of militant riots by Muslims in Algeria was met by unrestrained butchery from the French army and the colonialists, with CP backing. Figures of those killed after the May riots range from 1,000 to 80,000. A figure of 15,000 seems well established.

One of the more right-wing nationalists, Ferhat Abbas, was arrested at this point. On his release he formed the Democratic Union of the Algeria Manifesto (UDMA) which called, moderately, for an autonomous secular Algerian state within the French union. The UDMA scored electoral successes, but was so tame that it failed to make any headway with the French.

The UDMA faded away, adopting a tactic of boycotting elections. And in its place the Movement for the Triumph of Democratic Liberties (MTLD) was launched by Messali Hadj. It demanded a sovereign constituttuional assembly and a withdrawal of French troops.

As the MTLD faced a barrage of repression and ballot-rigging a split took place in its ranks and increasingly the underground military wing gathered support. In 1949 it launched an attack on the town of Oran, led by Ben Bella. After the failure of its mission, Ben Bella escaped from prison to Cairo in 1952.

Messali Hadj gradually evolved towards a position of Pan-Arabism. But the divided MTLD gave birth to a Revolutionary Council for Unity and Action (CRUA). This was the body that was later to become the FLN. Its goal was simple: armed struggle against the French. It divided the country into six regions, under separate commands. It also built a substantial external guerrilla force.

In 1956 the FLN was joined by Ferhat Abbas and by a motley bunch of religious and other leaders. Messali Hadj (whose MNA was subsequently to be supported by the SLL/OCI) stayed outside this united bloc and eventually struck a squalid deal with the French.

The FLN congress drew up a programme for a Socialist Algerian republic, and planned a terrorist offensive. It began with a huge bombing campaign.

The French replied with savage repression of the Muslims: torture, internment, summary shootings of prisoners. Electric fences were set up along the Tunisian border. The French army detachment was stepped up, under the new French Socialist premier Guy Mollet from 120,000 to 400,000. A "liberal" general was recalled and replaced by a hard-liner. Tunisian border villages were bombed.

The Cuban revolution: calls for serious analysis, not logic-chopping

Algeria: the armed struggle ousted French imperialism, but left the working class still exploited in the imperialist world economy

Yet the scope and cost of the action was forcing the French imperialists simultaneously to negotiate with the FLN. Talks began in secret in Morocco. As this became known, anger grew among the colonists, and the new De Gaulle government as a concession to them increased the army of occupation to 500,000.

The FLN fought on. They set up a provisional government in August 1958 including the imprisoned Ben Bella and Ferhat Abbas. They scented that De Gaulle was being driven towards a climbdown. But the final deal was a long time a-coming.

In September 1959 De Gaulle acknowledged the Algerians' right to determine their own future, unleashing a revolt by the colonialists backed by sections of the army. Talks continued for over two years before the Evian agreement of March 1962, which agreed to a ceasefire and an independent Algeria after a transitional period, but it spelled out limits within which the new regime would have to stick in order to preserve its subordinate relation to French imperialism.

The referendum in July 1962 brought a 91% vote for independence. The colonialists packed their bags and left in droves. Ninety percent of the Europeans left, leaving behind them a shattered economy and 70% unemployment.

The FLN government was physically divided into three camps. There was a "centre" majority; an opposition around Ferhat Abbas; and a "left" opposition grouped around Ben Bella, whose position centred on a large scale agrarian reform involving expropriation of large estates, peasant cooperatives and state farms, as well as a state monopoly of foreign trade and an anti-imperialist foreign policy.

This line won a majority at the FLN Tripoli conference. So when the "centre" leadership under Ben Khedda tried to move against Ben Bella by removing the FLN commander-in-chief Boumedienne, a formidable political/military alliance was formed between Ben Bella and Boumedienne.

These two set up their own political bureau in opposition to Ben Khedda's provisional government, and began to win support.

But the in-fighting between the FLN leaders had little to offer the working class. It is conspicuous that as Boumedienne's troops began to march on Algiers in September 1962, they were countered by massive demonstrations organised by the Algerian trade union confederation, the UGTA. This minimised the violent confrontation. But Ben Khedda was ousted and Ben Bella/Boumedienne at once implemented a purge of FLN candidates, wiping out one third of those standing in the September 20 elections and replaced them with loyal supporters and non-entities.

Ben Bella, now in a bloc with Ferhat Abbas, took the prime ministership, and immediately banned Messali Hadj's PPA, the Algerian CP, and the Party of Socialist Revolution (November 1962).

And all of the FLN's organisations, with the exception of the trade unions were brought under central control.

January 1963 saw Ben Bella remedy that omission in spectacular fashion. The podium of the UGTA conference was taken over by Ben Bella supporters at the start of one morning session; and, that afternoon, delegates returning found their seats taken by Ben Bella's thugs, who declared the need for the UGTA to comprise 80% peasant delegates! This was Ben Bella's answer to UGTA opposition to his dictatorial policies.

Yet in March 1963 came some concessions to the mass movement: decrees were passed legalising the UGTA committees that had taken over abandoned French estates. It was declared that "self-management" (with elected workers' committees alongside a state appointed director) was now the basis of "Algerian socialism." As Ben Bella tightened his grip (taking over as FLN general secretary, president, commander-in-chief, head of government) Ferhat Abbas was driven out. Alongside the dictatorial moves went the nationalisation of remaining European estates under "self-management" (October 1963).

It is important to note that in the course of these events the USFI, influenced of course by Pablo as an advisor in the Ben Bella regime, and the US SWP were loud supporters of the progressive moves being made by these petty bourgeois leaders.

Joseph Hansen, writing in The Militant, applauded the fact that **"Ben Bella's first appeal is to the peasantry."** He pointed to what he called **"the already evident tendency of the revolution to develop in the socialist direction . . . Ben Bella,"** he argued, was **"a leadership which intends to move in a socialist direction, but which lacks Leninist clarity."** Ben Bella's takeover of the UGTA was not even reported in the Militant, while the French Pabloites actually focussed their attack not on Ben Bella but on the UGTA!

Yet the Militant gave two whole pages to the March nationalisations and "self management" decreees, with Hansen declaring **"the tendency of the Algerian Revolution to develop in the socialist direction has grown stronger."**

He made no report however of the April budget, in which Ben Bella increased spending on the army and police, taking on French-trained gendarmes.

Only from such a selective and subjective standpoint is it possible to portray the Ben Bella government as a 'left-wing' body, one making progressive moves towards the masses and against imperialism. But from the standpoint of the struggle for revolutionary leadership, an objective, all-sided assessment of the Ben Bella government was essential, one that exposed its continued links to imperialism. Ben Bella was attempting to secure a foothold by balancing between token concessions to the militancy of the masses alongside practical measures to strengthen the state apparatus on which the power of the petty bourgeoisie and capitalism rested.

The state sector of agriculture and industry, providing lucrative and influential positions for Ben Bella's petty bourgeois supporters, offered both the means for fostering the emergence of an increasingly prosperous layer of businessmen, and a convenient medium through which the Algerian economy could remain linked to the world capitalist market.

It is in this context that the state takeovers of industries in the neo-colonial countries must be understood as part and parcel of the search of petty bourgeois nationalist leaders for a solid material basis to perpetuate and consolidate their control.

Trotsky in 'Trade Unions in the Epoch of Imperialist Decay' discussed exactly this question when he discussed the actions of the 'left' nationalist Cardenas government in Mexico in 1940:

"The nationalisation of railways and oilfields in Mexico has of course nothing in common with socialism. It is a measure of state capitalism in a backward country which in this way seeks to defend itself on the one hand against foreign imperialism and on the other against its own proletariat.

"The management of railways, oil fields, etc. through labour organisations has nothing in common with workers' control over industry, for in the essence of the matter the management is effective through the labour bureaucracy which is independent of the workers, but in return, completely dependent on the bourgeois state.

"This measure on the part of the

ruling class pursues the aim of disciplining the working class, and making it more industrious in the service of the common interest of the state, which appears on the surface to merge with the interests of the working class itself".

This description fits the Ben Bella strategy like a glove. We will see how it relates to subsequent petty bourgeois led revolutions. But we do not need to leave Algeria to see that such moves are by no means confined to the 'left' wing of petty bourgeois nationalism.

Ben Bella balanced precariously after his rise to power, between rival opposed factions. A pro-imperialist wing had opposed his apparent socialist commitment and any gesture towards 'self-management'. And a more 'Marxist' left wing unsuccessfully pressed him to proceed rapidly to the major question of nationalising the French and US oil holdings and industry.

In 1965 Ben Bella railroaded his middle-of-the-road Algiers Charter through the first FLN Congress, and proceeded to crush many of his remaining fellow old FLN leaders in the subsequent party split.

But among his opponents was now the source of his original strength: military leader Boumedienne. As Ben Bella prepared for a renewed gesture of leftism as a fanfare for the planned Afro-Asian conference scheduled for June, 1965, in Algiers, Boumedienne prepared a preemptive coup against Ben Bella to preserve his own position. Ben Bella has apparently planned to release sections of the Marxist left from prison, to issue a call for the formation of popular militias, and to order the arrest of Boumedienne and the rightist FLN leaders.

But such moves were being prepared solely from above: they had in no way been prepared through mass action or mobilisation. Neither the workers, whose union confederation had been annexed by Ben Bella, nor the peasants who resented his dictatorial rule and elimination of many old FLN leaders, waged any struggle to defend him against Boumedienne. And in September 1965 the Boumedienne regime felt strong enough to round up leftists and CP members.

Was Boumedienne's rightist policy fundamentally different from that of Ben Bella? Only in that it actually increased the state role in the economy!

It was under Boumedienne in 1966 that a state construction company was set up; distribution of income from oil and gas industries was placed under state control, eleven foreign owned mines were nationalised, as was the property of absentee owners. Insurance was placed under state control. A national bank was formed in July 1966. These moves into the very centre of the economy were far more sweeping than those of Ben Bella in the preceding two years, at a peak of the revolutionary mood of the masses.

Boumedienne's balancing between such populist moves, which strengthen and enlarge the base of the petty bourgeoisie, and imperialism, was shown by the signing of a 20 year deal with the French in April 1966. And the new options open to such regimes, using the Soviet bureaucracy as a lever, in forcing the deals with imperialism, were shown in 1967 when the French refused to take their agreed wine quota: Algeria turned at once to the Soviet Union, which stepped in to take half the wine exports and supply technical aid in mining and military training.

It is in this context that we should understand that it was not Ben Bella in the wake of the revolutionary war in the early 1960s, but Boumedienne, in a political haggle over prices in 1971, who carried through the nationalisation of a controlling interest in the French oil firms and the takeover of natural gas and pipeline interests.

Essentially the same regime remains in control in Algeria to this day, balancing delicately between on the one hand the demands of the imperialists and the vagaries of the capitalist world market, and on the other hand the revolutionary potential of the Algerian proletariat, whose exploitation takes place not so much directly at the hands of the large-scale Algerian bourgeoisie, as indirectly at the hands of the oil monopolies and multinational firms through the medium of the state-run enterprises in oil, gas, and heavy industry.

The armed struggle that overthrew the shackles of French imperialism did not succeed in breaking the bonds of imperialist exploitation for the Algerian masses. The proletariat found no leadership capable of placing it at the head of the liberation struggle and spearheading the struggle for the socialist overthrow of capitalism in Algeria.

This, then, was what happened in Algeria. And, as must have been clear in the account of the events, it is the Algerian revolution which really provides the model for the development of petty bourgeois nationalist regimes in the post-war period.

Boumedienne (centre): organised a coup against the left, then decreed sweeping nationalisations

The Algerian model

Let us look at the distinctive features which run in common through the Algerian revolution and subsequent petty bourgeois led movements.

The first feature is the emergence of a left talking cross-class political 'front' (the FLN) in which the proletariat is subordinated to the national petty bourgeoisie and sections of national capitalists.

Not all such fronts necessarily wage armed struggle to secure this limited objective of national independence.

Julius Nyerere's TANU, for example, which secured the support of the black working class as well as poor peasants and petty bourgeois layers, successfully negotiated the independence of Tanzania from the British imperialists, using the lever of increased working class militancy as reflected through the TANU-led union federation, the TFL.

Within three years, however, the TANU leadership was forced to call on British military support to crack down on an army mutiny and the threat of solidarity strikes.

Just as Ben Bella moved in thugs and FLN heavies to take over the Algerian unions, Nyerere in 1964 used martial law restrictions to dissolve the TFL, replace it with a state-run union, the NUTA, and ban all parties other than TANU.

It was not until the revolutionary challenge to the rule of Nyerere's petty bourgeois regime was long gone, that in 1967 he announced a programme of

nationalisation and state participation in banking, trade and industry. Compensation was paid and profits were guaranteed to the imperialists who remained.

Elsewhere similar fronts have come to power in much more protracted and violent struggles, such as the MPLA in Angola, FRELIMO in Mozambique, ZANU in Zimbabwe and the FSLN in Nicaragua. But while diverse elements within such fronts (ranging from the urban proletariat to the rural peasantry, from the intelligentsia to agricultural labourers, and even some disaffected sections of capitalists) can unite in opposition to imperialism and its puppet governments, the taking of power rapidly demonstrates the class divisions that remain.

Almost invariably the successful seizure of power is followed by a greater or lesser period of acute governmental crisis, in which the contending class forces and their representatives raise their demands. And in every instance the proletariat faces an anti-socialist alliance of intelligentsia, prosperous peasants, small businessmen and administrators, which seeks to subordinate the unions and workers' demands to the new 'national interests'.

This indeed is the second common feature of petty bourgeois led revolutions. While workers, denied an alternative, revolutionary leadership, look to the nationalist forces to answer the demands which have driven them to lend their support, the petty bourgeoisie looks first and foremost for means to tame and control the working class! The struggle to stabilise Neto's MPLA government in Angola involved not only the military defeat of the imperialist-backed FNLA/UNITA forces, but also the use of Cuban and MPLA troops to repress mass struggles by workers in Luanda itself and impose the authority of the new pro-capitalist hirelings. Only by establishing his power over the working class could Neto hope to prove his worth either to the Stalinists in Havana and the Kremlin or to the multinational oil monopolies that continue to exploit Angola's natural resources.

Similarly in Zimbabwe, the first moves of the white-run army of the Mugabe regime were against strikes and demonstrations in Harare and other urban centres.

Over in Nicaragua, the FSLN has opposed strikes and made repeated attempts to fuse the trade union federations into a single, Sandinista-led confederation that would therefore tie the working class to the policies of their petty bourgeois rulers.

More obvious perhaps is the repression of the workers' movement that follows on the other major form of petty bourgeois nationalist movement: the military coup.

Thus the coups by Nasser in Egypt, the Ba'athists in Iraq, Gaddafi in Libya, and the Derg in Ethiopia, have all been followed by a combination of apparently anti-imperialist moves combined with the crushing of any independent movements by the working class and poor peasantry.

This combination of anti-imperialism and fears of the mass movement provides the background to the third common factor of petty bourgeois-led regimes: the extensive role played by the state apparatus in an economy within which there is no native big bourgeoisie strong

Gaddafi: "strong verbal opposition to US and other imperialist powers is combined with material links with the deformed workers' states"

enough to compete with the multinationals and undertake the necessary developments of raw material extraction, transport and heavy industry. As administrators, technologiests, supervisors and managers, the petty bourgeoisie sees the advantage of extending the apparatus of the state to fulfil such functions: as would-be capitalists in their own right, they see the necessity to create favourable economic conditions for industries producing consumer goods and other small scale items to develop. Thus the state-capitalist or 'statist' development of the economy in countries like Egypt or Algeria can be seen as providing a protective greenhouse atmosphere for the raising of an embryo national bourgeoisie. In Ethiopia the extension of nationalisations and land reforms are part of this pattern, they are also an attempt of the narrow military clique in the leadership of the Derg to secure a broader base of support in the form of a network of state functionaries and employees.

In Mozambique, the sweeping nationalisations that followed the military defeat of the Portuguese colonialists have already begun to be rolled back as the Machel regime, recognising its affinity to world capitalism, its dependence upon international loans and upon the South African economy, openly seeks to foster a native capitalist class alongside foreign investments.

In Nicaragua the pattern of selective nationalisations cuts like a winding road around the vested interests of the anti-Somoza bourgeoisie that to a greater or lesser degree supported the FSLN in its anti-dictatorial struggle. Banks have been nationalised, with the support of the international bankers! Elsewhere, Somozist property has been expropriated, but little else. Instead the focus is on using these state holdings as part of a joint plan of production with the remaining capitalists, while the FSLN opposes strikes and fights to increase production.

But none of these nationalist regimes could hope to survive in the longer term if they simply set their faces against every element of the mass movement. Instead they all share a willingness to head off mass pressure into anti-imperialist gestures, and to placate the peasantry with such measures as limited land reform.

Strong verbal opposition to US and other imperialist powers is often combined with varying degrees of material links with the deformed workers' states. These links provide 'left' credentials, valuable cash, technical and military support, and a useful bargaining counter for driving a more advantageous deal with imperialism.

Angola, for instance, has allowed the maintenance of oil supplies to Gulf Oil and other monopolies, and the unrestricted capitalist exploitation of the minerals in Cabinda. But this has been combined with a policy of flirting with Comecon, the maintenance of a garrison of 3,000 Cuban troops, and extensive military links with the USSR.

In other instances, such as Algeria, Libya, etc., the anti-imperialist gestures have focused on declarations of support for the Palestinian struggle and a willingness to continually raise oil prices (one anti-imperialist gesture which conveniently also eases the economic plight of the nationalist regime!)

Populist techniques such as the 'self-management' schemes in Algeria and Tanzania, and Gaddafi's 'arming' of the Libyan people in a kind of giant Home Guard (while opposition parties and Marxist literature are outlawed), are being echoed in the Sandinista Defence Committees (CDS) in Nicaragua, through which the petty bourgeois leaders seek to consolidate their hold over the mass movement unleashed by the defeat of Somoza.

We should bear in mind that these techniques are not confined to the neo-colonial countries: in Portugal after 1974, the petty bourgeois officers of the Armed Forces Movement utilised neighbourhood and factory committees as a means of diverting the mass movement of Portuguese workers into containable channels. The key to understanding such committees is *not* the influx of workers and urban petty bourgeois at their base, but the secure political control over them at the *top* exercised by the new regime (either directly by its own nominees, or through the obedient assistance of Stal-

inist and reformist hangers-on).

Thus, in Nicaragua, the popular 'militias' are being steadily welded into a capitalist state against attack from either the imperialists outside or the Nicaraguan working class at home. In Zimbabwe, one of the key provisions in the independence deal was a scheme for the integration of Mugabe's and Nkomo's guerilla forces into the machinery of the capitalist state. The difficulties of filtering out the most militant elements appear particularly acute in Zimbabwe, where the continuity of exploitation by white settlers and foreign imperialist holdings has not even yet been concealed by so much as token nationalisations. Whole detachments of guerillas remain in limbo, unable to pursue the struggle for which they took up arms, and are isolated from the process of capitalist consolidation being carried through by Mugabe.

Indeed Zimbabwe is a particularly difficult test for the imperialists and for the Mugabe leadership, since a loss of control over the process could trigger a renewed wave of struggles in Namibia and in South Africa itself. This would jeopardise the increasingly beleagured apartheid/capitalist state and destabilise the whole area. This is the situation feared by both the capitalists and by the Stalinists, who fought tooth and nail to contain the Zimbabwe struggle and even now stand in the way of action by either Angola or Mozambique to counter South African raids.

The fifth and final major factor which runs through these experiences of petty-bourgeois nationalist movements is their relationship with world Stalinism. It is crucial to understand that without the continued existence and relative strengthening of the degenerated Soviet workers state and its bureaucratic leadership in relation to imperialism in the post-war period, petty-bourgeois nationalist movements on the scale we have seen would have been virtually inconceivable.

From the Kremlin leaders, they have been able to seek material assistance, military protection, political guidance and ideological support in their moves to balance between the imperialist powers and their own working class and poor peasantry.

As a nationalist, parasitic ruling caste itself, the Stalinist bureaucracy is ideally suited to provide expert guidance to the emerging petty-bourgeois leaders in their delicate tasks. In particular the Stalinist theory of revolution by stages is ideal as a cover for the consolidation of power in the hands of the petty-bourgeoisie.

But of course the Kremlin bureaucracy and its fellow ruling Stalinist bureaucracies rest upon nationalised property relations in their own countries. It is these property forms that provide the only guarantee of the survival of the bureaucracy as a privileged ruling stratum. The foreign policy of the Kremlin therefore is quite unlike that of social democratic governments in capitalist countries. Through seeking to collaborate with imperialism against revolutionary movements the Stalinist bureaucracy takes as its premise the need to defend the foundations of the workers states (in bureaucratic military fashion). It is this underlying antagonism between the workers' states and imperialism which underlies the willingness and ability of the Stalinists to seek diplomatic and military advantage by lending support to certain anti-imperialist movements which they hope to annex and use for their own objectives.

At the same time the internal defence of the Stalinist bureaucracy and its influence in the international workers' movement requires that it uphold at least a token commitment to anti-imperialist struggles internationally and in place of any strategy for world proletarian revolution, the provision of political and material aid to petty-bourgeois movements provides a convenient answer for this.

The post-war political situation has further created conditions for the strengthening of petty-bourgeois nationalist movements, and underlined the weakness of imperialism.

The French imperialists found themselves unable to retain control over Indo-China, sections of the Middle East and Algeria. The British imperialists were forced to surrender direct control over colonies in the Far East, India and Pakistan, the Middle East and Africa. In part this weakness flowed from the economic after-effects of World War II; in part from the relative weakening of French and British imperialism in relation to US imperialism (as symptomised by the Suez fiasco of 1956).

It is significant however that fear of direct Soviet intervention to defend nationalist movements against imperialist attack has only very recently emerged as a factor in the imperialists' calculations. In Vietnam, for instance, only five years ago the USA was allowed to involve a huge arsenal and 500,000 soldiers, engaged in the most barbaric bombing offensive against the Stalinist-ruled North, without a finger being lifted by the Kremlin or Peking bureaucrats.

It is only in the period since the defeat of imperialism in Vietnam that the role of the Cuban troops in Angola and the military support from Cuba and the USSR to the regimes in Mozambique and Ethiopia have raised the issue of Soviet intervention, possibly prompt-

Against the military butchers in El Salvador: the hand of the avenger, or workers' self-organisation?

Nicaragua: the Cuban road?

ing a more widespread confrontation.

Even now the possibilities of this are extremely limited and open to doubt. For instance, whereas it seems clear that the Stalinists stand to lose considerable face if US imperialism and the Central American gendarmes moved in to invade Nicaragua, it seems very unlikely that either Cuba or the Kremlin would lift a finger to prevent imperialist intervention or to assist a left, petty-bourgeois nationalist take-over in El Salvador, elsewhere in Latin America, or indeed in many parts of Africa.

The role of Stalinism centres not so much on the open or tacit military support offered by the Stalinist bureaucracies (crucial though this was in the case of Cuba and Angola) but the material and financial support they are prepared to offer in order to buy their way into the favours of what are often the extremely fickle and unreliable petty-bourgeois leaders who succeed in establishing themselves.

It is the availability of such aid and technical help which means that it is now not automatic that the petty-bourgeois leaders, after an initial honeymoon period of leftism, find their way back to a humiliating and subservient deal with imperialism. It makes possible the maintenance for quite a long period of vigorously anti-imperialist and pro-Soviet regimes: but it makes their existence and their political positions dependent upon the approval and strategic and tactical interests of the Stalinist leaders. And, far from Cuba being the 'model' for a series of colonial liberation struggles, twenty years of experience have shown that the Cuban revolution was the exception, in which the global policies of Stalinism, coupled with the weakness and tactical errors of imperialism, created conditions for the establishment by a petty-bourgeois nationalist leadership of a deformed workers' state.

Next issue: what happened in Cuba?

Join the WSL

The present Workers' Socialist League was formed in July 1981 by the fusion of the old Workers' Socialist League with the International-Communist League.

The old WSL originated in the expulsion from the Workers' Revolutionary Party in late 1974 of about 200 members, including the principal working-class base of the WRP in the Cowley car plants at Oxford. They had opposed the accelerating sectarian degeneration of the WRP.

The I-CL was created by a fusion of Workers' Fight and the former International Socialists Left Faction in December 1975. Workers' Fight, the larger of these two groups, dated back to a small breakaway in 1966 from the Militant tendency, but traced its political roots to the early-1960s SLL (forerunner of the WRP). It rejected the SLL from the mid-'60s as irredeemably sectarian.

The WSL, together with the LOR (Italy), TAF (Denmark), and Socialist Fight (Australia), is affiliated to the Trotskyist International Liaison Committee. The RWL (USA) is prevented from affiliating to TILC by reactionary legislation, but is in political sympathy.

The WSL organises on the basis of democratic centralism, and aims to help build a revolutionary workers' party in Britain as part of a revolutionary International. For other WSL literature, see the advertisement elsewhere in this issue.

For more information about the WSL, write to: WSL, PO Box 135, London N1 0DD.

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From the arsenal of Marxism

WHY did working class militancy collapse just when it was needed to stand up against the most savage ruling-class onslaught for 40 years? This is one of the most important questions facing those whose hopes and struggle for socialism centre on the working class.

There had been no crushing, demoralising defeat before the return of the Tory government in May 1979. Quite the opposite, in fact — the movement had shown its mettle, and plenty of muscle, in the 'winter of discontent' of 1978-9.

The explanation is to be sought in the complex interaction between the effects of the Tory victory, the deepening slump bringing mass unemployment and the economic devastation of whole areas, the bureaucratisation of the top layers of the shop stewards' movement, and the collaboration with the government of the national trade union leaders.

It is all the more difficult for the would-be Marxist left to come to terms with what has happened because 'primitive slumpism' — the belief and expectation that the inevitable economic crisis, when it came, would radicalise the working class — had been a very popular response during the boom years to the capitalist argument that prosperity had bourgeoisified the working class.

In the following excerpts from his writings, Leon Trotsky shows that there is no mechanical or direct relationship between slump and working class militancy. He shows, for example, that it was the economic slump of 1907 that finally snuffed out the 1905-7 Revolution in Russia. He argues that the economic crisis of the late '20s had the effect of grinding down the British labour movement after its defeats in the General Strike and afterwards. In his words, "Thus, in a conjunctural decline accompanied by growing unemployment, particularly after defeats, increased exploitation does not breed a radicalisation of the masses, but, quite the contrary, demoralisation, atomisation and disintegration. We saw that, for example, in the British coal mines right after the 1926 strike".

Thus the current downturn should sweep away, not our hopes for the future, but any residues of 'primitive slumpism' inherited from the past. That 'primitive slumpism' has been shown to be no more than a rehash of the mechanistic pseudo-Marxist sociology common to both a section of the 'Marxist' European Social Democracy and the ultra-left wing of the early Comintern. Trotsky's texts shed a great deal of light on the debates now going on in the British left. Other aspects of this question will be taken up in future issues of Workers' Socialist Review.

The texts are taken:
1. From Trotsky's unfinished biography of Stalin,
2. From a 1930 article, 'The Third Period of the Comintern's Errors',
3. From a speech made by Trotsky at the Third Congress of the Communist International.

From "Stalin"

BY 1910 the industrial revival became an indisputable fact. The revolutionary parties were confronted with the question: what effect will this break in the situation have on the political condition

Trotsky in 1930 with co-thinkers (left to right) Pierre Naville, Gerard Rosenthal, Denise Naville

of the country? The majority of Social-Democrats maintained their schematic position: the crisis revolutionises the masses, the industrial resurgence pacifies them. Both factions, Bolshevik as well as Menshevik, tended, therefore, to disparage or flatly deny the revival that had actually begun.

The exception was the Vienna newspaper Pravda, which, notwithstanding its Conciliationist illusions, defended the very correct thought that the political consequences of the revival, as well as of the crisis, far from being automatic in character, are each time determined anew, depending on the preceding course of the struggle and on the entire situation in the country. Thus, following the industrial resurgence, in the course of which a very widespread strike struggle had managed to develop, a sudden decline in the situation might call forth a direct revolutionary resurgence, provided the other necessary conditions were present. On the other hand, after a long period of revolutionary struggle which ended in defeat, an industrial crisis, dividing and weakening the proletariat, might destroy its fighting spirit altogether. Or again, an industrial resurgence, coming after a long period of reaction, is capable of reviving the labour movement, largely in the form of an economic struggle, after which the new crisis might switch the energy of the masses onto political rails.

The Russo-Japanese war and the shocks of the revolution prevented Russian capitalism from sharing the world-wide industrial resurgence of 1903-1907. In the meantime, the uninterrupted revolutionary battles, defeats, and repressions, had exhausted the strength of the masses. The world industrial crisis, which broke out in 1907, extended the prolonged depression in Russia for three additional years, and far from inspiring the workers to engage in a new fight, dispersed them and weakened them more than ever. Under the blows of lockouts, unemployment and poverty, the weary masses became definitely discouraged. Such was the material basis for the 'achievements' of Stolypin's reaction. The proletariat needed the resuscitative font of a new industrial resurgence to revive its strength, fill its ranks, again feel itself the indispensable factor in production and plunge into a new fight.

The Third Period of the Comintern's errors

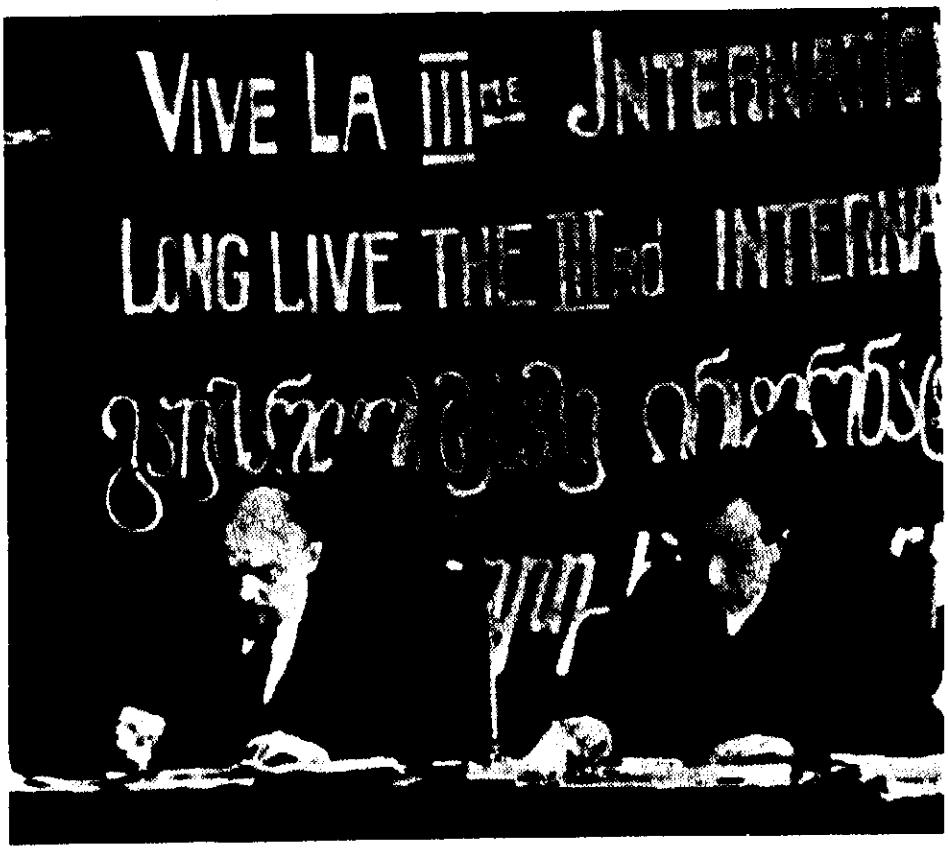
These excerpts are from a long article of Trotsky's, published in 1930, criticising the ultra-left policies then pursued by the Stalinised Communist International on the perspective that this was the 'third period', the 'final' crisis of capitalism.

1. What is the radicalisation of the masses?

For the Comintern, the radicalisation of the masses has become, at present, an empty catechism, not the characterisation of a process. Genuine communists—teaches l'Humanite—should recognise the leading role of the party and the radicalisation of the masses. It is meaningless to put the question that way. The leading role of the party is an unshakeable principle for every communist. If you do not accpet this, you can be an anarchist or a confusionist but not a communist, that is, a proletarian revolutionary. But radicalisation in itself is not a principle; it is only a characterisation of the temper of the masses. Is this characterisation correct or incorrect for the given period? That is a question of fact. In order to correctly gauge the temper of the masses, the right criteria must be used. What is radicalisation? How does it express itself? What are its characteristics? With what tempo and in which direction does it develop? The deplorable leadership of the French Communist Party does not even pose these questions. At most, an official article or a speech will refer to an increase in the number of strikes. But even then only the straight figures are given without a serious analysis or even a simple comparison with the figures of the preceding years.

Such an attitude to the question flows not only from the unfortunate decisions of the Tenth Plenum of the ECCI but, as a matter of fact, from the Comintern programme itself. The radicalisation of the masses is described as a continuous process: today the masses are more revolutionary than they were yesterday, and tomorrow will be more revolutionary than today. Such a mechanical idea does not correspond to the real process of development of the proletariat or of capitalist society as a whole. But it does correspond almost perfectly to the mentality of the Cachins, Monmousseaus, and the other frightened opportunists.

The social democratic parties, especially before the war had imagined the future as a continual increase in the social democratic vote, which would grow systematically until the very moment of taking power. For a vulgar or pseudo-revolutionary, this perspective still essentially retains its force, only instead of a continual increase in the number of votes, he talks of the continual *radicalisation of the masses.* This mechanical conception is sanctioned also by the Bukharin-Stalin programme of the Comintern. It goes without saying that from the point of view of *our epoch as a whole* the development of the proletariat advances in



L'HUMANITE: paper of the French CP.

Marcel CACHIN: leader of the French Communist Party, and a servile Stalinist.

Gaston MONMOUSSEAU: a CP trade union leader. His pseudonym was Jean BRICOT.

Albert VASSART: another CP union leader.

the direction of the revolution. But this is not a steady progression, any more than the objective process of the deepening of capitalist contradictions. The reformists see only the ups of the capitalist road. The formal "revolutionaries" see only its downs. But a Marxist sees the road as a whole, all of its conjunctural ups and downs, without for a moment losing sight of its main direction—the catastrophe of wars, the explosion of revolutions.

The political mood of the proletariat does not change automatically in one and the same direction. The upturns in the class struggle are followed by downturns, the floodtides by ebbs, depending upon complicated combinations of material and ideological conditions, national nad international. An upsurge of the masses, if not utilised at the right moment or misused, reverses itself and ends in a period of decline, from which the masses recover, faster or slower, under the influence of new objective stimuli. Our epoch is characterised by exceptionally sharp periodic fluctuations, by extraordinarily abrupt turns in the situation, and this places on the leadership unusual obligations in the matter of a correct orientation.

The activity of the masses, properly understood, expresses itself in different ways, depending upon different conditions. The masses may, at certain periods, be completely absorbed in economic struggles and show very little interest in political questions. Or, suffering a series of defeats in economic struggles, the masses may abruptly turn their attention to politics. Then depending upon the concrete circumstances and the past experiences of the masses—their political activity may go in the direction of either purely parliamentary or extra-parliamentary struggle.

We give only a very few variants, but they characterise the contradictions of the revolutionary development of the working class. Those who know how to read the facts and understand their meaning will readily admit that these variants are not some kind of theoretical construction but an expression of the living international experience of the last decade.

In any case, it is clear that in a discussion about the radicalisation of the masses a concrete definition is demanded. The Marxist Opposition should, of course, make the same demand of itself. A simple denial of the radicalisation is of as little use as its complete affirmation. We should have an estimate of what the situation is and what it is becoming.

(. . .)

What do the Statistics Show?

Do the statistics confirm the thesis of the radicalisation of the masses or do they refute it? First of all, we answer, they take the discussion out of the realm of abstractions in which Monmousseau says yes and Chambelland says no, without defining what is meant by radicalisation. The statistics of the strike struggles are indisputable proof of certain shifts in the working class. At the same time, they give a very important estimate of the number and character of these shifts. They outline the general dynamics of the process and make it possible, to a certain degree, to anticipate the future or, more exactly, possible future variants.

In the first place, we can affirm that the statistics for 1928-29, compared with those of the preceding period, characterise the beginning of a *new cycle* in the life of the French working class. They give us the right to assume that deep molecular processes have taken and are taking place in the masses, as a result of which the momentum of the decline begins—if only on the economic front now—to be overcome.

Nevertheless, the statistics show that the growth of the strike movement is still very modest, and do not in the least give a picture of a tempestuous upsurge that would allow us to conclude this is a revolutionary or at least a prerevolutionary period. In particular, there is no marked difference between 1928 and 1929. The bulk of the strikes continued to be in light industry.

From this fact Chambelland comes to a general conclusion *against* radicalisation. It would be a different matter, he says, if strikes were spreading to the large enterprises in heavy industry and the machine shops. In other words, he imagines that a radicalisation falls ready-made from the sky. As a matter of fact, these figures testify not only that a new cycle of proletarian struggle has begun, but also that this cycle is only in its first stage. After defeat and decline, a revival, in the absence of any great events, could occur only in the industrial periphery, that is, in the light industries, in the secondary branches, in the smaller plants of heavy industry. The spread of the strike movement into the metal industry, machine shops, and transportation would mean its transition to a higher stage of development and would indicate not only the beginning of a movement but a decisive turn in the mood of the working class. It has not come yet. But it would be absurd to shut our eyes to the first stage of the movement because the second has not yet begun, or the third, or the fourth. Pregnancy even in its second month is pregnancy. Forcing it may lead to a miscarriage, but so can ignoring it. Of course, we must add to this analogy that dates are by no means as certain in the social field as in physiology.

Facts and Phrases.

In discussing the radicalisation of the masses, it should never be forgotten that the proletariat achieves "unanimity" only in periods of revolutionary apex. In conditions of "everyday" life in capitalist society, the proletariat is far from homogeneous. Moreover, the heterogeneity of its layers manifests itself most precisely at the turning points in the road. The most exploited, the least skilled, or the most politically backward layers of the proletariat are frequently the first to enter the arena of struggle and, in case of defeat, are often the first to leave it. It is exactly in the new period that the workers who did not suffer defeats in the preceding period are more likely to be attracted to the movement, if only because they have not yet taken part in the struggle. In one way or another, these phenomena are bound to appear also in France.

The same fact is shown by the vacillations of the organised French workers, which is pointed to by the official Communist press. Yes, the inhibitions of the organised workers are too well developed. Considering themselves an insignificant part of the proletariat, the organised workers often play a conservative role. This of course is not an argument against organisation but an argument against its weaknesses, and an argument against those trade union leaders of the Monmousseau type who do not understand the nature of trade union organisation and are unable to estimate its importance to the working class. At any rate, the vanguard role of the unorganised at the present time testifies that the question is not yet one of a revolutionary but of a united economic struggle, and moreover in its elementary stage.

The same thing is demonstrated by the important role of the foreign-born workers in the strike movement, who, by the way, will in future play a part in France analagous to that of the Negroes in the United States. But that is the music of the future. At present, the part played by the foreign-born workers, who often do not know the language, is further proof of the fact that it is not a question of political but of economic struggle, which has received an impetus from the change in the economic conjuncture.

Even in relation to the purely economic front, one cannot speak of the *offensive* character of the struggle as Monmousseau and Company do. They base this definition on the fact that a considerable percentage of the strikes are conducted for *higher* wages. These thoughtful leaders forget that such demands are forced upon the workers on the one hand by the rise in the cost of living and on the othe by the intensified physical exploitation, a result of new industrial methods (rationalisation). A worker is compelled to demand an *increase* in his nominal wages in order to *defend* his standard of living. These strikes can have an "offensive" character only from the standpoint of capitalist bookkeeping. From the standpoint of trade union policies, they have a purely defensive character. It is precisely this side of the question that every serious trade unionist should have clearly understood and emphasised in every way possible. But Monmousseau and Company believe that they have a right to be indifferent trade unionists because they are, if you please, "revolutionary leaders." Shouting until they are hoarse about the offensive political and revolutionary character of purely defensive strikes, they do not, of course, change the nature of these strikes and do not increase their significance by a single inch. On the contrary, they do their best to arm the bosses and the government against the workers.

It does not improve matters when our "leaders" point out that the strikes become "political" on account of—the active role of the police. An astonishing argument! The beating up of strikers by the police is called—a revolutionary advance of the workers. French history reveals quite a few massacres of workers in purely economic strikes. In the United States, a bloody settlement with strikers is the rule. Does this mean that the workers in the United States are leading the most

Maurice CHAMBELLAND: leader of the syndicalist (pure trade-unionist) minority in the CGTU. The French trade union movement at the time was divided into two main federations, the reformist CGT and the revolutionary CGTU, led by the CP.

revolutionary struggle? The shooting of strikers of course has in itself a political significance. But only a loudmouth could identify it with the revolutionary political advance of the working masses —thus unconsciously playing into the hands of the bosses and their police.

When the British General Council of the Trade Union Congress called the revolutionary 1926 strike a peaceful demonstration, it knew what it was doing. That was a deliberately planned betrayal. But when Monmousseau and Company call scattered economic strikes a revolutionary attack on the bourgeois state, nobody will think of accusing them of deliberate betrayal. It is doubtful that these people can act with deliberation. But that certainly is no help to the workers.

In the next section we will see how these terribly revolutionary heroes render some other services to the bosses, ignoring the upturn in commerce and industry, underestimating its significance, that is, underestimating the profits of the capitalists and by the same token undermining the foundation of the economic struggles of the workers.

All this is done, of course, to glorify the "third period".

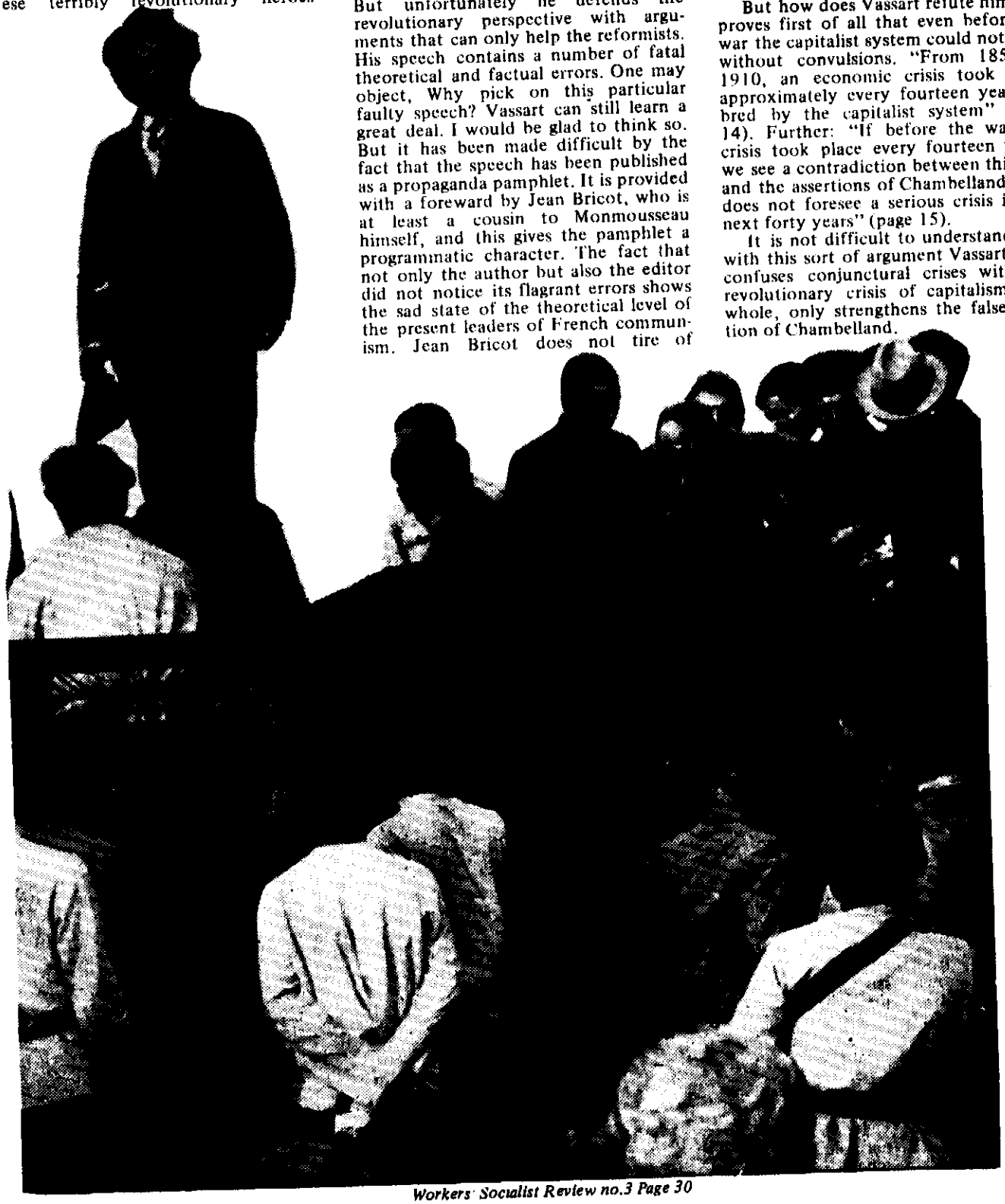
2. Conjunctural Crises and the Crisis of Capitalism.

At the Fifth Congress of the Unitary General Confederation of Labour, A. Vassart made a lengthy speech against Chambelland, which was later published as a pamphlet with a foreward by Jean Bricot. In his speech Vassart attempted to defend the revolutionary perspective against the reformist perspective. In this our sympathies are entirely on his side. But unfortunately he defends the revolutionary perspective with arguments that can only help the reformists. His speech contains a number of fatal theoretical and factual errors. One may object, Why pick on this particular faulty speech? Vassart can still learn a great deal. I would be glad to think so. But it has been made difficult by the fact that the speech has been published as a propaganda pamphlet. It is provided with a foreward by Jean Bricot, who is at least a cousin to Monmousseau himself, and this gives the pamphlet a programmatic character. The fact that not only the author but also the editor did not notice its flagrant errors shows the sad state of the theoretical level of the present leaders of French communism. Jean Bricot does not tire of demolishing the Marxist Opposition. What he ought to do, as we shall soon demonstrate, is simply sit down and study his ABC. Leadership of the workers' movement is incompatible with ignorance, as Marx once said to Weitling.

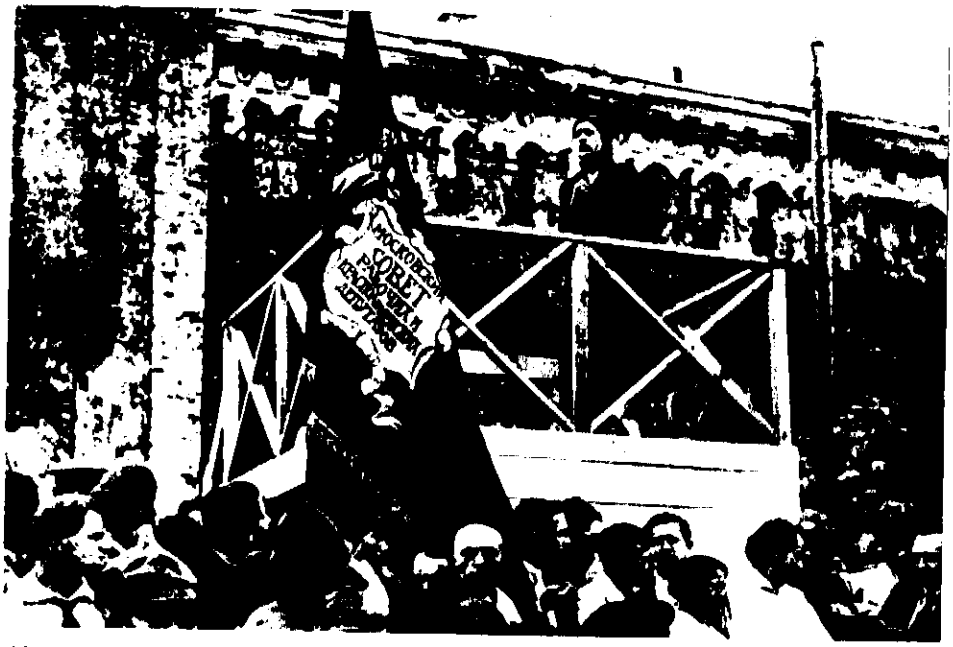
At the congress, Chambelland expressed the superficial thought—based exclusively on his own reformist inclinations—that capitalist stabilisation will last for about another thirty or forty years, that is, even the new generation of the proletariat now coming forward will not be able to make a revolution. Chambelland had no serious arguments to substantiate his fantastic time period. The historical experience of the past two decades and the theoretical analysis of the present situation completely negate Chambelland's perspective.

But how does Vassart refute him? He proves first of all that even before the war the capitalist system could not exist without convulsions. "From 1850 to 1910, an economic crisis took place approximately every fourteen years (?) bred by the capitalist system" (page 14). Further: "If before the war the crisis took place every fourteen years, we see a contradiction between this fact and the assertions of Chambelland, who does not foresee a serious crisis in the next forty years" (page 15).

It is not difficult to understand that with this sort of argument Vassart, who confuses conjunctural crises with the revolutionary crisis of capitalism as a whole, only strengthens the false position of Chambelland.



Zinoviev: i 1924 he pronounc the Frenc Socialist Party 'dead'



Above: A delegate to the Second Congress of the Comintern addresses Red Square

First of all, setting the conjunctural cycle at fourteen years is rather surprising. Where did Vassart get this figure? We see it for the first time. And how is it that Jean Bricot, who instructs us so authoritatively (almost as authoritatively as Monmousseau himself), did not notice such an immediate and vital significance for the labour movement? Before the war, every trade unionist knew that crises or at least depressions recurred every seven or eight years. If we take the period of a century and a half, we find that there were never more than eleven years between crises. The average duration of the cycle was about eight and a half years and, furthermore, as was shown in the prewar period, the conjunctural cycle had a tendency to accelerate, not slacken, which stemmed from the renewal of technical machinery. In the postwar years, the conjunctural fluctuations had a turbulent character, which was expressed by the fact that the crises recurred more frequently than before the war. How does it happen that leading French trade unionists do not know such elementary facts? How can one lead a strike movement without having a realistic picture of conjunctural economic shifts? Every serious communist can and must pointedly put this question to the leaders of the CGTU, primarily to Monmousseau.

This is how the matter stands on the factual side. It is no better from the point of view of methodology. What does Vassart actually prove? That capitalist development is generally inconceivable without conjunctural contradictions; they existed before the war and will exist in the future. It is doubtful that even Chambelland would deny this commonplace. But this does not yet open up any revolutionary perspective. On the contrary, from the fact that for the past century and a half the capitalist world experienced eighteen crises, there is no reason to conclude that capitalism must fall with the nineteenth or twentieth. In actuality, conjunctural cycles in the life of capitalism play the same role as, for example, cycles of blood circulation in the life of an organism. The inevitability of revolution flows just as little from the periodicity of crises as the inevitability of death from a rhythmic pulse.

At the Third Congress of the Comintern (1921), the ultra-lefts of that time (Bukharin, Zinoviev, Radek, Thaelmann, Thalheimer, Pepper, Bela Kun, and others) claimed that capitalism would never again know an industrial revival because it had entered the final ("third"?) period, which would develop on the basis of a permanent crisis until the revolution itself. A big ideological struggle took place at the congress around this question. A considerable part of my report was devoted to proving that in the epoch of imperialism the laws determining industrial cycles remain in effect and that conjunctural fluctuations will be characteristic of capitalism as long as it exists: the pulse stops only with death. But from the state of the pulse, in connection with other symptoms, a doctor can determine whether he is dealing with a strong or weak organism, a healthy or sick one (of course, I do not speak of doctors of the Monmousseau school). Vassart, however, attempts to prove the inevitability and proximity of the revolution on the basis of the fact that crises and booms take place every fourteen years.

Vassart could easily have avoided these obvious errors if he had at least made a study of the report and discussion that took place at the Third Congress of the Comintern. But, unfortunately, the most important documents of the first four congresses, when genuine Marxist ideology was the rule in the Comintern, are now prohibited reading. For the new generation of leaders, the history of Marxist thought begins with the Fifth Congress, particularly with the unfortunate Tenth Plenum of the ECCI. The principal crime of the dense and blind bureaucratic apparatus consists in the mechanical interpretation of our theoretical tradition.

Economic Conjuncture and Radicalisation

If Vassart does not know the dynamics of business cycles and does not understand the relationship between conjunctural crises and revolutionary crises of the capitalist system as a whole, then the dialectical interdependence of the economic conjuncture and the struggle of the working class is just as unclear to him. Vassart conceives of this interdependence as mechanically as his opponent Chambelland does; although their conclusions are directly opposite, they are equally erroneous.

Chambelland says: "The radicalisation of the masses is in a certain sense the barometer which makes it possible to evaluate the condition of capitalism in a given country. If capitalism is in a state of decline the masses are necessarily radicalised" (page 23). From this Chambelland concludes that because in France strikes embrace only the peripheral workers, because the metal and chemical industries are only slightly affected, capitalism is not as yet in decline. Before him there is still a forty-year period of development.

How does Vassart answer this? Chambelland, according to him, "does not see the radicalisation because he does not see the new methods of exploitation" (page 30). Vassart repeats the idea that if one recognises the intensified exploitation and understands that it will develop further "that in itself compels you to reply affirmatively to the question of the radicalisation of the masses" (page 31).

Reading these polemics, one gets the impression of two blindfolded men trying to catch each other. It is not true that a crisis always and under all circumstances radicalises the masses. Example: Italy, Spain, the Balkans, etc. It is not true that the radicalism of the working class necessarily corresponds to the period of capitalism's decline. Example: Chartism in Britain, etc. Like Chambelland, Vassart substitutes dead forms for the living history of the labour movement. And Chambelland's conclusion is also wrong. You cannot deny a *beginning* of radicalisation because strikes have not yet embraced the main sections of the workers; what can and must be made is a concrete evaluation of the extent, depth and intensity of this radicalisation. Chambelland, evidently, agrees to believe in a radicalisation only after the whole working class is engaged in an offensive. But leaders who wish to begin only when everything is ready are not needed by the working class. One must be able to see the first, even though weak symptoms of revival, while only in the economic sphere, adapt one's tactics to it, and attentively follow the development of the process. Meantime one must not even for a moment lose sight of the general nature of our epoch, which has proved more than once and will prove again that, between the first symptoms of revival and the stormy upsurge that creates a revolutionary situation, not forty years but perhaps only a fifth or a tenth of that are required.

Vassart fares no better. He simply establishes an automatic parallel between exploitation and radicalisation. How can the radicalisation of the masses be denied, Vassart asks irritably, if exploitation grows from day to day? This is childish metaphysics, quite in the spirit of Bukharin. Radicalisation must be proved not by deductions but by facts. Vassart's conclusion can be turned into its opposite without difficulty. The question can be put this way: How could the capitalists increase exploitation from day to day if they were confronted by the radicalisation of the masses? It is precisely the absence of a fighting spirit that permits an intensi-

fication of exploitation. True, such arguments without qualification are also one-sided, but they are a lot closer to life than Vassart's constructions.

The trouble is that increasing exploitation does not always raise the fighting spirit of the proletariat. Thus, in a conjunctural decline accompanied by growing unemployment, particularly after defeats, increased exploitation does not breed a radicalisation of the masses but, quite the contrary, demoralisation, atomisation and disintegration. We saw that, for example, in the British coal mines right after the 1926 strike. We saw it on a still larger scale in Russia, when the 1907 industrial crisis coincided with the wrecking of the 1905 revolution. If in the past two years intensified exploitation brought about the evident growth of the strike movement, the basis for it was created by a conjunctural rise in the economy, not a decline.

Fear of Economic Processes

But the ultra-left opportunists leading the Comintern fear an industrial upturn as an economic "counterrevolution". Their radicalism leans on a weak reed. For a further rise in the industrial business conjuncture would first of all deliver a mortal blow to their stupid theories of the "third and last period". These people deduce revolutionary perspectives not from real contradictory processes but from false schemata. And from this flow their fatal errors in tactics.

It may seem quite improbable that the official orators at the CGTU congress tried above all to depict the state of French capitalism in the most piteous light. Loudly exaggerating the present swing of the strike movement, the French Stalinists' description of French industry makes future strike struggles seem absolutely hopeless. Among them was Vassart. Precisely because he, together with Monmousseau, does not distinguish between the fundamental crisis of capitalism and the crisis of conjuncture, and this time thinks along the same lines as Chambelland that a conjunctural rise might put off the revolution for a period of decades, Vassart is apprehensive about an industrial upturn. On pages 21-24 of his pamphlet, he proves that the present industrial revival in France is "artificial" and "momentary" (page 24). At the December national committee meeting, Richetta diligently painted the French textile industry into a state of crisis. If this is the case it means that the strike wave, which so far has served as the only indication of radicalisation, has no economic foundation or is losing it rapidly. To say the least, Vassart and Richetta give the representatives of capital a priceless argument against economic concessions to the workers and, what is more important, they give decisive arguments to the reformists against economic strikes, for it must be understood that from a perspective of chronic crisis one cannot develop a perspective of growing economic struggles.

Do not these sorry trade unionists follow the economic press? But, they may say, the capitalist press deliberately displays optimism. However, it is not a question of the editorials. From day to day, from month to month, the newspapers publish the market reports, the balances of the banks, the commercial and industrial businesses, and the railroads. Some of the totals involved have already been reprinted in *La Verite*. The more recent figures are further proof of the upward trend of French industry. The last weekly economic supplement to reach me, *Le Temps* (December 9, 1929), for example, carries a report of a general meeting of the stockholders of the metal industry of northern and eastern France. We do not know M. Cuvelette's attitude to the philosophy of the "third period" and we admit that we are not very much interested. But nevertheless he can very well add up profits and collect dividends. Cuvelette sums up the total of the past year as follows: "The condition of the domestic market has been exceptionally favourable." This estimate, I hope, has nothing in common with platonic optimism, because it is strengthened by forty-franc dividends instead of the twenty-five-franc dividends of the year before. Has or has not this fact an importance for the economic struggles in the metal industry? It would seem that it has. But, unfortunately, behind the back of Cuvelette we see the figures of Vassart and Bricot or that of Monmousseau himself, and we hear their voices. "Don't belive the words of this capitalist optimist who does not know that he is up to his ears in the third period!" Isn't it clear that if a worker makes the mistake of believing Monmousseau and not Cuvelette, he must come to the conclusion that he has no basis for a successful economic struggle, to say nothing of an offensive?

The Monmousseau school — if one may give such a title to an institution where people are taught to unlearn thinking, reading and writing — is afraid of an economic upturn. It must be said plainly that for the French working class — which has renewed its composition at least twice, during the years of the war and after the war, drawing into its ranks tremendous numbers of youth, women, and foreign-born and still far from having assimilated these new elements — for this French working class the further development of an industrial upturn would create an incomparable school, would allow it to gather its strength, would prove to the most backward sections their meaning and role in the capitalist structure, and would thereby raise the general class consciousness as a whole to new heights. Two or three years, even one year, of a broad, successful economic struggle would rejuvenate the proletariat. After a properly utilised economic upturn, a conjunctural crisis might give a serious impetus to a genuine political radicalisation of the masses.

At the same time it must not be forgotten that wars and revolutions in our epoch result not from conjunctural crises but from the contradictions between the development of productive forces on the one hand and the national boundaries of the bourgeois state on the other, carried to their ultimate conclusion. The imperialist war and the October Revolution have demonstrated the depth of these contradictions. The new role of America has further accentuated them. The more serious the development of the productive forces in one country or another, or in a number of countries, the sooner a new upturn in industry will find itself confronted with the basic contradictions of world industry and the sharper will be the reaction — economic and political, domestic and international. A serious industrial revival would be, in any case, not a minus but a tremendous plus for French communism, creating a mighty strike movement as a fore-

Stalin: gravedigger of the revolution

runner to a political offensive. There will be no lack of revolutionary situations. It is quite likely, however, that there will be a lack of ability to utilise them.

But is a continuing upward trend in the French industrial conjuncture guaranteed? This we cannot dare to assume. All sorts of possibilities remain open. At any rate, it does not depend on us. What does depend on us, and what we are obliged to do, is not to close our eyes to facts in the name of pitiful schemata, but to see the course of economic development as it really is and to work out trade-union tactics on the basis of facts. We speak now of tactics in distinction to strategy, which is determined, of course, not by conjunctural changes but by basic tendencies of development. But if tactics are subordinate to strategy, strategy is realised only through tactics.

For the Comintern as well as the Profintern, tactics consist of periodic zigzags, and strategy is the arithmetical sum of these zigzags. That is why the proletarian vanguard suffers defeat after defeat.

3. What are the Signs of Political Radicalisation?

The question of the radicalisation of the masses is not exhausted, however, by an analysis of the strike movement. What is the level of the political struggle? And, above all, what is the size and influence of the Communist Party?

It is remarkable that in speaking of the radicalisation the official leaders pointedly ignore the question of their own party. Yet the facts are that beginning with 1925 the membership of the party has been falling from year to year: 1925, 83,000 members; 1926, 65,000, 1927, 56,000; 1928, 52,000; 1929 35,000. For the previous years we use the official figures of the Comintern secretary Piatnitsky; for 1929 the figures of Semard. No matter how these figures are regarded, they undoubtedly are greatly exaggerated; nevertheless, as a whole, they very vividly show a curve of the party's *decline*: in five years, the membership fell by more than half.

It may be said that quality is more important than quantity, and that there now remain in the party only the fully reliable communists. Let us assume that is so. But this is not the real question. The process of the *radicalisation* of the masses can in no way mean the isolation of the cadres, but, on the contrary, the influx into the party of reliable and partially reliable members and the conversion of the latter into "reliables."

The political radicalisation of the masses can be reconciled with the regular decline in party membership only if one sees the role of the party in the life of the working class as a fifth wheel to a wagon. Facts speak louder than words. We observe a steady decline of the party not only during the years 1925-27, when the strike wave was ebbing, but also during the last two years, when the number of strikes was beginning to grow.

At this point the honourable Panglosses of official communism will interrupt, pointing to the "disproportion" between the size of the party and its influence. This is now the general Comintern formula, invented by the shrewd for the simple. However, the canonised formula not only fails to explain anything but in some respects even makes matters worse. The experience of the workers' movement testifies that the more a revolutionary party assumes a "parliamentary" character – all other conditions being equal – the more the extent of its influence exceeds its size. Opportunism is a lot easier than Marxism, for it bases itself on the masses in general. This is obvious from a simple comparison between the Socialist Party and the Communist Party. The systematic growth of the "disproportion", with the decline in the number of organised communists, consequently can only mean that the French Communist Party is being transformed from a revolutionary into a parliamentary and municipalist party. The recent "municipal" scandals revealed that this process did develop *to a certain degree* in the last years, and it may be feared that "parliamentary" scandals will follow. Nevertheless, the differences between the Communist Party as it is today and the social democratic agents of the bourgeoisie remains enormous. The Panglosses in the leadership merely slander the French Communist Party when they discourse on some gigantic disproportion between its size and its influence. It is not difficult to show that the political influence of communism, unfortunately, has grown very little in the last five years.

For Marxists, it is no secret that parliamentary and municipal elections distort and even falsify the underlying moods of the masses. Nevertheless, the dynamics of political development find a reflection in parliamentary elections; this is one reason why Marxists take an active part in electoral struggles. But what do the election results show? In the 1924 legislative elections the Communist Party polled 875,000 votes, a little less than 10 per cent of the total electorate. In the 1928 elections, the party polled a little more than a million votes (1,064,000), which represented 11 1/3 per cent of the votes cast. Thus the specific weight of the party in the

PANGLOSS, the caricature optimist philosopher in Voltaire's satire 'Candide', who insists through disaster after disaster that "all is for the best in the best of all possible worlds".

Kalinin's birthday party, 1929: left to right, Molotov, Mikoyan, Stalin, Kamenev, Voroshilov, Kalinin and Budenny celebrate

electorate increased by 1 1/3 per cent. If this process were to continue at the same rate, then Chambelland's perspective of thirty to forty years of "social peace" would appear too – revolutionary.

The Socialist Party, already "non-existent" in 1924 (according to Zinoviev and Lozovsky), polled almost 1,700,000 votes in 1928, more than 18 per cent of the total, or more than one and a half times the Communist vote.

The results of the municipal elections change the total picture very little. In some industrial centres (Paris, the North) the Communists undoubtedly won votes away from the Socialists. Thus in Paris, the specific weight of the Communist vote increased in four years (1925-9) from 18.9 per cent to 21.8 per cent, that is, by 3 per cent, at a time when the Socialist vote fell from 22.4 per cent to 18.1, that is, by 4 per cent. The symptomatic significance of such facts is undeniable; but so far they have only a local character and are greatly discredited by the antirevolutionary "municipalism" personified by Louis Sellier and other petty bourgeois like him. As a result of the Selliers, the municipal elections that took pace a year after the legislative elections did not bring about any real changes.

Other indications of political life also, to say the least, speak against the premature parrotings on the so-called political radicalisation of the masses that is supposed to have taken place in the last two years. The circulation of *l'Humanite*, to hour knowledge has not grown. The collections of money for *l'Humanite* are certainly gratifying. But such collections would have been large, in view of the demonstrative reactionary attack on the paper, a year, two, and three years ago as well.

On the first of August – it must not be forgotten for a minute – the party was incapable of mobilising either all the workers who had voted for it or even all the unionised workers. In Paris, according to theprobably exaggerated reports of *l'Humanite*, about fifty thousand workers participated in the first of August demonstrations, that is, less than half of the unionised workers. In the provinces, things were infinitely worse. This proves, by the say, that the "leading role" of the political bureau among the CGTU apparatus people does not guarantee a leading role of the party among the unionised workers. But the latter make up only a tiny fraction of the class. If the revolutionary upsurge is such an irrefutable fact, what good is a party leadership that, at the critical moment of the Sino-Soviet conflict, could not mobilise an anti-imperialist demonstration even a quarter – rather, even a tenth – the size of the country's electorate? No one demands the impossible of the party leadership. A class cannot be manipulated. But what stamped the August 1 demonstration a failure was the monstrous "disproportion" between the victorious shouts of the leadership and the real response of the masses.

As far as the trade union organisations are concerned, they parallelled the party's decline – judging by the official figures – one year later. In 1926, the CGTU numbered 475,000 members; in 1927, 452,000; in 1928, 375,000. The loss of 100,000 members by the trade unions at a time when the strike struggles in the country were increasing is incontestable proof that the CGTU does not reflect the basic processes at work in the economic struggles of the masses. As an enlarged reflection of the party, it merely experiences the decline of the latter, after some delay.

The data given here doubly confirm the preliminary conclusions we came to on the basis of our analysis of the strike movement. Let us recapitulate. The years 1919-20 were the culminating point of the proletarian struggle in France. After that, an ebb set in, which in the economic field began slowly to change. In the political field, however, the ebb or stagnation continues even now, at least among the majority of the workers. The awakening of activity of certain sections of the proletariat in economic struggle is irrefutable. But this process too is only in its first stage. It is primarily *light* industry that is drawn into the struggle, with an evident preponderance of the *unorganised* workers over the organised, involving a large number of foreign-born workers.

The impetus to the strike wave was the upturn in the economic conjuncture with a simultaneous rise in the cost of living. In its first stages, the strengthening of economic struggles is not ordinarily accompanied by a revolutionary upswing. It is not evident now either. On the contrary, the economic struggles for a certain time may even weaken the political interests of the working class, at least some of its sections.

If we further take into consideration the fact that French industry has been on the upturn for two years now, that there is no talk of unemployment in the basic branches of industry, and that in some branches there is even an acute shortage of workers, then it is not difficult to conclude that under these exceptionally favourable conditions for trade union struggle the present strike wave is extremely modest. The main indications of its moderate character are the quiescence of the masses that carries over from the preceding period and the slowness of the industrial upturn itself.

(. . .)

What are the immediate perspectives?

The development of the working class, especially as expressed in the strike movement, from the very beginning of capitalism has been closely bound up with the development of the conjunctural cycle. But this must not be considered mechanically. Under certain conditions that go beyond the commercial-industrial cycle (sharp changes in the world economy or politics, social crises, wars, revolutions), the strike wave may express fundamental historical revolutionary tasks of the working class, not their immediate demands evoked by the given conjuncture. Thus, for example, the postwar strikes in France did not have a conjunctural character but expressed the profound crisis of capitalist society as a whole. If we use this criterion, we see that the strike movement in France today has a primarily *conjunctural* character; its course and tempo will depend in the most immediate sense on further fluctuations of the market, alternating conjunctural phases, and their scope and intensity. The instability of this current period makes it all the more impermissible to proclaim the "third period" without any regard for the real development of economic events.

There is no need to explain that even if there should be a favourable conjuncture in America and a commercial-industrial upturn in Europe, a new crisis is entirely unavoidable. There is no doubt that when a crisis does develop, the current leaders will declare that their "prognosis" was fully justified, that the stabilisation of capitalism did not occur, and that the class struggle took on sharper form. Clearly, such a "prognosis" costs very little. One who predicted daily the eclipse of the sun, would finally live to see this prediction fulfilled. But we are unlikely to consider such a prophet a serious astronomer. The tasks of communists is not to predict crises, revolutions, and wars every single day, but to prepare for wars and revolutions by soberly evaluating the circumstances and conditions that arise *between* wars and revolutions. It is necessary to foresee the inevitability of a crisis after an upturn. It is necessary to warn the masses of a coming crisis. But the masses will be the better prepared for the crisis the more that they, with correct leadership, utilise the period of the upturn. At the recent plenum of the CGTU national committee, quite healthy ideas were expressed. Claveri and Dorelle, for example, complained that the previous CGTU congress (September 1929) evaded the question of the economic demands of the working masses. The speakers, however, did not stop to think how it could happen that a trade union congress overlooked what should be its first and most urgent task. In accord with so-called "self-criticism", the main speakers this time condemned the CGTU leadership more thoroughly than the Opposition ever did.

However, Dorelle himself introduced not a little confusion in the name of the "third period" concerning the *political* character of the strikes. Dorelle demanded that the revolutionary Communist trade unionists – there are no other revolutionary trade unionists at the present time – show the workers in every strike the relation of isolated examples of exploitation to the contemporary regime as a whole, and consequently the connection between the immediate demands of the workers and the proletarian revolution. This is ABC for Marxists. But this in itself does not determine the character of a strike. A political strike is not a strike in which Communists carry on political agitation, but a strike in which the workers of all occupations and plants conduct a struggle for definite political aims. Revolutionary agitation on the basis of strikes is a task under all circumstances; but the participation of workers in political, that is, revolutionary strikes is one of the most advanced forms of struggle and occurs only under exceptional circumstances, which neither the party nor the trade unions can manufacture artificially according to their own desires. The identification of economic strikes with political strikes creates confusion that prevents the trade union leaders from correctly approaching economic strikes, from organising them and working out a practical programme of workers' demands.

Matters are worse still in respect to

general economic orientation. The philosophy of the "third period" demands an economic crisis immediately and at all costs. Our wise trade unionists, therefore, close their eyes to the systematic improvement of the economic conjuncture in France in the last two years, although without a concrete estimate of the conjuncture it is impossible to work out correct demands and to struggle for them successfully. Claveri and Dorelle would do well to think the question through to the end. If the economic upturn in France continues for another year (which is not out of the question), then primarily the development and deepening of the economic struggles will soon be on the agenda. To be able to adapt to such circumstances is a task not only of the trade unions but also of the party. It is not enough to proclaim the abstract right of communism to have a leading role; it is necessary to gain this by deeds, not only within the narrow framework of the trade union apparatus but in the arena of the class struggle. To the anarchist and syndicalist formula of trade union autonomy, the party must counterpose serious theoretical and political aid to the trade unions, making it easier for them to orient correctly in economic and political developments and to elaborate correct demands and methods of struggle.

The unavoidable shift in the upturn caused by a crisis will change the tasks, putting economic struggles into the background. It has already been said that the onset of a crisis will in all probability serve as an impetus to the political activity of the masses. The force of this impetus will depend on two factors: the duration and extent of the upturn and the depth of the crisis succeeding it. The more abrupt and decisive the change, the more explosive will be the action of the masses. This is natural. Because of inertia, strikes generally acquire their greatest sweep at the moment when the economic upturn begins to collapse. It is as if, in the heat of running, the workers encounter a solid wall. Economic strikes can then accomplish very little. The capitalists, with a depression under way, easily make use of the lockout. It is then that the deepened class consciousness of the workers begin to seek other means of expression. But which? This depends not only upon the conjunctural conditions but on the total situation in the country.

There is no basis to declare in advance that the next conjunctural crisis will create an immediate revolutionary situation in France. On the basis of the convergence of a number of conditions that go beyond the conjunctural crisis this is quite possible. But at this point only theoretical conjectures can be made. To put forward *today* the slogan of a general political strike on the basis of a future crisis that will push the masses onto the road of revolutionary struggle is to try to appease the hunger of today with the dinner of tomorrow. When Molotov stated at the Tenth Plenum that the general strike has in effect been put on the order of the day in France, he only showed once too often that he does not know France, nor the order, nor the day. The anarchists and syndicalists compromise the very idea of a general strike in France. Official communism goes along with them, attempting to substitute adventurist goat-leaps for systematic revolutionary work.

The political activity of the masses, before it assumes a more decisive form, for a shorter or longer period may express itself in more frequent attendance at meetings, in broader distribution of Communist literature, in additional electoral votes, in increased membership in the party. Can the leadership adopt in advance a worked-out orientation based on a stormy tempo of development, come what may? No. It must be prepared for one or another tempo. Only in this way can the party, not altering its revolutionary direction, march in step with the class.

Sit-down strikers, Paris 1936

The Art of Orientation

The art of revolutionary leadership is primarily the art of correct political orientation. Under all conditions, communism prepares the political vanguard and through it the working class as a whole for the revolutionary seizure of power. But it does it differently in different fields of the labour movement and in different periods.

One of the most important elements in orientation is the determination of the temper of the masses, their activity and readiness for struggle. The mood of the masses, however, is not predetermined. It changes under the influence of certain laws of mass psychology that are set into motion by objective social conditions. The political state of the class is subject, within certain limits, to a quantitative determination press circulation, attendance at meetings, elections, demonstrations, strikes, etc. etc. In order to understand the dynamics of the process it is necessary to determine in what direction and why the mood of the working class is changing. Combining subjective and objective data, it is possible to establish a tentative perspective of the movement, that is, a scientifically-based prediction, without which a serious revolutionary struggle is in general inconceivable. But a prediction in politics does not have the character of a perfect blueprint, it is a working hypothesis. While leading the struggle in one direction or another, it is necessary to attentively follow the changes in the objective and subjective elements of the movement, in order to opportunely introduce corresponding corrections in tactics. Even though the actual development of the struggle never fully corresponds to the prognosis, that does not absolve us from making political predictions. One must not, however, get intox-

icated with finished schemata, but continually refer to the course of the historic process and adjust to its indications.

Centrism, which now rules the Comintern as an intermediate tendency living on the ideas of others, is by its very nature incapable of historic prognosis. In the Soviet republic, centrism became dominant under the conditions of reaction against October, at the ebb of the revolution, when empiricism and eclecticism allowed it to swim with the stream. And since it had already been announced that the course of development led automatically toward socialism in one country, this was enough to free centrism from the need of a world orientation.

But the Communist parties in the capitalist countries, which still have to struggle for power or to prepare for such a struggle, cannot live without prognosis. A correct, everyday orientation is a question of life or death for them. But they fail to learn this most important art because they are compelled to leap about at the command of the Stalinist bureaucracy. Bureaucratic centrism, which is able to live for a time off the capital of already captured proletarian power, is completely incapable of preparing the young parties for the conquest of power. In this lies the principal and most formidable contradiction of the Comintern today.

The history of the centrist leadership is the history of fatal mistakes in orientation. After the epigones missed the 1923 revolutionary situation in Germany, which profoundly changed the whole situation in Europe, the Comintern went through three stages of fatal errors.

The years 1924-25 were the period of ultraleft mistakes: the leadership saw an immediate revolutionary situation ahead of them when it was already past. In that period they called the Marxist-Leninists 'right-wingers' and 'liquidators'.

The years 1925-27 were the period of open opportunism, which coincided with a stormy rise of the labour movement in Britain and the revolution in China. In this period they called us nothing else than 'ultralefts'.

Finally, in 1928, the 'third period' is announced, which repeats the Zinovievist errors of 1924-5 on a higher historical plane. The 'third period' has not yet come to a close; on the contrary, it continues to rage, devastating organisations and people.

All three periods are characterised, not accidentally, by a steady decline at the leadership level. In the first period: Zinoviev, Bukharin, Stalin. In the second period: Stalin, Bukharin. In the third period: Stalin and – Molotov. There is a pattern in this.

Economic Strikes and Crises

"Wherein lies the basis of this revolutionary upsurge?" Molotov makes an attempt at analysis and immediately comes up with the fruits of his deliberations: "At the basis of the upsurge can only lie the growth of the general crisis of capitalism and the sharpening of the basic contradictions of the capitalist system".

Whoever does not agree is a "sorry liberal". But where is it written that at the basis of economic strikes "can only be" a crisis? Instead of analysing actual economic conditions and relating them to the present strike movement, Molotov proceeds in reverse order; enumerating half a dozen strikes, he comes to the conclusion about 'the growth' of the capitalist crisis and – lands in the clouds.

The rise of the strike movement in a number of countries was caused, as we know, by the improvement of the economic conjuncture in the last two years. This occurred primarily in France. True, the industrial upturn, which is far from general for all of Europe, remained limited until now even in France, and its future is far from certain. But in the life of the proletariat even a small conjunctural turn in one direction or another does not take place without having an effect. If workers are laid off daily, those who remain on the job do not have the same morale as they do when workers are being hired, even though in small numbers. The conjuncture has no less an influence on the ruling classes. In a period of an industrial revival, which always arouses workers' expectations for a still greater upturn in the future, the capitalists are inclined toward easing international contradictions, precisely in order to safeguard the development of the favourable conjuncture. And this is the 'spirit of Locarno and Geneva'.

In the past we have had a good illustration of the relation between conjunctural and fundamental factors.

From 1896 to 1913, there was, with few exceptions, a powerful industrial expansion. In 1913 this changed to a depression, which, for all informed people, clearly began the long drawn out crisis. The threat of a turn in the conjuncture, after the period of an unprecedented boom, created an extremely nervous mood in the ruling classes and served as a direct impetus to the war. Of course, the imperialist war grew out of basic contradictions of capitalism. This generalisation is known even to Molotov. But on the road to war there were a series of stages when the contradictions either sharpened or softened. The same applies to the class struggle of the workers.

In the prewar period, the basic and the conjunctural processes developed much more evenly than in the present period of abrupt changes and sharp downturns, when comparatively minor shifts in the economy breed tremendous leaps in politics. But from this it does not follow that it is possible to close one's eyes to the actual development and to repeat three incantations: "contradictions are sharpening", "the working masses are turning to the left", "war is imminent" – every day, every day. If our strategic line is determined *in the final analysis* by the inevitability of the growth of contradictions and the revolutionary radicalisation of the masses, then our tactics, which serve this strategy, proceed from the realistic evaluation of each period, each stage, each moment, which may be characterised by a temporary softening of contradictions, a rightward turn of the masses, a change in the relation of forces in favour of the bourgeoisie, etc. If the masses were to turn leftward uninterruptedly, any fool could lead them. Fortunately or unfortunately, matters are more complicated, particularly under the present inconstant, fluctuating, 'capricious' conditions.

The so-called general line is only a phrase unless we relate it to each alternating change in national and international conditions. How does the Comintern leadership act? Instead of evaluating conditions in all their concreteness, it smashes its head at every new stage and then consoles the masses for its subsequent defeat by a change of even expulsion of those on guard duty in the central committees of the national parties.

The Slogan of the General Strike

Entering with gusto into the "most tremendous revolutionary events", Molotov five minutes later returns to these strikes with the unexpected comment: "However, these mobilisations against capital and the reformism that serves it still have an isolated and episodic character".

It would seem that isolated and episodic strikes occur in different countries for quite different reasons but, in general, arising as they do out of a conjunctural upturn in the world market, are not yet precisely because they are isolated and episodic – "tremendous revolutionary events". But Molotov wants to unite the isolated strikes: a praiseworthy task. In the meantime, however, this is still the task, not an accomplished fact. To unite isolated strikes – Molotov teachers – is possible by means of mass political strikes. Yes, *under the necessary conditions*, the working class may be united in revolutionary mass strikes. According to Molotov, then, the mass strike is "that new, that basic and most characteristic problem which stands in the centre of the tactical tasks of the Communist parties at the given moment. And this means" – continues our strategist "that we have approached [this time only 'approached!] new and higher forms of class struggle". And in order to affirm definitively the Tenth Plenum religion of the third period, Molotov adds: "We *could not have* advanced the slogan of a mass political strike if *we had not* found ourselves in a period of ascent". His logic is truly unexampled! At first both feet entered the most tremendous revolutionary events. Later it appeared that facing the theoretical head stood only the task of the general strike – rather, not the general strike itself, but only the slogan. And from this, by inverse method, the conclusion is drawn that we "have approached the highest forms of class struggle". Because, don't you see, if we had not approached them, how could Molotov advance the slogan of the general strike? The whole conception is based on the word of honour of the newly made strategist. And the powerful representatives of the parties respectfully listened to the self-confident blockhead and on roll call replied: "Right you are!"

At any rate, we learn that all countries, from Britain to China – with France, Germany and Poland at the head – are now ready for the slogan of the general strike. We are finally convinced that not a trace is left of the unhappy law of uneven development. We might manage to be reconciled to this, if they would only tell us for what political aims the slogan of the general strike is advanced in every country. It should at least be mentioned that the workers are not at all inclined toward general strikes just for the sake of general strikes. Anarcho-syndicalism broke its head on the failure to understand this. A gen-

eral strike may sometimes have the character of a protest demonstration. Such a strike may occur when some clear, sometimes unexpected, event stirs the imagination of the masses and produces the necessity for unanimous resistance. But a *protest strike demonstration* is not yet, in the real sense of the word, a *revolutionary political strike*: it is only one of the preparatory rehearsals for it. As far as the revolutionary political strike is concerned, in the real sense of the word, it constitutes, so to speak, the final act in the struggle of the proletariat for power. Paralysing the normal functions of the capitalist state, the general strike poses the question: *Who is master in the house?* This question is decided only by armed force. That is why a revolutionary strike which does not lead to an armed uprising ends finally with the defeat of the proletariat. If Molotov's words regarding revolutionary political strikes and "highest forms of struggle" have any sense at all, it is that simultaneously, or almost simultaneously, throughout the world, the revolutionary situation has reached maturity and faces the Communist parties of the West, East, North and South with the general strike as the immediate prologue to armed uprising.

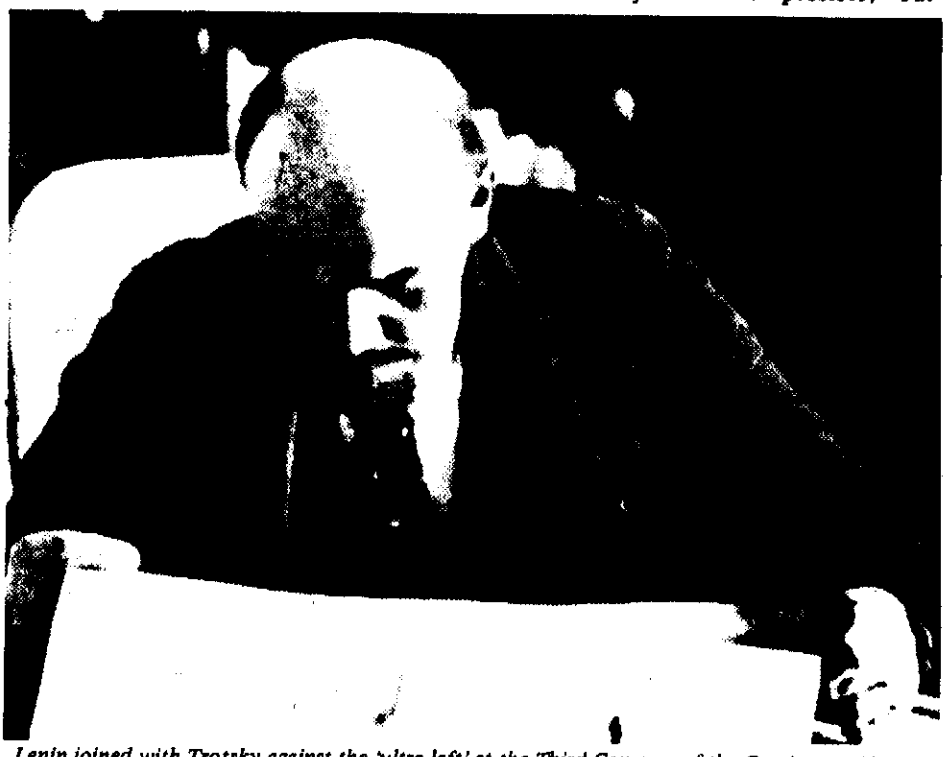
It is sufficient to review Molotov's strategy of the 'third period' to reveal its absurdity.

Speech to the Third Comintern Congress

THE RECIPROCAL relation between boom and crisis in economy and the development of revolution is of great interest to us not only from the point of theory but above all practically. Many of you will recall that Marx and Engels wrote in 1851 — when the boom was at its peak — that it was necessary at that time to recognise that the Revolution of 1848 had terminated, or, at any rate, had been interrupted until the next crisis. Engels wrote that while the crisis of 1847 was the mother of revolution, the boom of 1849-51 was the mother of triumphant counter-revolution. It would, however, be very one-sided and utterly false to interpret these judgments in the sense that a crisis invariably engenders revolutionary action while a boom, on the contrary, pacifies the working class.

The Revolution of 1848 was not born out of the crisis. The latter merely provided the last impetus. Essentially the revolution grew out of the contradictions between the needs of capitalist development and the fetters of the semi-feudal social and state system. The irresolute and half-way Revolution of 1848 did, however, sweep away the remnants of the regime of guilds and serfdom and thereby extended the framework of capitalist development. Under these conditions and these conditions alone, the boom of 1851 marked the beginning of an entire epoch of capitalist prosperity which lasted till 1873.

In citing Engels it is very dangerous to overlook these basic facts. For it was precisely after 1850, when Marx and Engels made their observations, that there set in not a normal or regular situation, but an era of capitalist *Sturm und Drang* (storm and stress) for which the soil had been cleared by the Revolution of 1848. This is of decisive importance here. This storm and-stress era, during which prosperity and the favourable conjuncture were very strong, while the crisis was merely superficial and short-lived — it was precisely this period that ended with revolution. At issue here is not whether an improvement in the conjuncture is possible, but whether the fluctuation of the conjuncture are proceeding along an ascending or descending curve. This is the most important aspect of the whole question.



Lenin joined with Trotsky against the 'ultra-left' at the Third Congress of the Comintern, 1921

Can we expect the same effects to follow the economic upswing of 1919-20? Under no circumstances. The extension of the framework of capitalist development was not even involved here. Does this mean that a new commercial-industrial upswing is excluded in the future, and even in the more or less near future? Not at all! I have already said that so long as capitalism remains alive it continues to inhale and exhale. But in the epoch which we have entered — the epoch of retribution for the drain and destruction of wartime, the epoch of levelling out *in reverse* — upswings can be only of a superficial and primarily speculatory character, while the crises become more and more prolonged and deeper-going.

Historical development has not led to the victorious proletarian dictatorship in Central and Western Europe. But it is the most brazen and at the same time the most stupid lie to attempt to conclude from this, as do the reformists, that the economic equilibrium of the capitalist world has been surreptitiously restored. This is not claimed even by the crassest reactionaries, who are really capable of thinking, for example, Professor Hoetzch. In his review of the year this professor says in effect that the year 1920 did not bring victory to the revolution, but neither did it restore capitalist world economy... the curtailment of production continues... profound economic depression.

On the basis of this economic depression the bourgeoisie will be compelled to exert stronger and stronger pressure upon the working class. This is already to be seen in the cutting of wages which has started in the full-blooded capitalist countries: in America and in England, and then throughout all of Europe. This leads to great struggles over wages. Our task is to extend these struggles, by basing ourselves on a clear understanding of the economic situation. This is quite obvious.

It might be asked whether the great struggles over wages, a classic example of which is the miners' strike in England, will lead automatically to the world revolution, to the final civil war and the struggle for the conquest of political power. However, it is not Marxist to pose the

question in such a way. We have no automatic guarantees of development. But when the crisis is replaced by a transitory favourable conjuncture, what will this signify for our development? Many comrades say that if an improvement takes place in this epoch it would be fatal for our revolution. No, under no circumstances. In general, there is no automatic dependence of the proletarian revolutionary movement upon a crisis. There is only a dialectical interaction. It is essential to understand this.

Let us look at the relations in Russia. The 1905 revolution was defeated. The workers bore great sacrifices. In 1906 and 1907 the last revolutionary flare-ups occurred and by the autumn of 1907 a great world crisis broke out. The signal for it was given by Wall Street's Black Friday. Throughout 1907 and 1908 and 1909 the most terrible crisis reigned in Russia too. It killed the movement completely, because the workers had suffered so greatly during the struggle that this depression could act only to dishearten them. There were many disputes among us over what would lead to the revolution: a crisis or a favourable conjuncture?

At that time many of us defended the viewpoint that the Russian revolutionary movement could be regenerated only by a favourable economic conjuncture. And that is what took place. In 1910, 1911, and 1912, there was an improvement in our economic situation and a favourable conjuncture which acted to reassemble the demoralised and devitalised workers who had lost their courage. They realised again how important they were in production; and they passed over to an offensive, first in the economic field and later in the political field as well. On the eve of the war the working class had become so consolidated, thanks to this period of prosperity, that it was able to pass to a direct assault.

And should we today, in the period of the greatest exhaustion of the working class resulting from the crisis and the continual struggle, fail to gain victory, which is possible, then a change in the conjuncture and a rise in living standards would not have a harmful effect upon the revolution, but would be on the contrary highly propitious. Such a change could prove harmful only in the event that the favourable conjuncture marked the beginning of a long epoch of prosperity. But a long period of prosperity would signify that an expansion of the market had been attained, which is absolutely excluded. For after all, capitalist economy already embraces the terrestrial globe. Europe's impoverishment and America's sumptuous renascence on the huge war market corroborate the conclusion that this prosperity cannot be restored through the capitalist development of China, Siberia, South America and other countries, where American capitalism is of course seeking and creating outlet markets but on a scale in no way commensurate to Europe. It follows that we are on the eve of a period of depression; and this is incontestable.

With such a perspective, a mitigation of the crisis would not signify a mortal blow to the revolution but would only enable the working class to gain a breathing spell during which it could undertake to reorganise its ranks in order subsequently to pass over to attack on a firmer basis. This is one of the possibilities. The content of the other possibility is this: that the crisis may turn from acute into chronic, become intensified and endure for many years. All this is not excluded. The possibility remains open in such a situation that the working class would gather its last forces and, having learned from experience, conquer state power in the most important capitalist countries. The only thing excluded is the automatic restoration of capitalist equilibrium on a new foundation and a capitalist upswing in the next few years. This is absolutely impossible under the conditions of modern economic stagnation.

Here we approach the question of social equilibrium. After all, it is frequently said — and this is the guiding thought not only of a Cunow but also of Hilferding — that capitalism is being automatically restored on a new foundation. Faith in automatic evolution is the most important and most characteristic trait of opportunism.

If we grant — and let us grant it for the moment — that the working class fails to rise in revolutionary struggle, but allows the bourgeoisie the opportunity to rule the world's destiny for a long number of years, say, two or three decades, then assuredly some sort of new equilibrium will be established. Europe will be thrown violently into reverse gear. Millions of European workers will die from unemployment and malnutrition. The United States will be compelled to reorient itself on the world market, reconvert its industry, *and suffer curtailment for a considerable period*. Afterwards, after a new world division of labour is thus established in agony for 15 or 20 or 25 years, a new epoch of capitalist upswing might perhaps ensue...

In short, speaking theoretically and abstractly, the restoration of capitalist equilibrium is possible. But it does not take place in a social and political vacuum — it can take place only through the classes. Every step, no matter how tiny, toward the restoration of equilibrium in economic life is a blow to the unstable social equilibrium upon which the Messrs Capitalists still continue to maintain themselves. And this the most important thing.

Делегаты первого съезда Коммунистического Интернационала в Москве
6 марта 1919 г.

The founding of the Communist International: Moscow 1919

Communists go for 'bishops and brickies'

Chris Reynolds looks at the Communist Party's conflicts and crises

THE Communist Party's daily, the Morning Star, has struck a militant tone in its comments on the proposed National Economic Assessment. In an editorial on March 21, it called for "class struggle, not class collaboration", and argued that: "Class collaboration cannot solve the crisis in the interests of the working people. It always works in the interests of big business".

Returning to the theme on Thursday 24th, it declared that "the way forward requires an intensification of class struggle, not another dose of the old discredited remedy — class collaboration". "It is almost unbelievable that those on the left in the TUC general council could have allowed themselves to be bamboozled into voting for this document on the basis of assurances that it did not mean wage restraint".

But the *unanimous* General Council vote to approve this re-run social contract included the Communist Party's most prominent trade unionists, Ken Gill and George Guy. And by the next day, Friday 25th, the class-struggle message had faded away. A feature article by Peter Carter, recently chosen to be the CP's new industrial organiser, was headlined: "Jobs march can unite bishops and brickies". The People's March for Jobs, Carter argued, "provides the opportunity for the construction of the broadest possible alliance of all who agree with the central demand [*'to make the ending of unemployment the number one priority'*], which of ecurse ranges from bishops to bricklayers, from non-Thatcherite Tories to revoluticnary Socialists".

So much for the idea that "class collaboration cannot solve the crisis". What Carter proposes is not a class-struggle alliance round a single, or a few, precise demands, but the silencing of any mention of class struggle for jobs for the sake of securing class collaboration around empty phrases.

The position of Gill and Guy, and the CP line on the Jobs March, epitomise the political crisis that lies behind the continued decline of the CP. Its membership is now down to 15,000.

Tied by a strategy which essentially focuses on winning positions, friends, and influence in the trade union bureaucracy, the CP has become an external 'fifth wheel' for the 'centre left' in the Labour Party. Its identification with the USSR has become a hindrance and, to many CP members, an embarrassment. Its strong network in certain industries, which made it attractive to some trade union militants, is gradually decaying and not being rebuilt. There is now a sizeable and vocal current in the Labour Party consistently to the left of the CP: as against that left current, the CP is identified more with people like the Labour Party's new general secretary, Jim Mortimer,

Mick Costello

with his Stalinist ideological formation and his background as a full-time official in TASS.

There is less and less reason why anyone should join the CP rather than the Labour Party. And that fact is the background to the internal conflict now racking the CP.

It blew up last year over an article in the CP magazine Marxism Today. The author — Tony Lane (a non-CPer) — concluded by arguing that minor perks and privileges were corrupting a section of shop stewards. This was close to the bone for many CP senior stewards and convenors who had been heavily involved in 'participation' — and even more so for CP full-time trade union officials. The Fleet Street press picked up on it, which increased the indignation.

CP industrial organiser Mick Costello issued a statement condemning the article, and a fierce debate followed in the Morning Star letters column. Eventually the CP executive committee declared in favour of Marxism Today editor Martin Jacques, and soon afterwards Costello resigned as industrial organiser. The resignation was for 'domestic reasons', Costello said, but those 'domestic reasons' proved no obstacle to him taking on the job of Morning Star industrial correspondent from March 7.

As industrial correspondent he will work under the Morning Star's editor, Tony Chater, who inclines to Costello's side in the internal conflict — not under the more 'Eurocommunist' executive. New industrial organiser Peter Carter is more identified with the executive's line.

In this conflict the basic politics of the CP are not in question. The CP is moving along a road from Stalinism to social democracy, a road which at no point leads to real class-struggle politics. The issue is between those who think it is moving too fast, and those who think it is not moving fast enough.

The latter current has one success to its credit: since Martin Jacques, a determined 'moderniser', took over as editor of Marxism Today, its circulation has risen rapidly, and is now 11,500 as against 5,000 in 1979.

But the more conservative wing in the CP could well point out that to develop a circulation for a theoretical magazine on the basis of refining reformism and having CP academics float ideas in favour of incomes policy or a Labour-Alliance coalition, is one thing: to stem the decline of the CP's industrial strength on that basis is impossible.

The problem is that neither the modernisers nor the conservatives are what they claim to be. The supposed fresh new thinking of the modernisers differs from what Bernstein and Kautsky wrote 80 years ago mostly by being more pompous and less serious; their anti-Stalinism stops well short of any programme of working class action against the bureaucracy. The conservatives are not defending proletarian politics, but a political tradition imbued with class collaboration since the mid-'30s and with stultifying bureaucratism for longer.

The CP — *both wings* — is a force for class collaboration, not class struggle.

Workers Socialist Review

Magazine of the Workers' Socialist League

April/May 1983

(Affiliated to the Trotskyist International Liaison Committee)

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