

# the next step

review of the Revolutionary Communist Party

Reagan,  
recession and  
rearmament  
p 14-17



# FIGHT



# TO

# THE

# FINISH

# the next step

monthly review of the Revolutionary Communist Party  
No 53 November

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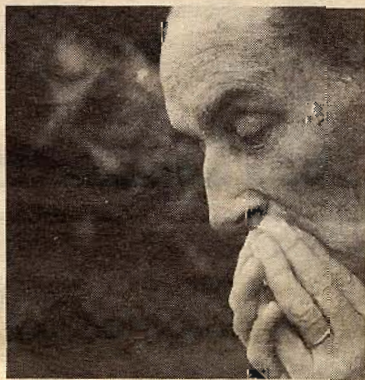
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## Fighting fund

We want to take *the next step* to a weekly. We need your money to take us there.

By 14 October we had raised £11 654 towards our £25 000 target. We need to raise nearly £5000 a month to reach our target in January. The regional breakdown below shows how we got £3479 in the four weeks up to 14 October.

Make an investment in the future of the working class! Rush donations to BM RCP, London WC1N 3XX. Cheques payable to RCP Association

Edinburgh					£117.84
Glasgow					£199.29
Leeds					£124.60
Sheffield					£166.88
Bradford					£315.94
Manchester					£147.83
Liverpool					£207.29
Cardiff					£143.30
Birmingham					£204.95
Coventry					£315.85
Southwark					£291.47
Wandsworth					£154.82
Lewisham					£ 97.89
Camden					£205.88
Islington					£288.20
Hackney					£403.48
Others					£ 93.41
<b>Total</b>					<b>£3478.92</b>

# Solidarity action



Stepping out: RCP supporters supporting the miners

● On Friday 5 October RCP supporters from Southwark, Lambeth, Wandsworth and Lewisham protested outside the national headquarters of the Department of Health and Social Security at Elephant and Castle.

We called for workers in the DHSS to refuse to implement rules for supplementary benefit payments which 'deem' striking miners to get £15 a week strike pay.

Our protest certainly upset the DHSS management, which issued a circular warning staff to have nothing to do with us. Despite these threats, sympathetic workers gave us their support.

We urge our supporters in the CPSA to get the following motion passed in their branches, get delegated to the national Broad Left conference on 2, 3 November and the national CPSA conference next year, get in touch with us and get involved.

'This union:

1) Deplores the action by the government/DHSS in withholding benefits from striking miners.

2) Instructs its members in the DHSS to pay out full benefits to all miners on strike.

3) Instructs its members to take all-out industrial action in response to any victimisations resulting from implementing this policy.'

● Bradford RCP supporters in Nupe took Selby miners and their wives to the 4 October branch meeting and collected £30 before moving on to a transport workers' meeting in the same building where we raised a further £50.

● On Saturday 6 October London RCP supporters organised a miners' motorcade through North London. We collected money and food from Saturday shoppers and theatre group Doppleganger performed sketches outlining recent events in the strike.

● Camberwell Green was hit by a bumper collection for striking miners on Saturday 13 October. Defying threats of arrests and a Camberwell magistrate's ruling that collecting money for miners is illegal, Southwark RCP supporters collected over £75 in just over two hours.

● Portsmouth RCP supporters are refusing to be intimidated off the streets after two were arrested collecting money for the miners. We are mobilising for a vocal anti-police protest outside the law courts on Tuesday 30 October at 9.15am and we will continue fighting for the right to help the miners fight.

● On Monday 8 October Islington revolutionary communists held a lightning picket at Highbury Magistrates Court where two miners from Keresley pit near Coventry appeared after being arrested the previous Saturday collecting in Camden Town.

# Keep the lights on for the miners!

Striking miners and their families have discovered that the coercive forces of the police and the courts are not the only weapons the state has ranged against them. They also face economic coercion in the form of gas and electricity disconnections.

Six striking miners and their families in Deane Street, Darton, near Barnsley, recently received letters from the Yorkshire Electricity Board threatening disconnection if their bills weren't paid within seven days. The letters warned that officials could enter homes by force with police assistance to cut off supplies. In nearby Cudworth 53 year old miner Bernard Brooke from Houghton Main colliery, has been forced to get by with candles for two months.

The gas and electricity union, the general, municipal and boiler-makers', agreed at its annual conference in June

not to disconnect gas and electricity supplies to striking miners. In practice, however, both the GMBATU and the NUM have done little to ensure that this elementary solidarity action is adhered to.

RCP supporters in Leeds have been organising a 'no-payment' campaign. We successfully stopped the electricity board from installing an electric slot machine at the home of Edwin Jimmeson from Allerton Bywater colliery.

Local GMBATU officials hauled at our demand that no weekly payment, even a token one, should be contemplated. Leeds GMBATU official Les Atkinson argued that the YEB was in a difficult position and that 'satisfactory arrangements' had already been made with 1500 miners.

A general and municipal workers' official at the

Gelderd Road YEB depot in Leeds, told us that the principle of non-payment was dangerous because it could be extended to other groups such as the unemployed. He argued that any concessions to individual miners should be kept quiet to prevent others 'taking advantage'. RCP supporters discovered that rank and file workers at Gelderd Road were in the dark about the threatened cut-offs to striking miners. We arranged further meetings with striking miners to discuss what action to take.

Edwin Jimmeson is now paying £1 a week of his electricity bill but says 'there will come a time when I won't be able to pay the pound'. Effective solidarity from rank and file gas and electricity workers can stop this campaign of intimidation and ensure that striking miners are not left out in the cold.

David Osgood

# After weeks of talks, miners need... Action not words

The miners have had talks with the coal board and talks with Acas. They have had talks with the TUC and talks with the Labour Party.

When the latest round of talks collapsed the miners' leaders appealed for anybody to talk to Ian MacGregor to make him see reason. But no amount of talking will persuade the employers to withdraw their pit closure programme.

Talks will not bring British industry to a standstill and force the government to back down. Talks will not feed the miners and their families through the winter. Nor will talks protect miners against police attacks, fines and prison sentences and victimisation by the coal board. As the miners' strike becomes a dogged fight to the finish, the miners now more than ever need action not words.

## ● ACTION to make the strike effective

The miners cannot afford to have pickets tied down outside their own pits keeping a few scabs out. Picketing must be stepped up and must involve more strikers in action to make the strike hit energy supplies to industry.

The miners need to take steps to make picketing effective. Miners must stop the police from smashing picket lines and making it easy for scabs to undermine the strike. Basic defensive measures are necessary to prevent miners from being injured or arrested.

Winning effective sympathetic action — not just empty gestures or resolutions of support — is vital to the miners. Keith Hammond, a miner at the Prince of Wales colliery, told us how the power union leaders set out to undermine attempts to build rank and file solidarity between local miners and power workers at Eggborough:

'Recently we organised a series of unofficial meetings between the eight unions involved and miners. As soon as the leadership of the unions heard about it they clamped down. I've been warned off trying to organise things, like

this. There is now going to be a series of officially organised meetings.'

The unions will do everything to prevent it, but rank and file links with workers in transport, power supply and other sections of industry and services are the only way to win real solidarity action.

## ● ACTION to ensure supplies of money, food and clothing

Many miners and their families are already facing real hardship. Many are finding it harder to collect money and food from public contributions. These collections need to be stepped up and made into part of a wider drive to win political solidarity with the miners.

Local councils, especially Labour councils have a particularly important role to play. They can provide transport and other facilities to assist picketing. They can also provide practical assistance to mining communities in problems of housing, food and clothing for the winter.

Council workers and workers in social security should make sure that miners get every benefit they are entitled to, and fight to give them even more.

## ● ACTION to prevent cut-offs

In every area miners need to establish direct rank and file links with the unions involved in disconnecting gas and electricity supplies. Vague national agreements have proved insufficient to prevent cut-offs. Miners should also fight against the installation of pre-payment meters. For penniless miners this amounts to a method of cutting themselves off.

## ● ACTION to defend miners facing trial

The NUM has been lamen-

tably slow in organising any coordinated resistance against the legal offensive on the miners. Miners need to organise a campaign of collective defiance of restrictive bail conditions and non-payment of fines. At the very least miners need effective legal representation and full union backing which in many cases have been lacking.

## ● ACTION in solidarity with miners in prison

The few score miners who have already been imprisoned in the course of the strike are the real heroes of the NUM. Yet the NUM has done little to prevent their imprisonment and still less to get them out.

We need protests over the imprisonment of every miner. We should make it clear to the world that workers the state labels as criminals are respected as class fighters by the labour movement.

A central demand in any further negotiations with the bosses must be an amnesty for all prisoners of the miners' strike before the NUM agrees any return to work.

## ● ACTION against victimisations

Several hundred striking miners have already been sacked by the coal board in the course of the dispute. Miners who have been convicted of picket line offences have been sacked. Some — like Iain Watson from Bilston Glen in Scotland — have received dismissal notices before they have been to court.

In Lothian and Fife, 19 of those arrested and convicted have been dismissed by the coal board, including five prominent local NUM leaders. The reinstatement of all victimised workers must be another condition for a return to work. George Bidwillie, NUM delegate at Polmaise colliery in Scotland, told us that eight men were sacked right at the start of the strike in April:

'It's a condition of settlement



'I've been warned off trying to organise things': Yorkshire miner Keith Hammond talks to the next step reporter Inez Landa

that they are reinstated. If the strike was finished tomorrow we would not go back to work until they do.'

For six months the leaders of the NUM have put their faith in talks with the employers. Their strategy has been to use the determination and resilience of the miners as a lever in negotiations. They have tried to persuade the coal board and the government to adopt a different management policy for the coal industry. This strategy has clearly reached the end of the road. Mick Adamson, a miner at Selby in Yorkshire, told us his views on the talks and Scargill's strike strategy:

'I will never agree with Arthur Scargill going in to talk to Acas. The Plan for Coal is wrong. They are talking about compromise on the basics. We all know that when they've

compromised Margaret Thatcher and Neil Kinnock will stand up and applaud and we'll know there's been a complete sell-out of the working people of this country. It's a disgrace — Acas should never have been allowed in to this. Acas is a body that resolves arguments for government, no more, no less.'

The NUM has spent eight months talking about the coal board's levels of output and investment and market prospects. Meanwhile the employers and the government have been fighting all out to smash the NUM. It's high time the NUM stopped worrying about how to make the British coal industry profitable. Instead the miners' leaders should set about defending the miners' class interests as forcefully as MacGregor and the Tories

have pursued theirs.

It is getting late in the day but there is still time to change course. Indeed, the miners' hopes of rescuing something from this dispute depend on pursuing a different strategy.

The NUM leaders have failed to achieve a satisfactory compromise in talks because the bosses are not looking for a compromise. They are fighting to win. Miners have no alternative but to pursue the same objective.

If the miners put their faith in their own class and go out to involve other miners and other workers in action against the bosses and their system then the Tories could still be forced to make major concessions. The militant stand of the imprisoned miners will have been vindicated. And the sacrifices of the last eight months will not have been in vain.

## Proud to be a prisoner of the class war

Guy Bennett, a 22 year old miner from Markham Main colliery, Armthorpe, is one prisoner of the class war. Guy was very active in the strike until he was arrested and framed for organising an anti-police demonstration after the police ran riot through Armthorpe in June.

### Branded

He was convicted on trumped-up charges and imprisoned in Armley jail, Leeds, before being transferred to Rudgate open prison, Wetherby.

Like thousands of other striking miners, Guy has been branded a criminal for choosing to stand up against the government, the coal board, the police and the courts. But he refuses to be cowed by the forces of law and order:

'You know I'm here because of that march. That is all. Just remember that and be proud. They won't get me down.'

Guy's mother told us that the police were trying to use her son's imprisonment to intimidate militant miners

and keep them off the streets — but they wouldn't succeed:

'We won't stop fighting until all imprisoned miners are released and every victimised miner is taken back.'

The miners' leaders must show the same resolve in defence of their members.

### Solidarity

Yorkshire RCP supporters have been organising solidarity protests for Guy and other imprisoned miners. And we have been campaign-

ing on the streets, in workplaces and in colleges to win political support for their cause.

● Our mass street meeting in Sheffield city centre appealed to workers to take sides with striking miners against British law and order. Local police were so incensed at the enthusiastic response that they threatened to 'break legs' and use other unspecified violence if we did not disperse. Outraged bystanders challenged the police and defended our right to be there.

● On Saturday 20 October we organised a Yorkshire-

wide protest outside Rudgate open prison, Wetherby, in solidarity with Guy and fellow prisoners. Nearly 100 miners and their wives, students and trade unionists vocally demonstrated their support for the miners and opposition to the bosses' law.

● On 9 November, Yorkshire RCP supporters are holding a champagne reception for family, friends and supporters to celebrate Guy's release from prison.

### Join us!

The RCP is organising nationwide pickets and

protests in defence of class war prisoners. We are demanding:

● that the NUM organise a mass defiance of the legal offensive

● that every arrested miner be guaranteed total union support before, during and after his case is heard, no matter what his 'crime'

● that NUM leaders insist on an amnesty for all prisoners of the class war in all negotiations.

Anybody who would like to get involved in the campaign should get in touch with local sellers of the next step or phone 01-729 0414.



Brighton bomb blast: the occasion for another bout of anti-Irish bigotry

On 12 October an IRA bomb came close to assassinating Margaret Thatcher and half of her Cabinet in their Brighton conference hotel.

In the days that followed the explosion, Britain's leading public opinion-makers came close to bursting blood vessels in their efforts to stir popular outrage against the Irish republican movement.

The establishment's fury at the IRA attack was heightened by the sensitive nature of the target (see page 24). But the heated anti-Irish rantings of press and politicians in the wake of Brighton are nothing new. This has been the standard response whenever the Irish War has hit Britain since the introduction of the Prevention of Terrorism Act, shortly after the Birmingham pub bombings, 10 years ago this month.

Most people in Britain are only vaguely aware that the Prevention of Terrorism Act (PTA) exists. Yet for 10 years this draconian law has been used to dictate how they view events like the Brighton bombing.

Both Tory and Labour governments have wielded the PTA's powers of detention and deportation without charge to terrorise opponents of the Irish War into silence.

By effectively making Irish republicanism illegal, the PTA has allowed the defenders of British imperialism to monopolise public opinion on Ireland since it became law in November 1974.

#### Extraordinary

On 21 November 1974 Birmingham's Mulberry Bush

and Tavern in the Town bars were wrecked by explosions. The Birmingham pub bombings killed 21 people and injured 160 more.

Eight days later the Labour government introduced the Prevention of Terrorism Act.

**An unnoticed exchange of government letters from 1974 illustrates the thinking behind the PTA. Three weeks before the act became law the Ministry of Defence wrote to Alford council in Lincolnshire requesting that the name of a local soldier killed in Northern Ireland be removed from Alford's war memorial.**

**The Ministry argued that 'Army action in support of civil authority should not be confused with war'. It warned against the consequences of admitting that British troops were not civil peacekeepers but foreign aggressors in Ireland: .**

**'If one war memorial is added to in this way other towns may follow the example, and in areas where there is a large Irish connection it may promote partisan action.'**

*(The Times, 9 November 1974)*

**Whitehall's fears were never realised. The PTA has stamped on any 'partisan action' in support of Irish freedom.**

# Ten years of the Prevention of Terrorism Act From Birmingham to Brighton

The IRA was banned and anybody 'reasonably suspected' of 'terrorism' could be locked up for a week without charge or kicked out of Britain without any evidence.

Police chiefs objected that writing such 'extraordinary powers' into law was an unnecessary embarrassment. The PTA would only make public existing Special Branch practice. Months before its introduction, Scotland Yard held Irishmen they accused of bombing London's Old Bailey incommunicado and without charge for four days.

Unlike its top cops, however, the political establishment was motivated by broader concerns than the technicalities of police practice. It passed the PTA not as a criminal law to convict IRA volunteers, but as an ideological weapon. Its primary aim was to insulate British politics from the destabilising effects of the Irish War and to silence the Irish community within Britain.

#### Protests

For more than 18 months before the Birmingham bombings, sporadic protests against the war rocked areas with large Irish communities such as London and the Midlands.

After Bloody Sunday in January 1972, when British troops shot dead 14 Irish demonstrators in Derry, thousands of Irish people joined a protest demonstration from North London and

clashed violently with police in Downing Street.

In the week of the pub bombings, Birmingham was hit by a row over plans for a march to commemorate IRA volunteer James McDaid, killed during a bomb attack in Coventry. Labour Home Secretary Roy Jenkins banned the march and bused in 1300 extra police to keep the lid on Birmingham's large Irish community. The Prevention of Terrorism Act was introduced against this background. The pub bombings provided the excuse for the PTA, but not its cause. Westminster wanted a legal measure which could help win the war on the home front by branding its opponents as criminals and legitimising their repression.

#### Branded

Between November 1974 and

mid-1984, 5850 mainly Irish people were held under the PTA. Only 143 of them — two per cent — were charged under the Act. A further 244 were deported back to Ireland. The rest were held for up to a week without charge, interrogated with no legal right to silence, and branded for life as 'bomb suspects'.

The fear of being dragged out of bed in the early hours by armed police has gagged political debate on the war among Irish people in Britain. British workers have largely escaped this terror treatment because they have acquiesced to the ruling class version of events in Ireland. This is the real success story of the PTA.

By isolating the Irish community from the mainstream of British political life, the PTA has allowed the establishment to decide the terms on which British people discuss the

**The PTA has ruined the lives of countless Irish men and women, and ended others altogether. In 1981 the Irish Freedom Movement campaigned for the release of Leo O'Neill and other Middlesex Polytechnic students detained under the Act. O'Neill's brutal treatment at the hands of the Special Branch under the PTA broke him physically and mentally. He never recovered from his ordeal. In May 1984 he leapt to his death from a block of flats in Newry — murdered by the PTA.**

war in the North of Ireland.

### Propaganda

The PTA legitimises hatred and violence against Irish people in Britain. Every time a bomb goes off in Birmingham, London, or Brighton, police use the PTA to raid Irish communities and pick up Irish travellers at British ports. The Act provides the legal back-up for bomb warnings on public

by the British establishment. To be an Irish nationalist is a crime, to be a screaming British jingo a virtue.

Today six Irishmen are serving life sentences for the Birmingham bombings. They have consistently denied any involvement. They were convicted on the strength of 'confessions' beaten out of them so severely that the state was forced to go through the motions of charging their

extends beyond encouraging anti-Irish pogroms by former squaddies and bar-room brawlers. The success of the Act has given the establishment free rein to convince more advanced workers that the Irish War is a series of irrational events beyond their comprehension. It has ensured that left-wing workers remain too confused to challenge the imperialist consensus which dominates British public opinion.

Academics, journalists and politicians use every medium to impress upon British audiences that Ireland is a 'complex' issue which defies rational explanation or 'simplistic solutions' such as getting Britain out:

The foreword to a recent major book produced by assorted university lecturers sums up the aim of all establishment writing on the war:

'No panacea to the current problem of Northern Ireland is offered, facile solutions are eschewed. Our objective is to offer some feeling for the complexity of the problem. No-one reading this book will come away with the impression that peace will be brought to Ulster easily or quickly.' (Yonah Alexander and Alan O'Day, *Terrorism in Ireland*)

'Our objective', they might just as well have said, 'is to confuse you'.

Media reporting of the Irish War follows a similar pattern. Violence in Ireland and bombs in Britain are reported out of all context, as a mindless sequence of explosions and executions. One radical sociologist noted Fleet Street's reaction to the IRA's assassination of Lord Mountbatten in 1979:

'The act of killing was widely interpreted as irrational, as

that of "evil men" (*Daily Mail*), "wicked assassins" (*The Sun*), "psychopathic thugs" (*Daily Express*), "murdering bastards" (*Daily Star*), as "cowardly and senseless" (*Financial Times*), and as the product of "diseased minds rather than political calculation" (*Daily Telegraph*). (Philip Schlesinger 'Terrorism, the media and the liberal-democratic state', *Social Research*, Spring 1981)

Establishment spokesmen will go to bizarre lengths to cloud the issues in the Irish War for British consumption. New Northern Ireland secretary and part-time novelist Douglas Hurd once wrote a 'thriller' about the IRA in which a British brigadier ascribes the cause of the 'troubles' to Irish grandmothers:

'They keep them at home, the Catholics, I mean. No question of old people's homes. So they sit there by the fire, night after night, telling all the old stories spreading all the old lies. That's why the different kinds of Irish go on hating each other.' (*Vote to kill*)

The prose may lack something, but the political message is clear enough.

### War

The British establishment has achieved a remarkable victory in presenting Ireland as an unfathomable enigma. For in reality, the situation in Ireland is eminently comprehensible. There is a war on. There are two sides. You have to take one or the other.

Britain, aided by its Loyalist allies, is fighting to maintain its domination over Ireland by preserving the Six Counties as part of the United Kingdom. The nationalist community, represented by

the IRA, is fighting to liberate Northern Ireland from British rule and to reunite the Irish nation. Bombing campaigns in Britain are an extension of the Irish people's war into the imperialist heartland.

Throughout the 10 years that the establishment has used the PTA to deny the existence of the Irish liberation struggle, events in Northern Ireland have underlined the reality of the war.

In November 1974, 20 republican prisoners escaped from the Maze prison in a mass breakout. One of the escapees, IRA lieutenant Hugh Coney, was shot down in cold blood by British Army guards. The next day six IRA volunteers opened fire on a British patrol in Crossmaglen, killing two soldiers. Nationalist workers struck and storekeepers shut up shop in protest at Coney's murder.

The same cycle of British repression and Irish resistance continues today. Two years ago this month Britain launched a police/Army shoot-to-kill campaign which has so far claimed 22 victims. In response, the IRA has stepped up its Border campaign against the Royal Ulster Constabulary and Ulster Defence Regiment.

Why has no force arisen in Britain which could use the day-to-day events of the war to cut through all the ruling class hype about psychopaths and complexities?

### Awe

The PTA has done a good job on the Irish community. But what of the left wing of the British labour movement? Few members of the British left have spent a week locked in Paddington Green police station. Nevertheless, the left stands in awe of the

ideological influence of the PTA.

For 10 years, British left wingers have failed to confront the public consensus backing the state's role in Ireland. They have equivocated about taking sides against Britain in the Irish War.

Taking sides against Britain means supporting the Irish people's right to self-determination — and their right to fight for it. It means standing up with the Irish people when IRA bombs hit British streets and the establishment's propaganda machine starts spewing out its murderous filth.

The British left has always balked at the magnitude of the task. It has sought to dodge the central issue of republican violence. Today, the Labour left campaigns against the consequences of the war at home — the PTA and anti-Irish prejudices — in isolation from their cause — the national liberation struggle.

### Oppression

Labour Party left wingers oppose the PTA not as the British face of the Irish War, but as an unnecessary assault on civil liberties. They ignore the ideological context in which it was introduced and condemn the Act as a break in the democratic tradition of British policing. In essence, the left's position is the same as that of the police chiefs in 1974.

Opposing anti-Irish sentiments is the particular preserve of left-wing Labour councils. A recent GLC report on the Irish community in London rails against 'anti-Irish racism'. This is a convenient device for improving the left's electoral appeal while ignoring the real issue of the national, not racial, oppression suffered by the Irish people.

The crucial flaw in the left's approach is not that it is 'unprincipled'. It is impractical. The PTA and the prejudices it spawns cannot be challenged by avoiding the central issue of the war. Any liberal sympathy the left's campaigns attract will disappear the moment a bomb explodes, and the question of whose side you are on in the Irish War becomes the only one that counts.

The Irish Freedom Movement has learned the lessons of the past decade. We put the reality of the war at the centre of all our propaganda and activity. We refuse to bow to the establishment by criticising the methods the Irish people use in their fight for freedom. In the aftermath of the Brighton bombing, we launched a campaign against the state's use of the PTA to put the screws on the Irish community.

Our message to British workers is clear: Irish freedom fighters are not British criminals, and the Irish War is not the mystery story the British establishment would have us believe. Join the Irish Freedom Movement at our 'Lessons of the Irish War' conference on 24 November, and help build a movement which can smash the PTA and all the myths it has sustained over 10 bloody years of the Irish War.

Mick Hume

**In September this year, a former British soldier who daubed anti-Catholic slogans on a London hotel and then set fire to it walked free from the Old Bailey. After the retired army arsonist claimed that hotel guests were IRA supporters, the judge said he would treat him 'leniently' because he had 'served his country well' in Northern Ireland (*Irish Times*, 22 September 1984).**

transport and police advice to 'be on the look-out' for Irish workers renting rooms or buying radio parts.

The state is well aware that all of this is a propaganda exercise. Police admitted that two Irishmen detained under the PTA after last month's bombing were not suspected of involvement in the attack. Yet both were held in Brighton itself to help whip up a lynch mob atmosphere. One was picked up in Liverpool and shipped south to improve the effect.

The PTA is used in this way to sustain the view that all Irish people are criminals and a threat to the peace of British society. Thus anti-Irish sentiments are always tolerated and often endorsed

jailers. But the mere fact of being Irish in Britain was enough to make them guilty in the eyes of the court.

The treatment of the 'Birmingham six' stands in stark contrast to the handling of three thugs who firebombed an Irish pub in Birmingham shortly after the 1974 explosions.

When their case finally crept quietly into court in August 1984, the three were freed with suspended sentences by a judge who told them their chauvinist fury was 'dangerous' but 'human' (*Irish Times*, 11 August 1984).

### Complex

The influence of the PTA

## Irish Freedom Movement Conference Ten years of the Prevention of Terrorism Act

# Lessons of the Irish War

Saturday 24 November, Birmingham  
Timetable

10 <sup>00</sup> am	Registration	
10 <sup>30</sup> am	The Tories, the miners and the Brighton bomb	Judy Harrison
1 <sup>00</sup> pm	Lunch	
2 <sup>00</sup> pm	● November 1974 - the Birmingham pub bombings	Mike Freeman
	● A beginner's guide to the Irish War	Frank Richards
	● Labour and the Loyalist veto	Helen Simons
	● Cross-Border collaboration	Phil Murphy
4 <sup>00</sup> pm	Tea break	
4 <sup>15</sup> pm	Ten years of war - why so little response in Britain?	Mick Hume

Sponsors include Harry Cohen MP, Syd Bidwell MP, Ernie Roberts MP, Eddie Loyden MP, Republican Band Alliance (Scotland)

Tickets £2 waged/£1 unwaged from BMIFM, London WC1N 3XX

Transport from all over Britain. Creche available  
For further details phone Mick Hume on 01-729 0414



Chris Black (relex)

# IFM message for Tories

## Irish freedom fighters are not British criminals

On Wednesday 10 October Tory conference delegates donated several pounds to Irish Freedom Movement funds outside the Brighton Centre. They hurled their change at IFM supporters demonstrating against the Prevention of Terrorism Act and for political status for Irish republican prisoners.

Our 10 October 'Irish freedom fighters are not British criminals' demonstration marked the release of Irish republican John McCloskey from Parkhurst prison on the same day (see below). It quickly became the loudest, liveliest demonstration during the week-long Tory bash.

Tory delegates returning from their long lunch had to run the gauntlet of IFM supporters lining the barricades outside the conference, brandishing the names of all 50 Irish republican prisoners still incarcerated in British jails.

A couple of young rakes from the shires tried to tough

it out by sporting 'Ulster is British' posters. They were booed off by IFM supporters, and shooed away by Tory stewards anxious to keep their party proceedings free from the taint of anti-British politics.

Meanwhile, just down the road, a veteran of the 'Ulster is British' lobby was given similarly short shrift by our

demonstration. A right-wing Monday Club fringe meeting addressed by Official Unionist Party leader James Molyneux was disrupted by IFM protesters shouting slogans, waving banners, blowing whistles and dropping stink-bombs. Monday Club members screaming 'kill the Irish scum' forgot about their aversion to

'violence for political ends' and attacked our supporters with beer glasses and chairs.

Days after the 10 October protest Democratic Unionist Party MP Peter Robinson dug up a report of the event in West Belfast's *Andersonstown News*. Robinson tried to link the IFM demonstration with the later IRA attack.

London's *Standard* devoted

its front page to the 'new evidence' Robinson had revealed. Irish Freedom Movement organiser Mick Hume made clear that this was an attempted media frame-up of the IFM. It only provided fresh evidence of the scurrilous lengths to which the British establishment will go to justify the state's repression of its opponents.

The Irish Freedom Movement has come to expect nothing more of the British media. However loud the press hounds bay for tighter controls on demonstrations, the establishment can expect nothing less than uncompromising anti-imperialist politics from the Irish Freedom Movement.



Rocking the Tories at Brighton: Irish Freedom Movement POW protest

Irish republican John McCloskey is what prison screws call 'a trouble-maker'. Throughout the 10 years he spent in British jails until his release on 10 October, McCloskey led struggles for the rights of Irish Prisoners of War. Days after he got out, he spoke to the Irish Freedom Movement about it.

Britain denies that Irish republicans are political prisoners receiving any special attention. But the everyday experience of life behind British bars for Irish prisoners like John McCloskey exposes the establishment lie.

John McCloskey was a high security, Category A prisoner from the time he was picked up in October 1974 and sentenced for conspiracy to cause explosions. He suffered top level physical and psychological brutality for 10 years. His struggle really began in June 1975 when he arrived in Albany prison.

'My wife came to visit me in a tiny room with a partition across the middle, a screw sitting next to her and another next to me. I had to decide then; would I accept that control or not? I wouldn't. I used to jump the partition and sit next to my wife. Every visit became a pitched battle with the screws.'

John McCloskey got two months in solitary and lost some remission. Then republican prisoner Brendan O'Dowd fell foul of the Albany authorities and landed in solitary. His Irish comrades decided to demand his release.

'We were all on different

wings, but one night after exercise we went to one wing and started a peaceful sit-down protest. When we refused to move, they sent in the Mufti squad with riot helmets and batons. They nearly killed us. We were all knocked unconscious and thrown down the stairs. They were like a crowd of dogs at a rabbit. There was blood everywhere.

'Sean Campbell, our spokesman, got it worst. Four screws carried him out while the governor told others to break his ribs, which they did. He was in plaster up to his chest. After 14 days the quack pronounced him fit and sent him back to the cells. He went without food or water for three days because he couldn't move.'

A 'kangaroo court' sentenced McCloskey to four months solitary and the loss of 690 days remission for his 'crimes'.

### Rocked

After the Albany attack McCloskey began the long process of shuttling from one jail to another with no notice. He has seen the inside of every top security jail in Britain. In mid-1978 he saw the outside of Gartree prison, during a roof-top protest in solidarity with republican prisoners in the H-Blocks of Northern Ireland.

Later that year, Gartree was rocked by an explosion of anger against the forcible

drugging of 'subversive prisoners'.

'A black prisoner told me his friend was being drugged in the hospital. So I got a crowd together and we went down to the office to demand his release. For an hour and a half they said the governor would "be along in 10 minutes". Eventually one prisoner said he'd put a box through the office window.



In recent weeks the Dublin government has extradited republicans to the North, hijacked the trawler *The Marita Anne* with seven tonnes of republican guns, and captured an IRA arsenal in Dublin — all with the considerable aid of the British security forces.

On 1 October Irish Freedom

'A warden said to me "look Mac — I was always 'Mac' when they wanted something — you're a sensible bloke, let's talk this out". I said to him "fuck off, we've been talking to you people for 800 years". Then the box went through the window and we took the whole wing apart in five minutes. Doors off the cells, everything.'

The prisoners barricaded themselves in overnight and

Movement supporters besieged the Free State's London embassy in protest at this collaboration in Britain's Irish War. The only people who need extraditing from Ireland are the British forces of occupation. And the only gun-running workers should worry about is the flow of arms to the murderous British war machine in the Six Counties.

fought off the Mufti squads. When they came out next morning they were met by armed police and John McCloskey was on the road again. The Irish prisoners involved in the Gartree protest spent months in solitary and lost more remission.

### Wrecked

By August 1980, McCloskey was in Wormwood Scrubs on the anniversary of the introduction of Internment without trial.

'We heard there was a demonstration outside, so me and another Irish POW thought "now's the time to hit the roof". We got up there and smashed it up. The screws rioted in the exercise yard and beat the other prisoners back inside.

'A few days later I organised a protest against this. We wrecked our cells. The screws beat us up, stripped us and threw us into the strong-boxes. They tried to rig up charges that I'd electrified my cell door. That was thrown out but I still got 11 months in a segregation unit.

The magistrate told me she was taking the last of my remission away. She said "if you ever apply to get your remission back...", "don't worry Madam", I told her, "I won't be coming begging

anything from you".'

In Parkhurst prison in 1981, McCloskey organised a three-day strike by republican prisoners demanding the same 50 per cent remission granted to POWs in Ireland.

### Piled

By mid-1982 John McCloskey was in Hull jail where republican prisoners were subjected to frequent strip-searches. In protest, they attacked the screws' office.

'There wasn't much else you could do. The Irish prisoners piled in and the screws piled in on top of us. Ten years ago the screws would have convinced some other prisoners to back them up. But after seeing us fight for our rights all those years, the prisoners backed us up. They piled in on top of the screws. We got our demands very quickly.'

John McCloskey was involved in many other battles with prison authorities, mostly over the harsh visiting conditions imposed on Irish POWs. He won some victories, but lost all his remission and spent four and a half years in solitary. Yet, he says, he had to do it.

'People like Bobby Sands have died in this struggle. When they send you to jail you have to decide if you're a common criminal or not. I'm not, so I acted accordingly. The struggle can't stop at the prison gates. We demand political status as a right. You can't put a price on that.'

# Labour's black 'problem'

Last month's Labour Party conference rejected a proposal to set up separate black sections in the party. But the question at the root of the controversy is not — how can the Labour Party fight racism? It is rather — how can the Labour Party sustain the support of black people?

The Labour Party's base of support among skilled workers, white collar workers and professional people is crumbling. Yet black people remain remarkably loyal Labour voters. Nearly two thirds of Britain's blacks voted Labour in the last General Election.

The black constituency is particularly important to Labour in London where it holds nine of the 14 boroughs which contain a substantial black population. But there is a wider issue at stake for Labour on the question of race.

Many young blacks are becoming increasingly alienated from mainstream British politics. Their allegiance to the Labour Party — or to the wider institutions of parliamentary democracy — cannot be taken for granted. The Labour Party as a whole wants to stake part of its claim to be an alternative party of government on its capacity to integrate black people into British society and to contain their potential revolt against the system.

The left and Labour's black activists want to ensure black support for Labour by giving them a stake in the party organisation. Black activists who set up a black section in the Vauxhall Labour Party have recently published a pamphlet on their experience, *Black sections: here to stay!*. The aim of the separate section is to 'act as a transmission belt, not only bringing more black people into the party, but also providing us with the voice of the black community'.

## Electoralism

The Labour leadership is sympathetic to the black activists' arguments. But it is also wary that too close an identification with black militancy would alienate the party's traditional racist voters. Hence the party keeps its options open. It voted down black sections at Blackpool. But the national executive will proceed with further consultation exercises to encourage black recruitment and to keep open channels of communication with black people.

It may seem strange that black people should support the Labour Party because it has no tradition of fighting racism. Indeed the Labour Party has always identified black people, not British racism, as the problem (see box). Yet because the Tories have always been more

explicitly racist and pro-capitalist most blacks have generally voted Labour.

The events of the last five years — rising unemployment, two Tory election victories, and especially the riots of summer 1981 — have modified the major parties' approach to the race issue.

## Hard and soft

The Tories have not hesitated to take a hard line against the black community. They sent in the riot police in 1981, rounded up several thousand young blacks and imprisoned hundreds. They have conducted a propaganda campaign blaming blacks for inner-city crime and labelling them as a threat to law and order. They have used immigration regulations as pass laws and deported thousands.

At the same time, the Tories

have devoted considerable resources to defusing the threat from the black community. They have provided grants to alleviate inner-city tensions and encouraged community policing. Earlier this year the Tory GLC spokesman on ethnic minorities joined Ken Livingstone in launching the GLC's anti-racist year. In July 1983 the Tories were sufficiently confident to launch their 'Labour says he's black, Tories say he's British' poster in the election campaign.

Brent council provides one illustration of the Tory's new 'anti-racist' image. The council fell into Tory hands when left-wing black councillor Ambrozie Neil defected to join the Tories. But the new regime retained much of the former Labour council's controversial 'equal opportunities' policies. It kept up the high level of funding to black and ethnic minority community organisations.

## Labour's line

The Labour Party too has modified its approach. After 1979, right-wing Shadow Home Secretary Roy Hattersley took charge of



Chris Black (left)



Hattersley's dilemma: how to keep the lid on black revolt against oppression

remoulding Labour's tarnished anti-racist image. Hattersley publicly apologised for having supported earlier immigration restrictions. He promised to repeal the Tories' 1971 Act that Labour had rigidly enforced in government between 1974 and 1979.

After the riots the Labour Party played a central role in integrating black activists. In London the GLC has been at the centre of this process. Through its sponsorship of

quangos and dispensation of grants, the GLC has harnessed the allegiance of hundreds of ethnic minority organisations through the Labour Party to the state.

At national and local levels the Labour Party has embarked on race equality initiatives and positive action policies. It has given its support to victims of immigration laws and campaigns for police accountability. The Labour

Party has helped to channel the revolt of 1981 into a diffuse network of committees and quangos. One effect of these initiatives has been to draw a layer of middle class black activists into the Labour Party. This in turn has given rise to the demand for black sections.

## Anti-black

The most striking feature of Labour's debate on black sections is that it has nothing to do with fighting racism. The issue for both the leadership and the left is how to improve Labour's electoral prospects. Whichever way the discussion goes it can only benefit the Labour Party and a small group of black activists. Its outcome is irrelevant to the problems facing black people and to the urgent need to make the labour movement into an effective anti-racist force.

For all its anti-racist rhetoric, Labour's policy on nationality and immigration and on discrimination and policing reveals the party's firm commitment to the British state. It has been carefully fudged to retain black support but it remains pro-imperialist and anti-black.

The Labour Party can make any number of sophisticated appeals to black voters and it may recruit hundreds of blacks to the party. But the black community as a whole will remain a volatile and anti-establishment force in British politics. Racism in Britain will never be combated by a party that wants to contain or recruit black people, but never to fight the system alongside them.

Fran Eden

# The threat

The Labour Party has long regarded black people and immigrants in general as a threat to the stability of British society. After the Second World War Labour saw immigration as a necessary evil. British capitalism had no alternative but to exploit foreign sources of alternative labour.

The Labour Party was never overtly racist. It simply encouraged suspicions and fears about large-scale immigration. The party acknowledged a link between black people and the social problems facing its traditional supporters.

## Prejudice

After the Notting Hill riots in which white racists attacked black people in 1958 local Labour MP George Rogers called for curbs on immigration:

'The government must

introduce legislation quickly to end the tremendous influx of coloured people from the Commonwealth ... Over-crowding has fostered vice, drugs, prostitution, and the use of knives. For years the white people have been tolerant. Now their tempers are up.'

Labour councillors in immigrant areas regularly promoted petitions demanding tighter controls.

'I'm not a racist, but...' became the dominant theme in Labour policy. A recent survey published by the Runnymede Trust, *Political parties and black people* by Marian FitzGerald, quotes a comment on this period from a Labour MP:

'I thought it was bloody wrong that they were coming in in such numbers to the same area. They invaded my birthplace — changed its whole character and I didn't like it. But I'm a

socialist and I could not go down that road of race hatred and fascism.'

The Labour Party helped to give legitimacy to the commonplace prejudice that blacks were competitors for scarce resources.

In the sixties the demand for immigrant labour began to decline and Labour's approval for tighter regulation strengthened. In 1962 Labour opposed the Tories' Commonwealth Immigration Act. But by 1963 the new party leader Harold Wilson called for a harder line. He approved immigration controls and tougher health checks and deportation for blacks convicted of criminal offences.

## Outlawed

As the crisis unfolded and racism gathered momentum the Labour Party kept in step

with public prejudice. In 1968 a Labour government rushed through Parliament a new act to block the entry of East African Asians to Britain. In 1976 Labour MP Bob Mellish proclaimed that 'enough is enough' in response to the widely publicised entry of a few families from Malawi.

In the late seventies Labour came under pressure as a result of the electoral successes — often in traditional Labour areas — of the overtly racist National Front. The party leadership's response was to reassure its supporters that it was fully committed to keeping blacks down and, if at all possible, out.

The Labour government allowed the police to use the 'sus' laws in a wave of terror against black youth in inner-city areas. It also tightened up immigration controls and introduced humiliating virginity tests at airports.

## Women workers and their unions

# 'We don't get a look in'

In hospitals and town halls, in rag trade sweatshops and telephone switchboards, women workers are an oppressed majority. They face problems of low pay and poor conditions — and ineffective unions. In the week before the RCP's London conference on women and the unions (see page 23) we spoke to four women about their experiences of work and the unions.

### ● Hospitals

Hospital workers all over the country have been active in fighting closure, privatisation, redundancies and cuts in hours and pay. Women have played a prominent part in many of these disputes, which have often dragged on to slow defeat in the face of union indifference. One woman who helped organise the recent strike at Hammersmith hospital is Lydia Fraser, the Nupe branch secretary. She spoke to *Denise Taylor* shortly after the strike against privatisation finished.

'I've been working at the hospital for five years as a ward orderly. Before being elected as branch secretary I was the shop steward for three years. I represent 400 ancillary workers and nursing staff.'

'We thought at first that being women would give us an advantage. We believed that people would have more respect for the picket line, because women are more polite and they would feel sorry for us. We also expected a disadvantage — that because women are ignored or looked down on nobody would have any respect for our picket line and just go straight through it.'

'At the end of the day, it made no difference whether it was men or women, it was more our determination to stop lorries and the strength of our arguments that made it effective or not.'

'In fact 16 out of the 180 people involved were men and there were no sexual divisions at all. The only divisions were between those on strike and those working. And that happened to include one man. Lots of the women are Spanish or Portuguese, and don't speak English very well. That together with the fact that they had come from very right-wing and repressive countries had made them particularly worried and a bit cautious.'

'But after a few days you should have seen them — they suddenly came out of themselves, shouting abuse at the scabs and trucks, telling the police to piss off, giving out leaflets and collecting money.'

'When the strike first began we tried staying on the picket line all day. Then we realised that because of all the other things we have to do at home we should organise shifts. Some women brought their kids with them, and we also organised an informal creche. More than 40 of those involved were one-parent families — but they were just as active. It didn't stop them from being completely

involved in the strike.

'Those who had husbands were quite lucky really, all of them were sympathetic to the strike and came on the picket line when they could. They didn't put pressure on their wives to go back. In fact the whole situation seemed to make them respect us more.'

'I'm sure most of the men used to take their wives for granted. And now the women hold their own at home — you know, answer back, don't just do what they are told. Some of those men had never made themselves a cup of tea before and now they are making the whole bloody dinner.'

'Management treated us like dirt. For a start they didn't believe we would go on strike — and then they didn't give it more than three days. They got a very big shock because even though we were women and low-paid we were out for 14 weeks.'

'They tried to stop us using the toilet and the shop. They treated us like criminals. It's obvious that women need to use the loos more than men would — but we worked out this plan for overcoming the toilet problem. If one of us wanted to go six of us would walk through quickly and then scatter and the one who wanted to go made sure she got there!'

### ● Local government

Many women work in local government. In the big cities many of them face the Labour council as their employer. Few are impressed. *Joan Phillips* was lobbying Nalگو's pay conference when she met militant nursery nurses *Madelaine Murray* and *Beverley Hobson* from Bolton, on strike against the Labour council and dissatisfied with their union.

'We've been out on strike for about 25 weeks now, all 200 of us. Most of us are down here today to make sure that our pay and regrading claim doesn't go to arbitration like the union negotiators wanted. We've been to arbitration before and know that you can't expect to win anything from it. We're also here to talk to other Nalگو members and make sure we get their support.'

'The council thinks that our wages are pin money — we get paid a pittance, some girls get less than £70 a week and the best paid only get £80 odd. But a lot of us are single mums or have to support our husbands on the dole. We decided it's about time we got a decent wage.'

'We've been doing regular pickets of schools and nurseries and we've had support from Manchester Nupe nursery workers and the



'We thought that being women would give us an advantage': Hammersmith hospital strikers Bernie O'Sullivan and Lydia Fraser

miners. The council wouldn't even talk to us so we did a sit-in at the Town Hall and that shook them up. In a lot of ways the Labour council is worse than the Tories — at least you know where you stand with Margaret Thatcher's lot!

'The women have really got stuck into the strike and are even enjoying themselves. But a lot of us are disappointed with the lack of support from the Nalگو branch. We asked them for a one-day strike, non-cooperation with the council, an overtime ban and an all-out strike — but we've got nothing. I blame the union officials. Some of the local officials have been crossing picket lines, then the members turn round and say "why should we honour them if our union leaders don't?" — so what can you do?'

'The only thing you can do is get organised yourself. We have joined the Nalگو executive en masse and we have a mass meeting of all the strikers every Wednesday to decide what to do.'

'We need to be a lot harder — we've been too soft up to now. We're planning to step out the action and do more sit-ins, but I can't tell you when or where because it's secret. Strikers have got to stick together — us and the miners — and be a lot harder if we're going to win.'

### ● Sweatshops

*Tony Powell* spoke to a young Asian woman who works in a small East London sweatshop. The firm shares a Victorian building in City Road with three others and produces ladies' and children's dresses and blouses. She asked us not to name or photograph her as she fears victimisation or the sack.

'I've worked in the garment trade eight years now. I used to work with my mother at home. Sometimes my father would bring back lots of coats or dresses for us to finish during the night for the next

morning, then I would go to school. I did real work, full-time, when I was 17. My father told me of a job with a friend's firm. I went there and started work and at first they didn't even tell me how much money I would get. I worked there because my father told me to. It was in a garage in Stoke Newington behind my father's friend's house. It was freezing cold; the only heating came from the light bulbs. I only stayed about six months.'

'The work is hard, fast and dangerous. Several times I have had a needle go through my finger, you have to work so fast that you make mistakes. In one factory in Shoreditch a friend of mine had her hand cut off by a packing machine. The boss didn't give her any money. He didn't give her her job back either. I tried to look for other jobs then but I soon realised they're all the same.'

'I've never joined a trade union — it's not worth the trouble. Around here it's difficult to get a job if you're in the union as the employers all talk to each other about who causes trouble. I don't even know how much money other people in the factory get. I've known women get more money or better work by getting their brother or husband to see the supervisor. That can be better than the union — you can never go to them.'

'Actually, I was in the union once, at a firm called JK Leisurewear, off Southgate Road, two years ago. Some people joined the trade union and the boss found out. He just sacked everyone. That was about 30 people altogether. People don't like trade unions, they can't stop the boss if he wants to sack us. Some people later beat up that boss and maybe that will stop it. Sometimes you have to fight for a job you know. A few years ago it didn't matter if you were sacked as you could get another job.'

'All the big factories have

closed and you have to take the cheating and the lying of the employers and say nothing. You can only get a job by knowing someone or someone doing you a favour. Only last week the police came into the building where I work because an employer refused to pay any wages and needed police protection to get out. It only takes one or two people to fight back and the boss gets very scared, but the union isn't strong enough.'

### ● Sexual harassment

*Kath Davies*, a telephonist from East London, interrupted her Saturday morning shopping to join the RCP's motorcade through North London (see page 2) and helped us collect money for the miners in Camden. She told *Denise Taylor* about sexual harassment at work.

'I've been working at British Telecom for the past five years. I am a full-time night operator — one of those people at the other end of the phone when you dial 100. I've always worked nights and weekends — unsocial hours — because the hours fit in with bringing up children. I've got four kids and there is no way I could have managed with a daytime job. I have to take them to school, do the shopping, see to their tea and then go out and earn a wage.'

'It's the same with most of the girls who work on nights — in fact there's more women on the night shift for that reason. The ones who work during the day are mainly part-time or temporary. Management likes them because they work harder for less money. Management reckons they'll be more flexible for when they bring in flexible rostering.'

'A lot of them aren't in the union either — not that that makes much difference. To be honest, the union has cooperated all the way with the privatisation and have

been trying to get some of us to volunteer for early retirement. We have meetings literally once or twice a year. They've never bothered with asking for creches or nurseries or anything for us. They are just not concerned about the problems we women have. We don't get a look in.'

'You get an awful lot of abuse when you're doing this kind of work. It's mainly sexual abuse by these men who ring up regularly and say something obscene. You get everything — literally the most disgusting things you could ever think a man would say to you. Not just "do you wear black knickers?" and that sort of thing — but "I want to stuff my cock in your mouth" or they're masturbating on the phone while you are talking to them.'

At first most girls are really shocked — I mean there's nothing further from your mind! But we're all working class and tough. We get used to it — and nobody is likely to do anything to prevent it. The union's not interested.'

'At first I used to say "fuck off" or "go do it to your mother". That would get to them sometimes, because they don't think of us in the same way as their mother — you know, with respect and that. Now I just ignore it and "pull out" (of the switchboard) immediately. You can't trace the caller unless it's a private line. I suppose the only thing you can do is try to educate people.'

'What's much worse in fact is the emergency 999 calls and the racist way the police operate. If the person on the other end of the phone doesn't speak the Queen's English — if they are Italian, Irish or black they just don't bother. I've had countless examples of people phoning up to get an ambulance and all the bloody copper says is "would you speak English please". But I should add they act more quickly if they know we are listening in.'

# Nicaraguan elections

# War and peace

The people of Nicaragua in Central America will go to the polls on 4 November. The promise to hold elections was one of the first proclamations made when the popular anti-imperialist Sandinista National Liberation Front (FSLN) overthrew the right-wing dictator Anastasio Somoza in 1979.

But until last year only Western politicians and the vocal Nicaraguan bosses' parties sustained the demand for elections under the popular regime.

Now the ruling Sandinistas have stood their leader Daniel Ortega as candidate for President. These elections have little to do with the needs of the Nicaraguan people, however. They are the Sandinistas' response to imperialist pressure on Nicaragua.

For the past three years, Nicaragua has lived under the continual threat of outside intervention by imperialism. The ruling Sandinista regime has come under increasing military, economic and political pressure from the USA.

Last year's American invasion of Grenada was an object lesson for the people of Nicaragua. The transformation of the neighbouring country of Honduras into a US military stockade and the permanent stationing of naval task forces off the Nicaraguan coast all helps to keep the threat of invasion ever-present. The setbacks inflicted on the contras, who are fighting for a return to the former Somoza regime, by the Sandinistas' militia has not ended the menace.

The Reagan regime has sought to strangle Nicaragua economically, by discriminating against its agricultural and industrial products. It is also bringing pressure to bear on other countries which sell Nicaragua vital supplies. Politically, America has denounced the Managua regime as a Marxist ally of the Soviet Union. Washington labelled Nicaragua as the first domino to fall to the Red Menace in its own 'backyard' of Central America.

Diplomatically, America's allies in Europe and the Contadora group (Mexico, Venezuela, Panama and Columbia) have stepped up pressure on the Sandinistas and pushed for reconciliation. Both these bodies are sufficiently autonomous from the USA to conduct negotiations with Nicaragua while still acting in the overall interests of imperialism.



Reconciling Nicaragua to Imperialist domination: Labour's pro-US Denis Healey gives Sandinista Carlos Tellez the EEC-Contadora line

Chris Black (relex)

## South of the border

Mexico's premier Miguel de la Madrid is the foremost figure mediating between the USA and the Sandinistas. Madrid's own oil-rich regime is up to its neck in debt to mainly American banks. In September it was able to re-negotiate half of its \$90 billion outstanding debt on very easy terms. The *Financial Times* recently remarked that Washington favours Mexico

because of the constructive role it plays for imperialism in Central America:

'In essence, Mexico's policy is based on the premise that Central America's rebels can be integrated and that the US-favoured use of force in the region is more likely to push the insurgents towards the communist camp and risks touching off a conflagration of unforeseeable dimensions.' (23 August 1984)

## Accommodation

The response of the Sandinistas to the threat of imperialist intervention has been to accommodate all down the line. An extensive private sector has been left virtually untouched by the radical regime, while poverty, austerity measures and strike-breaking are on the agenda for workers and peasants. Abroad, the Sandinistas have refrained from giving

practical support to the guerrillas fighting to overthrow the repressive El Salvadorean regime.

At the end of September, the Sandinistas told EEC foreign ministers and Contadora delegates meeting in Costa Rica that they would sign the Contadora draft peace treaty which called for the removal of all foreign military arms and aid from the area. At the same time, Nicaragua has been involved in secret talks with the USA in Manzanillo, Mexico.

## Invasion unnecessary

America has found that Mexico and its EEC partners have been proved right. The willingness of the Sandinistas to compromise has rendered invasion unnecessary for the

time being. The USA has avoided direct military intervention and has achieved all its objectives simply by issuing threats.

With the help of his allies among the Nicaraguan bourgeoisie, Reagan has secured — in the midst of the war against the contras — an end to the state of emergency in Nicaragua, the restoration of habeas corpus, the lifting of censorship of right-wing papers and an extended amnesty for the regime's opponents (including the contras). The right to unrestricted travel throughout the country has been re-introduced, together with the freedom to organise political meetings, rallies and demonstrations. So far, the Sandinistas have only balked at the demand to open negotiations with the leaders of the contras.

After the elections there will be an opportunity for imperialism to consolidate its gains. Mass organisations of workers and peasants under Sandinista control still play an important role in Nicaragua and exert a direct influence on government decisions. Now the new National Assembly established by the elections will push these organisations into the background and allow the traditional Nicaraguan establishment to hold sway for the first time since the fall of Somoza.

## Unsatisfied

The threat of a US invasion of Nicaragua is a real one. The Sandinistas' accommodation with imperialism, its 'peace plans' and its pandering to Somoza's supporters are designed to prevent it. But while America may be satisfied with Nicaragua's progress so far, this does not mean that it will abate its demands for change.

Ultimately, there can be no reconciliation between the demands of US imperialism and the needs of the Nicaraguan people. The Sandinistas' compromises with imperialism may stave off an invasion today or tomorrow, but only at the cost of the continuing immiseration of the Nicaraguan masses.

Andy Clarkson

## Dining with the devil

Last month, President Jose Napoleon Duarte of El Salvador sat down with the leaders of the Farabundo Marti National Liberation Front (FMLN) in the liberated village of La Parra in northern Chalatenango to negotiate a settlement to a war which has raged for five years and cost 52 000 lives. Facing each other across the table were Duarte and Guillermo Ungo, a former vice-president of the regime, now President of the FMLN's political wing.

After five years of bloody war, the masses of El Salvador are desperate for peace. The Duarte regime recently acquitted its elite US-trained Atlacati Battalion of the murder of 68 peasants in Cabanas and 37 more in the region of Santa Lucia. An army investigation dismissed massacre claims and quipped that any civilian casualties had been 'caught in crossfire'.

The masses of El Salvador have also had their fill of slaughter at the hands of the notorious death squads, created under Duarte's previous regime. Death squads like the Secret Anti-Communist Army have been responsible for the majority



Massacred: Civilian casualties of El Salvador's bloody war

of casualties in the war.

The imperialists also want an end to the war in El Salvador. They have been making major efforts to settle the conflict at the negotiating table. So far, they have won a commitment from the guerrillas to 'humanise the conflict' while a joint commission of government and FMLN representatives study detailed peace plans under the watchful eye of an array of interested parties — from the Catholic Church and the President of Columbia to Herr Willy Brandt, the former West German Chancellor.

Peace on the terms of the imperialists means more of the same for the El Salvadorean masses. Brandt, the church, the Contadora group and all the other pacifiers are acting as ambassadors for imperialism. Their only role is to safeguard its interests in the region — no matter what price the people of El Salvador are asked to pay.

The people of El Salvador have not been fighting for so long to see a peace made at their expense. There can be no real peace until the imperialists and their backers are dealt with once and for all.

# Action for gay rights



Breaking the ban: RCP supporters challenge Rugby council's attack on gay rights

Coventry RCP supporters reacted swiftly to a recent threat to the jobs of lesbian and gay workers at nearby Rugby District Council.

Local people, students from Lanchester Polytechnic and Warwick University, and a miner from Keresley pit near Coventry, joined a 30-strong picket of Rugby Town Hall called by Coventry RCP at lunch-time on Tuesday 9 October.

The protest followed the 25 September meeting of Rugby District Council which voted by 20 votes to 19 to delete the words 'sexual orientation' from the council's new equal opportunities employment policy.

During the debate right winger Keith Judge, the independent councillor who proposed the change, argued that the words 'sexual orientation' would give the impression that the council 'positively welcomed the queers and perverts'.

Tory group leader Gordon Collet told *The Guardian* that he did not believe there were any homosexuals working for

the council and that he hoped the council's decision 'would lead to a ban on employing homosexuals and lesbians'.

### No surprises

The local government union Nalگو has had a policy supporting gay rights since 1976. The union's national conference has regularly reaffirmed this policy. But it has done nothing to counter the threat to gay council workers in Rugby.

Local Nalگو representative Bob Lewis promised to discuss the issue in the branch, but warned that he was opposed to 'marching in the streets or strike action'.

The Labour Party and the Campaign for Homosexual Equality in the Midlands criticised Nalگو's reluctance to take action to defend council workers but took no action themselves.

Richard Apps of Leamington CHE said Nalگو should fight the ban but accepted that 'ordinary people don't want to get involved'. CHE nationally has called for

homosexuals to write to MPs, the Tory Party, local councils and the Association of District Councils.

The Labour Party has tried to avoid the issue. It invited Richard Apps to address a Labour group meeting. The personal problems faced by gay people were on the agenda at this 'educational discussion' but no decision was taken on how to respond to the council ban.

### Now

While the Labour Party and gay groups wait around to 'discuss the issue fully' the RCP hit back at the threat to jobs. Local people showed their support for our picket by hooting their car horns as they passed by or stopping to express their support.

Isolating homosexuals from their fellow workers is part of the bosses' divide and rule strategy and lays the basis for further job cuts in the future. The RCP is ready to fight this and every other challenge to our right to work.

Mary Harper

# Socialist sell-out

On Friday 19 October, 10 Sheffield building workers reported for work at Gleeson's building contractors. There should have been 14 of them. The Gleeson's workers were returning to work after more than three weeks on strike against four redundancies. They decided to give up their fight when it became clear that the left-wing Labour council would not take the measures necessary to save their jobs.

Gleeson's, which is kept in business by Sheffield council, has a reputation for being anti-union, but it has always had a pragmatic attitude to union membership. The firm has been known to recruit its workers into unions so that it can win contracts for union labour-only sites.

Until recently management was prepared to turn a blind eye to union organisation among the fitters, who are members of the Transport and General Workers' Union.

However, when the fitters appointed storeman Pete Woodward as their shop steward, management refused to recognise him and began a campaign of harassment, which ended when Pete received his cards along with three other workers.

The 14 fitters decided to take immediate strike action, demanding reinstatement of the four. But they faced problems making the strike bite. Most Gleeson's workers are non-unionised and continued normal working. AUEW and Ucat officials told their members to ignore the picket lines.

Local TGWU officials kept their heads down, made no attempt to get blacking, and simply acted as go-betweens for management. The workers never received any strike pay and, as Pete describes, became increasingly frustrated with their lack of leadership:

**'What it boils down to is that those officials have got a steady number and a steady income, so they don't want to know about our problems.'**

We argued that the onus was on the Labour council to show some solidarity with the Gleeson's workers. The council is supposed to operate a closed shop on tenders. If it had agreed to sever all relations with Gleeson's pending reinstatement of the sacked workers the strike would have been resolved within hours — but it wouldn't.

RCP supporters were involved in the strike from the beginning. We took the strikers along to speak at a Sheffield Nalگو meeting and organised collections on the streets, at workplaces and in the colleges. Union officials took so long producing leaflets and collection sheets that we went with the strikers to the local unemployment centre and produced them ourselves.

### Bitter

Despite support from council workers who refused to cross picket lines and a further 34 lay-offs by Gleeson's, the Labour council refused to budge. In a meeting with Gleeson's management and TGWU official Ken Long on 17 October, council representatives confirmed a new £400 000 contract with Gleeson's and effectively ended the strike.

Sentenced to a jobless future by a council that boasts about its socialist credentials, Pete is bitter:

**'The council has in this instance backed the bosses against us workers. That's why we lost.'**

Ann Burton

# Where freemen are imprisoned

In early October 37 shipyard workers were jailed for 28 days for refusing to end their sit-in at the Cammell Laird shipyard, Birkenhead, in defiance of a high court order. The Cammell Laird workers had been occupying an accommodation gas rig and the destroyer HMS Edinburgh for 14 weeks in protest at compulsory redundancies.

To the rescue came deputy leader of the Militant-controlled Labour council Derek Hatton, offering to make them freemen of the city. They would join such illustrious company as Liberal Prime Minister William Ewart Gladstone, Admiral Lord Beatty and Lord Mountbatten. This great blow for the class struggle came unstuck. The Labour group could not muster the two thirds majority on the council necessary to present every prisoner with the scroll and casket which would symbolise their freedom.

### Real freedom

In the class struggle, freedom is won through working class action, not by silly civic gestures. But the Labour council wasn't prepared to strike a blow for real freedom by bringing council workers out on strike and the city to a halt. Instead, it endorsed a token day of action, 16 days after the first imprisonments and two days before the first releases.

We spoke to Cammell Laird worker Lol Duffy in

Walton jail — he wasn't impressed:

**'If the council really wants to do more for us, besides supporting us in words, then it would get on with local strike action. Instead, all I've heard is talk of a one day general strike. Us lads are fighting for everybody's job. There's only one response to 37 workers jailed for fighting — that's down tools.'**

The Cammell Laird workers got as little satisfaction from their union, the general, municipal and boiler-makers'. At a local branch meeting immediately after the arrests, branch chair and Militant supporter Ian Lowes refused to discuss a hard-hitting plan of action put forward by an RCP supporter.

We urged the GMBATU to set up an official picket line at Walton prison and encourage its members and other prison workers in the CPSA and NUT to support it — to force the immediate release of the Cammell Laird prisoners. We called on the union to organise mass meetings in all workplaces to motivate immediate strike action.

Lowes didn't even let these proposals reach the table, arguing that there was no time to discuss them. Despite the tight agenda, however, standing orders were suspended to discuss a rota for a car park.

The union and the Labour council did little to challenge the bosses' right to imprison

workers for daring to fight for their jobs. Yet militant protests outside the prison combined with strike action could have turned the tables on the employers and demonstrated workers' refusal to accept that fighting back is a crime.

While the Cammell Laird strikers were behind bars, management got on with the job of getting everybody back to work. Within days, management had sent out threatening letters to those who had failed to return. The union's calls for mass pickets on the gates went largely unheeded.

The Cammell Laird story makes grim reading. In the past year alone, 1600 workers have joined the dole queues and more job losses are in the pipeline. The workforce is riven with divisions and discord. But these divisions are the consequence of the unions' failure to put forward a coherent defence of their members' jobs and challenge the sectionalism that forestalls united action.

Earlier this year shipyard workers proved that they were ready to take national action against redundancies and closures. They were badly let down by their leaders in the Confederation of Shipbuilding and Engineering Unions. The lesson of this and the more recent setback at Cammell Laird is that rank and file workers must get organised to fight for the future.

Alan Harding

**Taking Control** is a manual for active trade unionists and a guide to action. It aims to provide militants with the arguments and the strategies they need to overcome their isolation and make industrial action effective. **Taking Control** throws down a challenge to the employers and the government — and to the union leaders. Take it!



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# the next step

## After Brighton

**T**he IRA bombing of the hotel where senior Cabinet ministers were staying during the Tory Party conference last month was an audacious attack on the British state. In the event, the Prime Minister and her close colleagues escaped, but four people were killed. Many more were injured, including industry minister Norman Tebbit.

Our response to the Brighton attack is the same as our response to every aspect of the anti-imperialist struggle in Ireland. We support unconditionally the right of the Irish people to carry out their struggle for national liberation in whatever way they choose. We neither support nor condemn any particular tactic the republican movement pursues, whether it is an electoral campaign or a bombing campaign. We certainly refuse to make our support for the anti-imperialist struggle conditional on the tactics the movement adopts.

The ruling class and its media responded with the usual outpouring of chauvinist prejudice. On all sides the virtues of British democracy were proclaimed and the Irish 'terrorists' were denounced. There was more pressure on the American government to clamp down even more on IRA fund raising in the USA. There were resolute declarations of 'no surrender' in the Irish War and a renewed clamour for the death penalty for Irish Prisoners of War. The leaders of the official labour movement provided their customary cringing performances, upholding the British state and condemning Irish republicans who fight back against its oppressive rule over their country.

This is the familiar response of the British establishment when the Irish War comes to Britain. What was new about the Brighton bombing was that there was much less popular resonance for the establishment line than over previous IRA bombings. After the Harrods bomb last Christmas and the earlier Hyde Park and Regents Park bombings, sellers of the *next step* reported widespread anti-Irish sentiment. Many were hostile to calls for solidarity with the Irish people and sympathetic towards the victims — even when they were British soldiers directly involved in the war in Northern Ireland. After Brighton our sellers noticed much less hostility and concern about the victims and even a degree of respect for the IRA. This sentiment was stronger further north and strongest in mining communities. 'Pity they missed her' was a fairly widespread comment on Thatcher's escape.

The failure of a wave of anti-Irish hysteria to take off after Brighton reflects partly the IRA's choice of target — the Tories. It also reflects the changing climate of opinion that has been brought about by developments in the class struggle in Britain over the last few years, and particularly by the miners' strike. The more favourable response within the working class to an IRA bomb attack has both positive and negative aspects.

**T**he positive aspect of the sympathetic response to the Brighton bombing is that it shows a growing disrespect for the British state and its institutions among the working class. Over the past eight months, the miners have seen the government, the courts and the police revealed as a repressive coalition fighting on the side of

the employers. The government has invoked the principles of democracy, justice and the rule of law to back up its attack on the miners. But this ideological approach has only further brought the authority of the state into question (see pages 12 and 13).

Many miners have shown their willingness to defy what they have identified as the bosses' law and order in their struggle for jobs. They have shown on the picket lines that they are prepared to take the direct action necessary to make the strike effective in the face of mass policing. Other workers sympathetic to the miners have gone through this experience with them. Many — though still only a minority — have come to recognise the need to take violent action if necessary against the forces of the state. The reaction to Brighton showed that more people than ever before are ready to give their approval to others who do the same in a more direct and dramatic way.

The negative aspect of workers' approval for the Brighton bombing is that it arises out of a sense of powerlessness in the working class. This is accompanied by an attitude of near despair about the fighting capacities of the organisations of the labour movement. For five years the Tories have ravaged the working class, driving people out of work, sending young people straight from school to a life on the dole, smashing strikes, destroying trade union rights and creating misery and hopelessness throughout the country. The trade unions and the Labour Party have provided no effective defence of workers on any front and show no signs of putting up any serious resistance to the Tory onslaught.

When many workers saw Norman Tebbit's feet coming out of the rubble of the Grand Hotel in Brighton they found it hard not to feel some satisfaction at the fate of a man who has shown such cynical contempt for the unemployed. They took a certain consolation in the thought that 'at least somebody is having a go'. Many workers watched the Tory Cabinet wandering in their pyjamas in a daze down the Brighton sea front and thought that one IRA bomb had shaken up the Tories more than all the TUC's rallies, special conferences and days of action ever could.

Many workers welcomed the bombing because it seemed to shatter the Tories' apparent invincibility. Unfortunately, this response reflects the experience of five years of setbacks. The Tories only appear invincible when they are compared with the Labour Party. The IRA's bombing campaign in Britain may give a boost to the morale of the nationalist community in Ireland and take some pressure off the freedom fighters in the occupied Six Counties. But it will not destroy the British state. That task requires the British working class to rebuild its organisations into an effective fighting force against the Tories.

In fact the Brighton bomb came at the end of a Tory Party conference which exposed the deep insecurities that plague the British ruling class. The conference was haunted by the failure of the government to do anything to reduce unemployment. Chancellor Nigel Lawson was virtually slow hand-clapped over his smug line on economic policy. Environment minister Patrick Jenkin failed to convince the conference over his proposed reforms in local government.

Even defence minister Michael Heseltine, normally the darling of the Tory faithful, turned out to be a damp squib. It is striking that while Thatcher has no difficulty handling the official opposition's insubstantial attacks, she has faced problems dealing with dissidents in her own ranks. Tory wets and outspoken Anglican churchmen have caused the Tory leaders considerable discomfiture.

The Tory government faces even graver problems on the economic front. British capitalism continues its apparently inexorable decline. Instead of the long promised economic recovery, the prospects are that the situation may get out of control altogether. Last month's Bank of England quarterly bulletin gave little comfort to the ruling class. It showed that the 'upturn' is a myth and that the recovery is as far away as ever.

**P**rofit rates remain low and the rate of return on capital in British industry is still below the levels prevailing through most of the seventies. Within days of the publication of its report the Bank of England had to step in to save Johnson Matthey Bankers from collapse. This dramatic rescue operation showed the precarious position of one of the most prestigious banks in the City of London.

A weakening pound and a mounting trade deficit reveal the weakness of British capital against its foreign competitors. British businessmen are also in trouble on the home front. The collapse of industry continues and unemployment is rising steadily. It is this inability to deal with the structural weaknesses of British capitalism that creates a sense of fear and insecurity within the ruling class.

The 'banana skin' mishaps that keep befalling the government over issues like GCHQ and rate-capping are not the outcome of simple blunders. They are an expression of the crisis of confidence that haunts the ruling class. The issues that face the British establishment are not merely economic. Sooner or later the crisis is going to stimulate social instability and political unrest on a much bigger scale. It is in this context that the public reaction to the Brighton bomb and the miners' strike acquires its significance.

Many left-wingers have denounced the IRA bomb on the grounds that it will strengthen Thatcher's hand against the miners. But what decisively strengthens the Tories against the miners is the failure of the left to take up the broad struggle against the state that is necessary to prevent the miners from following so many other groups of workers to defeat.

For eight months the Tories have pursued a ruthless strategy to smash the miners. They have mobilised their full resources — the media, the courts, riot police, social security authorities — to make sure they win. As the strike has continued their line has hardened. They have always scorned negotiations and compromises and made it very clear from the start that they are fighting for nothing less than a complete victory.

What a contrast to the official labour movement! From the outset the leaders of the TUC and the Labour Party have had only one objective — to get a negotiated compromise settlement and a return to work. The longer the strike has dragged on the more desperate the labour leaders

have become to mediate and organise secret talks or to draw in Acas or the government itself. Although the Tories have insisted on widening the strike into an issue of class power, the labour bureaucrats have insisted that it is just another trade union dispute. Despite the fact that the Tories have thrown the physical might of the state at the miners, the leaders of the labour movement have done nothing to organise effective resistance. When miners have taken action to defend themselves the top bureaucrats have condemned them.

**W**hile the leadership of the labour movement has been working day and night to negotiate a sell-out, the left has been building the links with the striking miners that are necessary for the Labour Party to play its role as mediator. 'Miners' support groups' in every town have become the instruments through which the official labour movement maintains its connections with miners and workers involved in solidarity action with the miners' strike. They have also helped to ensure that the bureaucrats stay in control of solidarity activity at rank and file level.

Like the labour leaders, the miners' support groups have sought to avoid all the political issues in the miners' strike. They have refused to challenge the bureaucratic conduct of the dispute and the NUM leadership's disastrous strategy of tying miners' livelihoods to its interpretation of the *Plan for Coal*. They have backed down before the difficulties of mobilising effective solidarity action at rank and file level. And they have refused to challenge public opinion on the question of violence.

Instead of seizing the issues in the miners' strike and using them in the way the Tories have — to mobilise backing for a class position in the dispute — the left has dodged the issues. Virtually the whole of the left is now working under the wing of the bureaucracy in the support groups. Indeed the Socialist Workers' Party chose the very moment when the Labour leadership was making its most abject sell-out proposals to unite with the party's machine for selling whatever deal emerges to the rank and file.

'They shall not starve' is now the slogan of the support groups. But the miners have fought for eight months because they want to win, to save their jobs and the dignity of their communities — not merely to survive physically through the winter. 'They shall not starve' is a slogan of fatalism and defeat. It is offensive to the miners and their heroic struggle. And it must give comfort to Thatcher, Tebbit and the rest as they prepare for the final show-down with the miners. The mentality of 'they shall not starve' has helped to create the feeling of impotence that led many workers to celebrate the Brighton bombing.

The strength of the ruling class now derives almost entirely from the weakness of the official labour movement. The bureaucracy is too compromised with the existing system to lead any fight against it. And the left is too compromised with the bureaucracy to provide any alternative. The Revolutionary Communist Party is independent of both the system and the bureaucracy and we are fighting now to get rid of them both — for good.

# The miners' strike Law and order on the line



The government has tried to use popular respect for parliamentary democracy and the rule of law as a propaganda weapon against the miners. But the repressive actions of the police and the courts have led to a wider questioning of the authority of the state and a growing disrespect for its institutions.

WHATEVER ITS outcome, the 1984 miners' strike has shown that there is no going back to the good old days of British consensus politics. The strike has exposed what sections of the ruling class already knew, that the strength of the government is more apparent than real.

The historical strength of the British ruling class has been its ability to exercise its power with the consent of the people. The bourgeoisie has rarely had to use force to defend its interests. In general it has been able to rely on the authority of Parliament, the courts and other state institutions to win legitimacy for its policies. Parliament and its laws have seldom been challenged in the twentieth century. Even directly coercive agencies of state power — the army and the police — have succeeded in parading as neutral community bodies which operate above class interests.

In times of unrest the ruling class has always used the slogans of 'parliamentary democracy' and 'law and order' as weapons to isolate its opponents. This approach has generally worked well. Major strikes have been treated as threats to constitutional authority and the trade union leaders have usually backed down. In response to the 1926 General Strike the ruling class raised the stakes and denounced it as a threat to British democracy. The TUC immediately became defensive and protested that it was only running an industrial dispute — not challenging state power. The TUC was not prepared to question the authority of the ruling class and the General Strike went on to defeat. Since 1926 the ruling class has put its authority on the line on several occasions, knowing full well that its opponents would back down.

## Dissenting voices

The ruling class has proceeded in its traditional manner during the present miners' strike. From the outset it has questioned the legality of the strike and has denounced the intimidation of innocent people by mass pickets. The establishment has been shocked by the response. Workers struggling for their jobs have displayed no inhibitions about breaking the law. Violent confrontation with the police has become a daily occurrence. As the strike has continued the violence has become more widespread and more vicious. But what is most disturbing for the bosses is that the role and function of the police themselves have come into question.

The response of the government has been to raise the stakes and to turn picket line violence into a major public issue. The ruling class and its media have been running in top gear, demanding that every respectable politician denounce the violence of the pickets. They turned with particular vehemence on the Labour Party, incessantly exhorting its leaders that they too should condemn the bully boys on

the picket line. When Kinnock obliged at the TUC conference they insisted that he repeat his performance at his own party conference.

In the past this strategy has always worked. But this time something new happened. True, most Labour Party and trade union leaders crumbled under the pressure. But the Tories did not have it entirely their own way. More and more voices could be heard denouncing violence — but that of the police, not that of the striking miners. As the dispute intensified the coercive and anti-working class character of the police became increasingly apparent. The strike itself polarised opinion and had a radicalising effect on a sympathetic minority within the working class. This pressure was certainly felt at the Labour Party conference where it was expressed in widespread criticisms of the police.

The failure of the Tories' propaganda war against the miners is symptomatic of the underlying instability of British capitalism. The miners' strike has activated these underlying forces with devastating effect for the politics of consent. Instead of clinching victory for the bosses, the issue of violence has exploded in their faces. For the first time in living memory a significant section of society rejects traditional assumptions about the courts, the rule of law and the police.

Gary Long, an underground fitter at Kellingley colliery in Yorkshire, told one national daily paper how his views had changed over the course of the strike:

'Certainly I was opposed to any form of violence at the beginning and I would have attempted to stop it, but now I see that any actions taken are justifiable. I would find it hard to condemn anything on the picket line.'

Long said he anticipated pickets turning on economic targets and planning their own tactics. He declared that he now believed that 'any establishment target is legitimate':

'What we are seeing is people losing respect for any form of authority whatsoever. Things are never going to be right again.'

It is this recognition that lies behind the panic of Church of England bishops and Tory wets.

## Permanent damage

Criticism of the police and the courts is so far confined to a minority. But even this minority is more than the ruling class can afford. If disrespect for the most cherished institutions of British society spreads then the very foundations of capitalist law and order will be undermined. *The Economist* recently warned its readers of the dangers:

'This year's Labour Party conference was most

remarkable, and most alarming, for the acceptability it gave to law-breaking.... This is not the independent civil disobedience of the nuclear disarmers or the dedicated non-conformity of occasional nuts. It is a systematic withdrawal of consent, encouraged by a major political party, for laws passed by Parliament.'

Of course it is not the Labour Party that *The Economist* fears. It is the pressure of the miners which has forced the Labour Party to criticise the police and which threatens the withdrawal of consent.

The ruling class is concerned that, whatever the outcome of the miners' strike, the politics of consent could be irreparably damaged. The carefully nurtured image of the neutral police could be the first casualty. These fears were

clearly expressed by Metropolitan Police Commissioner Kenneth Newman in a speech in late September.

'It is not uncommon nowadays to hear men of position and authority speak as though there is some inalienable right of civil disobedience to laws of which they do not approve and a right to initiate deliberately unlawful and sometimes violent activity to protest against such laws.'

Newman was looking advisedly to the future and to the threat of more widespread withdrawal of consent.

Police Federation Chairman Leslie Curtis was the first to panic. In a widely publicised speech he intimated that the police might not be prepared to serve under a future Labour

## The strong

Police terror is in full swing in the coalfields. Transits patrol the streets, riot police baton charge picket lines with horses and dogs. Villages are sealed off for hours at a time, people are ordered off the streets and police in full riot gear go on the rampage.

## Marked men

More than 7000 miners were arrested in the first seven months of the dispute. Peter Davis from Tower Lodge, South Wales describes the police in operation:

'At Orgreave the police were coming along and hitting people with their batons as they were going along — anyone in the way. A man came out of a house to see what was going on. He went up to the police and he said "this is uncalled for violence — they are not doing anything". And they hit him over the head and knocked him out cold. You see that on numerous occasions. There must be hundreds of times I've witnessed the police beating people up. The police are there to protect the bosses' profits and that's all there is to it.'

## Charged words

Most activists have been arrested at least once. Some have been picked up several times — Colin Dixon, strike leader at Ollerton in Nottinghamshire, was arrested three times within the first two months of the strike. Rank and file activists are marked men. Those arrested can expect to

be beaten up, to receive anything from bruises to broken limbs.

'Besetting' is an offence under the 1875 Conspiracy and Protection of Property Act. It means visiting a scab at home to persuade him to join a strike. It was last used in the 1926 General Strike, but has been revived in the current dispute by the solicitor for the Nottinghamshire police. More than 200 miners have been charged with besetting or intimidating scabs. More than 600 have been charged under the recently revived common law offences of riot or unlawful assembly. Others face catch-all charges of 'obstruction' or 'breach of the peace'.

## Bail bars

The courts have imposed restrictive bail conditions on more than 80 per cent of all miners charged with an offence. This is an explicit attempt to stop miners from picketing. It has become common practice in miners' cases for court clerks to staple prepared bail conditions to defendants' papers before the police solicitor even applies for bail conditions. Miners found breaching their bail conditions are liable for instant imprisonment.

Peter Davis told us that the bail policy has only hardened the miners' resolve:

'When we came out of the court house we ripped up the bail conditions. One of the lads from Tower Lodge was in court and the magistrate asked him "do you understand the bail conditions?". "I understand them", he said, "I understand

government:

'Now for the first time in police history that system which has been a major factor in ensuring the political neutrality of the police force is under threat.'

Curtis went too far, and in his denunciation of the Labour Party, gave the game away. He was immediately put in his place by Chief Superintendent Stuart Anderson, President of the Police Superintendents' Association. Anderson categorically stated that 'the British police service prides itself on its independence from political pressures of any kind'.

The political controversy among leading police officers indicates the tensions within the ruling class. The police are fighting a losing battle to maintain their image of neutrality. They are more and more forced publicly to take sides. Yet they must do their utmost not to be seen as the agents of the bosses because their image of neutrality is one of the most precious assets of the ruling class.

### No way back

The problem facing the ruling class is that to maintain its power it is obliged to use more, not less, force. However, the deployment of force in the present conditions of instability can only undermine its authority and imperil the consensus that has been built up around its institutions. The miners' strike has put the Tories in a particular quandary because it is the first time since Thatcher came to power that they have lost an important propaganda battle. Instead of miners' pickets becoming the universal villains, a significant section of society has turned against the police.

The government has not won, but it has not yet lost. This is because the labour movement has not been prepared to take up the challenge. While many are ready to criticise the violence of the police, few are prepared to defend the force required to maintain effective picketing. Many who criticise the police locate the problem in a few over-zealous officers in the special riot squads despatched to the coalfields, rather than in the nature of the police as the agents of the capitalist state.

The traditions of the past still overwhelm the labour movement of today. There are too few who are ready to press home the point that the violence of the pickets is legitimate, indeed a vital necessity, for the survival of our class. Even many striking miners remain defensive

# The left and the law

Every leader of the NUM has declared his willingness to go to prison for the miners' cause. In the early stages of the strike the left-wing leader of Kent NUM Malcolm Pitt languished behind bars for days — days that would have been better spent organising effective action on the picket lines.

In October Arthur Scargill responded to a High Court decision declaring the miners' strike illegal in Yorkshire with a mixture of bravado and defensiveness. He declared that he would rather go to prison than betray his members, but escaped incarceration when a mysterious stranger paid off his £1000 fine for contempt of court. At the same time, Scargill emphasised that the strike was 'official' and that the NUM was acting entirely within the law. The strike may be official, but it is not effective. As Yorkshire miner Keith Hammond pointed out, 'while Scargill is outwardly defying the law, internally the

NUM is clamping down to stay within the law' and undermining hard-hitting action:

'The NUM has been tightly scouring all branch minutes. They've been getting their lawyers to work through to see if anything is going on which the union could be sued for.'

Striking miners can do without self-made martyrs who mouth empty rhetoric. They need leaders prepared to take a stand against the law and mobilise effective action in defence of jobs. The NUM has done neither.

Labour left wingers have also balked at challenging the law. Left-wing councillors in South Yorkshire announced that they were disbanding the mounted police section and selling off the force's 18 horses and half its 34 dogs. They backed down at the first threat of legal sanctions.

The left has also capitulated on the issues

of violence and intimidation. The Socialist Workers' Party has criticised workers' 'hit and run' squads. The SWP counterposes the 'individual terror' of isolated militants to mass picketing and demonstrations (*Socialist Worker*, 11 August). But intimidation and violence are as necessary as mass pickets to guarantee effective strike action. Random and isolated acts of violence are the inevitable consequence of the NUM's failure to organise effective resistance to police terror.

Striking miners need to take an unequivocal position on the issues of violence and law and order. The establishment is prepared to use every means at its disposal, including violence, to achieve its objectives. We should be prepared to throw everything back at them to defend our jobs, our picket lines and ourselves.

about the use of force and fear the hostility of public opinion. As long as this state of affairs persists there is a danger that the bosses can recapture the ground they have lost.

The panic of the British establishment about the breakdown of consent indicates the depth of its crisis. They know that they have not succeeded in winning an overwhelming popular mandate for their stand against the miners. They know that their position depends on the authority of the British state, the courts, Parliament and the police. But that authority is not theirs by right. Without the consent of the working class their institutions are exposed as empty shells protected only by naked force. Without consent their power is revealed for what it really is: a charade of rituals based on the ownership of capital backed up by a body of armed men.

Frank Richards

# Fighting back

The miners have yet to organise effective resistance to the state's police and legal onslaught. Yet workers in Britain and Ireland have shown in the past that workers' organisation can take on the armed might of the state and win.

In South Wales in the years from 1910 to 1913, militant miners did not hesitate to use organised force against the police, the courts and the employers. Houses and shops belonging to local magistrates were attacked by striking miners and sabotage against collieries was widespread. The South Wales Unofficial Reform Committee, set up in 1911, and committed to an aggressive policy of class struggle founded on 'the recognition of the war of interest between workers and employers', set up an embryonic workers' militia. In the 1913 Dublin Lockout, James Connolly founded the Irish Citizen Army to organise picketing and protect strikers from armed police and scabs. Workers marched into battle with the police in military formation, using burley sticks and wooden shafts shod with a cylinder of metal to beat them off. The ICA was reorganised into a proletarian army to fight for Irish freedom from British rule.

### Battle lines

In 1984, miners have faced brutal police assaults. Thousands of miners have been prepared to beat the police at their own game. But their leaders have limited the action to set-piece confrontations. Keith Hammond from the Prince of Wales colliery in Yorkshire expressed his frustration:

'We're all aware of the staged character of the picketing, the police herding us around most of the time. But by now, after seven months of confronting the police, the average militant picket just wants to get his own back at the cops.'

Bill Rennie, a young miner from Oakley in Fife, argued that violence against the police was entirely legitimate, but that rank and file miners had to get organised:

'MacGregor and his lot don't have sleepless nights because their consciences are plaguing them about the violence they use against us, so why should we?'

'I've been at Hunterston, Ravenscraig, Orgreave, all the big ones. To be honest we could do with learning a few lessons from the other side. The shoving technique is just chaotic. All that happens is our boys get hurt in the crush. The

police have proper clothing and riot shields to protect them. We should form lines like they do, with arms linked, and use proper weapons to defend ourselves. For instance when they use dogs against us, we should get all our dogs out too.'

### Legal terror

Miners have also had their fill of the courts, but the NUM has backed away from confrontation and kept its head down. Keith Hammond told us that the NUM has made it clear that it will have nothing to do with those miners arrested during the Fitzwilliam riot:

'Their court case is coming up on Monday and the NUM circulated all branches in the area discouraging miners from going to the lobby of their hearing.'

Michael McKinley, NUM delegate at the Fishcross strike centre in Scotland, told us what he thought the union should be doing:

'The government is out to criminalise all miners. It is about time the union adopted a policy of challenging this. For a start, whenever one of us goes up to court everyone else who was present at the time of arrest must be organised to go as well as witnesses. The charges they dish out are just lies. They couldn't get away with that if everyone went along to the court.'

### Class war prisoners

More than 50 miners have been imprisoned for fighting for the right to work, yet the NUM has done little to mobilise the working class to set them free. Peter Davis from Tower Lodge is unequivocal in his defence of imprisoned miners:

'The miners are all political prisoners. I'm surprised and saddened that there's not more being done about these cases. The men are in jail because they're fighting for their jobs — that's the sort of society we're living in. You only have to be a miner and they can arrest you. At Orgreave we were just walking across a football pitch when the police came and arrested people at random.'

The NUM must organise protests inside and outside jails where miners are imprisoned. And it must mobilise working class resistance to a legal system whose sole purpose is to defend the rights of the bosses and keep the working class in chains.

# arm state

I'm living in a police state and you're restricting my freedom of movement'.

'They've put all these stupid conditions on us only because we're miners. But they won't break us. I haven't broken the law as far as I'm concerned. So these bail conditions go out the window.'

### Kangaroo trials

Hundreds of miners have walked into the dock only to discover that the police have no evidence against them. Nonetheless, they have been bound over to keep the peace — a requirement which, like bail conditions,

### State terror up to October

Arrests	7149
Charges	6020
On Court bail	3839
Cases dealt with	1953
Convictions	1571
Acquittals	382

### Sentence after conviction

Custodial sentence	39
Detention Centre	5
Day in police custody	14
Suspended sentence	20
Remanded in custody	14
Youth custody	2
Fines — under £100	
over £100	327
Conditional or absolute discharge	179
Bound over to keep the peace	556

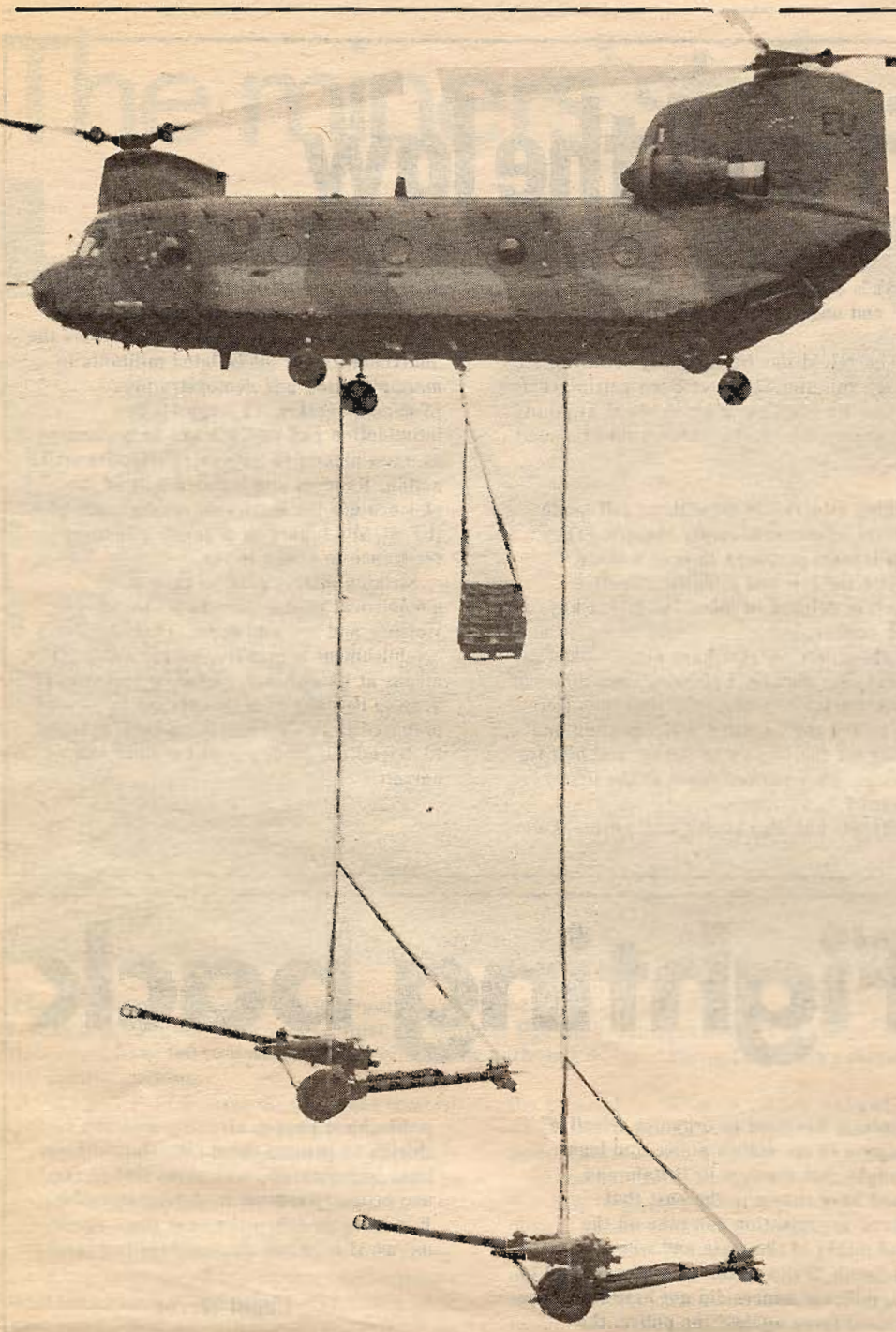
has the effect of curbing the right to picket. Nearly 2000 miners have already been dragged through the courts — often in sessions held by specially appointed stipendiary magistrates. Defendants and witnesses have been subjected to harassment and intimidation. Many have been forced to travel long distances, kept waiting all day and then sent home again because there was 'no time' to hear the cases. Many miners, especially in Scotland, have been refused legal aid. Magistrates have begun to impose heavy fines on miners for picket line offences.

The courts have warned that miners who fail to pay fines will be imprisoned. Many miners are still in the dark about whether the NUM will help them to pay their fines when they fall due.

The courts have also begun to remand miners in custody and to dish out prison sentences. Eleven miners from the Fife pit of Longannet were the first to be refused bail in August. Since then remands in prison have become commonplace. At least 40 miners have so far received custodial sentences of up to nine months duration.

● Eighteen year old Lyndon Naylor from Kellingley, Yorkshire, was first arrested back in June, charged under the Riot Act and forbidden to 'approach coal board property'. He did not appreciate that this also included his own pit and when he was arrested at Kellingley he went straight to Armley jail in Leeds.

● George Tait from Oakley in Fife was sentenced to 120 days imprisonment for a 'breach of the peace' on a Bilston Glen picket line in August.



After two years of predicting an upturn in the world economy, the leaders of the major Western nations are now having to come to terms with the symptoms of another wave of recession.

In Britain it's the plummeting pound and a jittery stock exchange. In the USA it's a soaring dollar, high interest rates and a massive budget deficit. In France it's obsolete industry and stagnant productivity and in Italy it's rising inflation.

In every Western country the ruling class has tried to put off the day of reckoning by expanding credit and state intervention in the economy. But these mechanisms have only fuelled financial instability and further exposed the underlying problems of inexorably declining profitability. The failure of the methods currently in operation to halt the progress of the recession leads to the pursuit of more drastic measures.

The ruling classes are now turning to enforce austerity programmes at home and score off their rivals abroad. To ensure their own survival the ruling classes of the capitalist world are preparing to declare war on the working class and on one another.

Elsewhere in this issue of *the next step* we look at the converging economic and political crises confronting the British ruling class. On these pages *Phil Murphy* surveys the global capitalist recession and the conflicts generated by the Western powers' attempts to overcome it. In the following pages we consider the deep problems lurking behind the US election campaign and the difficulties facing the labour movements of France and Italy.

'The present situation is not sustainable. The world's financial safety is balanced on a knife edge. The greatest immediate danger of destruction is posed by the risk that interest will not be paid on the existing debts of the major developing country borrowers.'

(Commonwealth Secretariat Report, *The debt crisis and the world economy*)

THE CONSTANT THREAT of a major debt default in the Third World and the fear of a banking collapse in the West expose the hollowness of claims that the world economy is pulling out of recession.

Figures and predictions presented to the International Monetary Fund and the Organisation of Economic Cooperation and Development last month reveal some harsh truths behind the upturn rhetoric of politicians on both sides of the Atlantic:

- world economic growth could fall by a half by the end of next year as a new slump looms ahead
- the American economy may slow down even more rapidly to a growth rate of around four per cent next year
- Japan could retain its buoyancy and maintain output — and become an even bigger threat to its old rivals in Europe and the USA
- European countries are expected to be hardest hit, with growth falling to around two per cent and unemployment rising to 20 million by late 1984.

The recovery of the early eighties seems to have been no more than a temporary delay in the capitalist system's slide towards ruin.

#### The fool's upturn

The global upturn in the last two years started from a lower trough, it proceeded more slowly and it has proved less durable than any period of growth since 1945. In all the Western countries the recovery is based on superficial or short-term factors that cannot sustain expansion into the eighties.

- Consumer spending has been the engine of growth in most countries — notably in Britain and West Germany. Special government measures, such as the suspension of hire purchase restrictions in Britain, have boosted spending in the shops. But at a time when real wages are stagnating there are limits to how far individuals can afford to go into debt. In Britain consumer spending had already begun to fall off early this year.
- Restocking is another device to promote recovery. Once there is a slight pick up in economic activity, industry begins to build up stocks of raw materials and other goods in anticipation of better times ahead. But once stocks have been raised to customary levels the expansionary stimulus loses its effect. This has already happened in Britain, West Germany and the USA. Only in Japan is restocking likely to make any contribution to growth next year.

These artificial and limited measures for boosting output have provided the Western economies with only a short-lived respite.

Indeed they have only exposed and exacerbated more deep-seated problems in the working of the capitalist economy.

- In the USA state expenditure has helped to finance a brief consumer-led boom. This in turn has led to an enormous budget deficit and record interest rates. The collapse of American manufacturing has continued apace.
- Even in Japan, the world's most dynamic economy, growth has slowed every year since 1979. Nearly half of this year's growth is attributable to the state-sponsored demand for goods in the USA. Japan's trade surplus is the flip side of the USA's deficit. When the US economy slows, Japan too will feel the effects.
- In West Germany output grew by three per cent in 1983 — half the rate of the comparable first year after the 1974-75 recession.

Two years of recovery find the world's capitalists little better off than they were in the late seventies. In some ways they are in an even worse position. The recovery has done nothing to reverse the decline of the manufacturing sector in a number of leading capitalist countries. The output of British manufacturing industry is still 15 per cent below its 1979 peak. A vision of a future economy based around supermarkets, fast food restaurants and selling insurance cannot fill the capitalist class with much optimism. Even the much-vaunted information technology sector has its problems. Sir Clive Sinclair and his colleagues can produce more and better microchips and robots. But as long as the rest of the economy continues to lack the capital to invest in new technology its long-term impact will be marginal.

#### Workers forced to pay

Mitterrand in France, Kohl in West Germany, Reagan in the USA, Thatcher in Britain, Nakasone in Japan — all have introduced austerity programmes as a central feature of government policy. They have all used the discipline of mass unemployment or its threat as a lever to intensify exploitation and force down living standards. In every advanced capitalist country the leaders of the official labour movement have proved no match for the class conscious offensive waged by the employers and their state.

- In the USA real wages are still below their 1978 level. Strikes have been outlawed in many states and union membership reduced to 20 per cent of the national workforce. In the autumn round of pay negotiations the

# World in recession Crisis breeds conflict





Mitterrand in flames: this was how French steelworkers at Longwy responded to government plans to axe 30 000 jobs

pace-setting miners and car workers have accepted wage cuts in return for better redundancy terms. The widely celebrated rise in employment has come about through the creation of predominantly low-paid, low tech jobs bringing down the average wage still further.

- In Britain cutting wages has now become a central government priority. In his recent speeches to the IMF and to the Tory Party conference chancellor Nigel Lawson has harped on the themes of 'pricing people back into jobs' and standing firm against wage claims. British employers lead the world in the substitution of part-time for full-time jobs. Last year 358 000 full-time workers were replaced by part-timers, mainly women. The government recently reminded employers that it is usually cheaper to employ two married women part-time than even one full-time youngster.

- In Japan and West Germany unit wage costs are stagnating or declining. In Germany the latest figures show that real wages fell both in 1981 and in 1982 and rose only slightly in 1983.

### The final solution

Restoring profitability requires the restructuring of capital on a world scale. The recession and domestic stagnation have made foreign trade and the export of capital a key part of the Western powers' struggle for survival. This brings the big imperialist powers into conflict not only with the masses of the Third World, but also with one another.

Every foreign initiative brings war among the imperialist superpowers closer. Ritual calls to preserve free trade at every international gathering in the past decade are now universally ignored. Earlier this year the Secretariat of the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade admitted that its original purpose of preventing a new trade war had 'almost been lost'. Now GATT simply tries to institutionalise protectionism and to hold off the eruption of major trade conflict. Behind GATT's tariff restriction measures every country is making greater use of quotas and other non-tariff barriers to trade.

Every country has its own methods of protecting its trading interests.

- Britain has imposed quotas on textile imports to cover 98 per cent of the market.

- Within the EEC spurious quality standards prevent the free movement of goods within the so-called 'common market'.

- In Japan a complex bureaucracy effectively closes off large sections of the market from foreign penetration.

- In the USA steelmakers have gained a reputation for spending more time in court claiming protection against the alleged dumping of steel by foreign companies than they spend in their own plants making it. They have succeeded in limiting imports to 20 per cent of the market.

A barely concealed trade war is now raging within the uneasy fraternity of the Atlantic Alliance. The war of words, broken agreements, court cases and special government measures extends from steel, shipbuilding and textiles through agricultural products to videos and computers.

The Western powers are also moving into sharper conflict over the export of goods and capital to the Third World. The USA is now threatening to pull out of an agreement with other Western nations limiting the use of export credits to subsidise exports. The main target of Washington's wrath is the French government which has sidestepped the regulations. It has boosted its foreign investments by 65 per cent over the last three years and secured some lucrative Third World contracts. But everybody is playing the same game.

Through the eighties the capitalists' drive to secure new markets, new spheres of investment and raw material sources abroad will grow in response to falling profitability at home. The conflicts can only become more intense. This is why rearmament with more and more lethal weaponry is a major area of expenditure for every imperialist ruling class. In economic terms they cannot afford to waste money on weapons, but in political and military terms they cannot afford to be outstripped by their competitors. The working class, the only truly international class, cannot afford — on any terms — to allow them to resolve their crisis at our expense.

## Their problems

The fragility of today's recovery exposes the deep-rooted problems facing the capitalist class around the world.

### ● Profitability

Profits are too low to justify the levels of investment necessary to get the economy moving again. The long-term tendency for the rate of profit to fall underlies the industrial stagnation which has characterised the world recession. Over the last 20 years the capitalists' average rate of return on investment (a rough guide to the rate of profit) has fallen sharply. It has declined from 22 to 10 per cent in the USA, from 26 to 12 per cent in West Germany and from 11 per cent to four per cent in Britain. When falling profitability leads to a declining mass of profits, investment is cut back and stagnation results.

The recent widely reported increases in company profits in Britain may appear to contradict this assessment. But a 25 per cent increase in profits in 1983, with a further 16 per cent expected in 1984 must be measured against the low starting point from which the increases begin. In real terms the figures suggest an increase in the rate of profit from four per cent to five or six per cent. This will not be sufficient to encourage new investment — especially at a time when much higher returns may be obtained with less risks on the Eurocurrency markets.

### ● Investment

Declining profits lead to a decline in real productive investment, leading to stagnation and decay in the economy. There has been an increase in investment in the recent upturn but it has been too little investment of the wrong type to launch a real recovery. Much of the new investment has taken place in response to state incentives. These include tax incentives to business in the USA and in Germany and the abolition of capital allowances in Britain.

Investment has been directed towards

the replacement of worn out equipment rather than expanding the capital stock. Instead of companies growing with new investment the trend has been one of accelerating closures. In the USA companies are going bankrupt at a rate of 24 000 a year. In the first half of 1984 in Britain there were 7000 liquidations, an 11 per cent rise on the previous year.

### ● Productivity

Declining investment has led to falling productivity. The dynamism which the capitalist system temporarily regained during the fifties and sixties has now come to an end. British commentators often make claims of substantial productivity improvements. But these are based on the effects of North Sea oil and major rationalisation programmes in declining industries, not any real improvements in productivity in productive industry. Over the past decade the annual growth in productivity has become smaller in every major capitalist power. In the USA it has dropped from 3.5 to 2.1 per cent, in Japan from 12.1 to 4.7 per cent and in Britain from 4.8 to 1.9 per cent.

### ● Debt

Since the 1974-75 recession the big powers have tried to inject some life into their economies through the extension of credit. Credit played a major part in the recovery of the late seventies. But the massive borrowing of recent years has now become a threat to the financial stability not only of Third World countries, but also of Western imperialist powers. For the Western nations borrowing has helped to finance measures of state intervention to beat the crisis. The USA is approaching the status of a net debtor for the first time since 1914. The indebtedness of Western Europe has increased almost three-fold since 1980. The debt problem now acts as a brake on further state counter-crisis measures.

# Reagan rejoices, Mondale on his knees, US imperialism...



## Praying for inspiration

'God so loved Ronald Reagan', so the joke goes, 'that he sent him Walter Mondale as an opponent'. On the eve of the US presidential elections all the pundits were predicting a landslide victory for ageing ham Reagan over the hapless Mondale. But Reagan's easy run back to the White House cannot disguise the real problems confronting the American ruling class.

'IT'S SPRINGTIME FOR America once again', declared Ronald Reagan in September, celebrating a 20 per cent lead in the opinion polls. The Republicans were riding high in the polls from the official opening of the campaign on Labour Day in early September. After his brief surge in the aftermath of July's Democratic Convention, Mondale always looked a loser. Reagan could point to the upturn in the economy since 1982, a strong dollar, falling unemployment and inflation, and 'some of the best statistics on US economic performance in the last 20 years' to support his claim that he is 'bringing America back'.

The key to Reagan's success lies in the weakness of his Democratic Party opponents. The Republicans had it all their own way in the election campaign. They chose the issues and dictated the terms. Reagan used ideological issues to great advantage to outflank the Democrats and to distract attention from the grave problems facing the American ruling class at home and abroad. The Democrats' inability to offer a credible alternative way out of the recession meant that Mondale's attempts to make an issue out of the budget deficit and other aspects of the crisis came to nothing. Reagan wiped the floor with his rivals as the Democrats capitulated on patriotism and religion, law and order and family values.

### Radically right

Like his good friend Margaret Thatcher in Britain, Reagan has taken the propaganda initiative and succeeded in shifting the political ground to the right. Reagan took office in 1981 after four failed presidencies and 16 years of national humiliation. The catalogue of disasters included defeat in Vietnam, the Watergate scandal, the Arab oil embargo and the overthrow of America's

client regime in Iran. Before he ever set foot in the White House, Reagan wrapped himself in the stars and stripes and reasserted traditional values. He evoked the nation's 'Manifest Destiny' and promised to make America great again. This summer's Olympic Games in Los Angeles provided Reagan with a golden opportunity to parade his success. According to Olympic organising committee president Peter Ueberroth, the Hollywood extravaganza marked 'the biggest outpouring of patriotism since World War Two'.

Reagan hammered Mondale for his association with the failures of the Jimmy Carter administration in which he was vice-president. Carter is still reviled in the USA, not least in his own Democratic Party. Reagan's policy of finding Mondale guilty by association found a resonance with American voters. Reagan was merciless in recalling the former President's abortive attempt to rescue the US embassy staff held hostage in Iran after the fall of the Shah. He boasted how his administration had turned the tide of US decline:

**'In the four years before we took office, country after country fell under the Soviet yoke. Since January 20 1981 not one inch of soil has fallen to the communists. America is coming back and is more confident than ever about the future.'**

The Republicans depicted the Democrats as the party of defeatism and decline, doom and despair. Republican senator Howard Baker lambasted Mondale for his dreary insistence that an 'economic Dunkirk' was just around the corner:

**'Misery has become very important to Walter Mondale. When he's in office he**

**creates it. When he's out he invents it, because Walter Mondale has nothing to offer a successful America.'**

The Republicans wheeled on Democratic dissident and United Nations ambassador Jeane Kirkpatrick at their Dallas convention in August to deliver the most damning repudiation of the Carter-Mondale administration.

### Pulpit politics

Reagan sparked the first controversy of the election campaign when he told the Dallas convention that 'politics and morality are inseparable and, as morality's foundation is religion, religion and politics are necessarily related'. Religion has always been a key theme in American political life. Former Democratic President Carter was the first presidential candidate to proclaim his 'born again' Christianity. In 1976 he forged a populist alliance of black churches and southern white evangelicals. In 1980, Reagan won a big majority among white 'born again' Protestants. Mondale has not been slow to make it known that he is the son of a Methodist minister. His principal rivals for the Democratic nomination were former divinity student Gary Hart and campaigning clergyman Jesse Jackson. His vice-presidential running mate Geraldine Ferraro has been widely promoted as a Catholic mother of three.

Mondale was too concerned about the God-fearing vote to dismiss Reagan's sermons out of hand. Instead he accused him of 'moral McCarthyism':

**'No President should attempt to transform policy debates into theological disputes. He must not let it be thought that political dissent from him is un-Christian...I don't doubt Mr Reagan's faith, his patriotism and his family values. And I call on him and his supporters to respect mine.'**

Mondale's meekness may help him inherit a

place in the kingdom of heaven, but it is no way to win elections on this Earth.

American liberals have loudly condemned the influence of Jerry Falwell's extreme right-wing Moral Majority on the Republican campaign. But Reagan's brand of reaction owes little to Falwell's coalition of evangelical Christians and political crusaders. The Moral Majority plays a useful role for the Republicans in focusing public attention on ideological issues which can disarm the Democrats. But Reagan's anti-abortion campaign, his support for voluntary prayer in schools and his virulent anti-communism reflect an instinct for survival more than Messianic conviction. By whipping up public prejudices around moral issues the American ruling class hopes to cohere a consensus behind the drastic measures needed to ensure the survival of US capitalism. The recent series of firebomb attacks on abortion clinics is a measure of the climate of reaction which the Reagan administration has fostered.

### Out in the cold

As the Reagan camp pitched its tent on the moral high ground, the Democrats went on to the defensive. In Mississippi and Texas the Mondale/Ferraro team told the crowds to put their faith in hard work and never to harbour a doubt about American excellence. Mondale's themes were family values and the need for a strong 'sensible' defence policy. Ferraro surpassed Reagan in her demands for a law and order crackdown and matched him in her calls to 'make America No 1'.

In an effort to counter the Reagan offensive, Mondale emphasised that the election campaign was about issues, not personalities. This was an understandable emphasis — Mondale manifestly lacked personal charisma and could not shake off his image as a loser. His television appearances quickly earned him the title of 'insomnia doctor'. Even Mondale's attempts

to take advantage of Reagan's advancing senility backfired on the President's challenger. A campaign joke made the point that people might complain about Reagan falling asleep in Cabinet meetings, but if Mondale was in the chair he would be the only one to stay awake.

Mondale's soporific qualities did not exhaust the problems facing the Democrats' image makers. When Mondale chose New York Congresswoman Geraldine Ferraro as his running mate she was hailed as the Democratic Joan of Arc. But she turned out to be a campaign liability. She had to fight off allegations about her husband's corrupt financial dealings and mafia connections. She also became embroiled in controversy with Catholic bishops on the abortion issue. The preoccupation of the presidential campaign with vice and sin only exposed Mondale's biggest problem more forcefully. He could not shift the debate from personalities to real issues because he had no real alternative to offer the electorate.

The crisis in the Democratic Party goes much deeper than the personal problems of Mondale or Ferraro. The empty sidewalks that greeted the two candidates as they marched down Fifth Avenue in New York's Labour Day parade summed up the Democrats' demise. It led to further speculation about the collapse of the Democrats' old base of support in the labour movement. The Democratic Party continues to thrive in Congress and at state and local government levels. But it can no longer assemble the coalition of forces at national level that it needs to win a presidential election. Once the USA's natural party of government, the Democrats have won only one of the last four elections. That was in the wake of Watergate when Carter managed to beat stop-gap Republican President Gerald Ford.

The long-term disintegration of the Democratic Party's traditional base explains its electoral decline. The Democrats have relied on a broad coalition since the thirties when Franklin D Roosevelt became the party's most successful leader. Under Roosevelt the Democrats united workers,

farmers, immigrants and blacks behind the promise of social and economic justice. Factional strife among these diverse interest groups is nothing new to the Democrats. But the recession has devastated their modern coalition of traditional Southern 'Dixiecrats' and union bosses, feminists and liberals, Catholics and Jews, blue collar workers and inner-city blacks. Another humiliating defeat at the polls can only intensify the forces tearing the Democratic Party apart.

It is still too early to write an obituary for the Democratic Party. Yet its decline is nevertheless a source of concern for the American ruling class. As the voice of US business put it, 'more is at stake than merely the health of the Democratic Party' (*Business Week*, 30 July). The Democrats have done sterling service for the US establishment over the years. They have helped to integrate immigrants, blacks and other potentially disruptive elements into the fabric of American society. The increasing inability of the party to reconcile the conflicting claims of its different constituencies poses a threat to social stability:

**'When a major party fails to fulfil this coalition building function, the result is political instability that makes the nation more difficult to govern.'** (*Business Week*, 30 July)

The problems of the Democratic Party have become a cause for concern in ruling class circles because they are a striking symptom of the broader social crisis threatening the American establishment.

#### The enemy abroad

The underlying, if understated, theme of the election campaign was the fragility of American power. Reagan succeeded in wrong-footing Mondale on questions of domestic economic policy. But the problems remain to be tackled by the new administration (see box). Reagan's foreign policy never became an issue because the

Republicans did not want it to and the Democrats could not make it one.

There have been no Irans under Reagan, but nor have there been any triumphal descents from Camp David with diplomatic solutions to conflicts in the world's trouble-spots. Under Reagan the USA has failed to sort out continuing menacing strife in Central America and the Middle East. Reagan's only decisive intervention — the invasion of tiny Grenada in December 1983 — only exposed America's weakness. It threw into sharp relief the USA's inability to deal with the internal threat to its client regime in El Salvador. The exit of the US marines from Beirut in February was an admission of American defeat in bringing the masses of Lebanon to heel.

Reagan remains largely unscathed by his foreign policy setbacks. Mondale's efforts to trim Reagan's lead in the polls by homing in on international issues succeeded only in revealing the common ground he shared with Reagan. Mondale did not oppose Reagan's decision to send US marines to Lebanon. He offered full support to the President in any 'appropriate counter-measures' he might take against local people in response to the recent bomb attack on the US embassy in Beirut. Mondale was equally forthright in defence of American interests in other trouble-spots. In a mid-election interview he told the *New York Times* that he would favour some form of 'quarantine' against Nicaragua if it continued to 'export revolution'. He favours continuing US military aid to El Salvador and Honduras and he endorsed the use of force in Grenada 'to save American lives'.

#### The enemy within

In addition to the mounting threat to US interests in the Third World, the American ruling class also faces an enemy within. Reagan's encouragement of union-busting and measures to drive down working class living standards have so far met with considerable success. One yardstick of the declining strength of the unions is the record of last year's wage settlements. The wage

increases won by union negotiators were the lowest in the 16 years since the Federal Labour Department began to collect detailed statistics. But Reagan is not having it all his own way.

The employers' offensive is beginning to provoke a working class fightback. After decades of collaboration with the bosses the trade union leaders have little influence or control over the rank and file. The result is that when conflict erupts it often takes a very militant and even violent form. The 15-month strike by Arizona copper miners over the Phelps Dodge Corporation's attempt to push through a sweeping 'giveback' wage contract — a wage cut — shows workers' determination to fight back. The bosses are also out to smash the workers' unions. The strike has led to violent clashes between armed strikers and policemen on a scale that makes the British miners' strike look quite friendly. On the first anniversary of the strike at the end of June, police snipers surrounded a strikers' rally, while state troops attacked the strikers with batons and tear gas in a battle that continued late into the night. Similar confrontations occurred outside hospitals and nursery homes in New York City between hospital ancillary and clerical workers and armed police. The strike, which began in July, and involved 50 000 health workers, protesting over wages and conditions, was the largest and one of the most volatile strikes in the North East in recent years.

The American ruling class is still the richest and most powerful in the world. But the impact of the recession on the USA means that the American government now has to fight hard to ensure its survival. Reagan has had a push-over with Mondale. But he has still to reckon with the masses of Central America, the Middle East and Africa. And he has still to reckon with the mighty force of the American proletariat. The working class has played a largely abstentionist role in the presidential elections, but it is the only force in American society that can resolve all the problems of the recession to the advantage of the whole of society.

Joan Phillips

Reagan may have beaten Mondale, but he has yet to overcome the deep-seated malaise of American capitalism.

#### Economic stagnation

Reagan has made much of the upturn in the US economy over the last two years. Yet although industrial production in June was 20 per cent higher than in October 1982, it was still only seven per cent above 1979 levels. Industry's use of capacity has risen rapidly from its low point of 20 months ago, but it still stands at no more than the average level of the past decade of stagnation.

Economic growth has relied heavily on credit and state and consumer spending. There has been no real capital restructuring or industrial expansion.

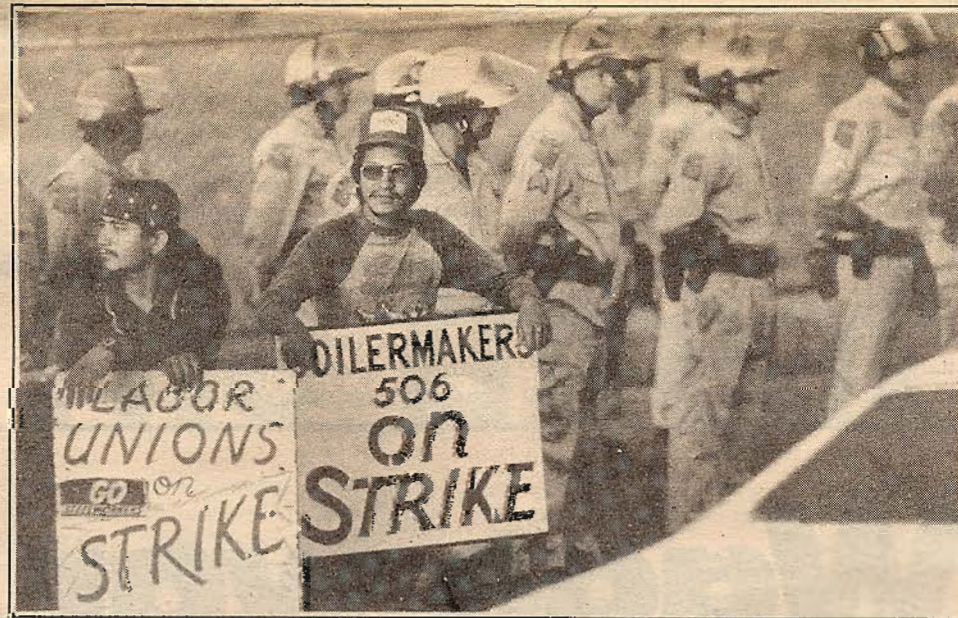
Capital investment has risen, but it has not been channelled into productive industries. Reagan can wax lyrical about the upsurge of 'the sunbelt' industries in the South West. But the ruling class knows that the relatively small new technology sector is no substitute for the declining heavy industry in 'the rustbelt' of the North. The fragile basis of the US upturn has been underlined by the huge budget deficit, high interest rates and tremors in the banking system.

#### Financial instability

High government spending has meant high government borrowing. This in turn has led to rising interest rates and blocked industry's access to credit to finance new investment. Meanwhile foreign investment in the dollar has rocketed, leaving it over-valued by around 30 per cent.

Up to now the inflow of foreign investment has helped finance the budget deficit and allowed the government to persist with its high borrowing strategy. But these trends cannot be sustained indefinitely. The 'super-dollar' is a result of American bluffing on the basis of an economic strength which it no longer possesses. The dollar still rules the

## Reagan's other contest



Reagan's enemy within: Phelps Dodge copper miners striking back

world's money markets, but only because no imperialist power is yet ready to call America's bluff and challenge the dominant position occupied by the USA since the Second World War.

Leading US bankers live in fear that political instability at home or a blow to American prestige abroad could result in a sudden collapse of confidence in the dollar. The result would be a rapid return to recession, sky high interest rates and soaring inflation. The near collapse of one of America's largest banks — Continental Illinois — earlier this year was symptomatic of the underlying insecurity of the financial system. Despite government support, more US banks have failed this year than at any time since 1939.

#### Public spending

The American ruling class is under pressure to reduce spending and tackle the budget deficit. Yet there are

constraints on Reagan's ability to do either. Leading economic commentators have argued that he must cut government spending by \$100 billion and raise taxes by \$100 billion by 1989 to put the budget within striking distance of a balance. But Reagan's difficulty is what to cut, where and by how much.

Cutting arms spending would do wonders for the budget but it is anathema to a ruling class determined to preserve America's standing as the world's leading power. Defence spending is at its highest ever peacetime level. In his first two years in office Reagan managed to drive up military spending by close to 10 per cent a year.

Republicans have railed against those who have tried to use the deficit stick to beat down the defence budget. Increasing US military might is the only way to maintain confidence in America's role as the guarantor of imperialist interests around the world. It also helps

to guarantee continued foreign investment in the dollar. Establishment spokesmen have warned that 'a great power that is unwilling to pay for its policies ends up as a country unable to preserve them' (*Business Week*, 26 March). The American ruling class has no choice but to endorse Reagan's military build-up whatever price it has to pay because the alternative could cost it its very survival.

Runaway grants to American farmers are one of the targets favoured for spending cuts by many government advisers. Major grant increases in recent years account for more than 10 per cent of the increase in the total federal budget. Yet calls for sweeping cuts pose serious difficulties for Reagan. The government can no longer afford to buy off the farmers for producing vast surpluses. But the farmers are a strong force for stability and they maintain a powerful political lobby. In the run-up to the election Reagan gave the farmers most of what they demanded. Once the election is over they can expect harsher treatment as the government is forced to look hard for economies.

The US ruling class faces even bigger problems in axing social security and welfare spending. Welfare programmes have already been cut by five per cent since 1980. Between 1979 and 1982 the population living below the official poverty line rose by 44 per cent to 29 million. Yet under new means test standards for food stamps and other benefits the government will pay less for welfare this year than it did in 1980. The new standards are designed to ensure that only the most impoverished qualify for food stamps and that the level of benefits is barely enough to keep the recipients alive. Soup kitchens are now an established institution in America's inner-city ghettos. Supermarket owners have taken to spraying their garbage with weed-killer to deter 'scavengers'. More welfare cuts would risk provoking serious disorder without saving much money.

# France and Italy

## New direction needed

The trade unions and the communist parties in France and Italy have shown that they cannot defend jobs and wages. A new direction for the labour movement is now an urgent necessity. *Sabena Norton and James Wood report.*

A NUMBER OF COMMON features stand out in the class struggle in France and Italy.

### Unpopular socialists

Both countries are led by socialists whose parties lack a base of popular support.

● Francois Mitterrand won a landslide victory in the 1981 presidential elections. His Socialist Party slumped to 21 per cent of the poll in June's European elections. At first Mitterrand widened his base by including prominent Communist Party members in his Cabinet. But this summer the communists finally withdrew from the government leaving the Socialist Party regime reliant on the support of barely a fifth of the electorate.

● Bettino Craxi's Socialist Party is even weaker than Mitterrand's. Although it has made some progress in recent years, the Italian Socialist Party remains much smaller and more middle class than the mass, largely proletarian, Communist Party. The Socialist Party also slumped in the June elections — from 13 to 11 per cent of the poll. Craxi holds power only because of the vagaries of Italian parliamentary politics.

### Right in disarray

In both France and Italy the socialist premiers cling on to office because of the weakness and divisions of their opponents. These in turn reflect a degree of insecurity and uncertainty within the ruling classes of both countries about the best course to pursue to stay on top.

● The French right was shattered by Mitterrand's success in 1981 and has yet to recover fully. Three figures compete for the title of Mitterrand's top contender. Former Prime Minister Raymond Barre leads the field in hard-hitting attacks on the government. Former President Giscard d'Estaing is also in the running to replace Mitterrand. Both are challenged by Jacques Chirac, also a former Prime Minister and leader of the more right-wing Gaullist RPR party. Mitterrand has skillfully exploited splits and rivalries among his opponents.

Through a combination of concessions and manoeuvres Mitterrand wrong-footed the right this summer over his proposals for tightening state control over education. The appointment of the dynamic and youthful Laurent Fabius as Prime Minister has given

the government's image a boost over the ageing yesterday's men of the opposition. The rise of Jean-Marie Le Pen's racist Front National has also put the right, especially Chirac, under considerable pressure. In June the FN won 11 per cent of the poll — equal to the Communist Party.

● Italy's dominant right-wing party, the Christian Democrats, has long been riddled with factional strife and corruption. It is the party of kickback deals in aerospace, rip-offs in earthquake relief and shady connections with the mafia, freemasonry and corrupt Vatican financiers. The Christian Democrats have succeeded in keeping the communists out of government, but they lack the authority or the popularity to rule themselves — so Craxi holds the ring.

### Recession strikes

Both countries face deepening economic crisis. Both economies weathered the last phase of recession fairly well through a combination of state support for industry and austerity measures against the working class. But the structural weaknesses of both economies are now being exposed in the harsher climate of the world economy of the mid-eighties.

● Up to the end of 1982 the French national product grew at around the average for the advanced Western economies. But in 1983 growth fell to 0.7 per cent, well below the OECD average of 2.4 per cent. Devaluation of the franc in March 1983 and the government's harsh austerity programme only temporarily narrowed the foreign trade deficit. Inflation is heading towards 10 per cent, some three per cent higher than the average for France's main European competitors.

The problems of French industry are at the heart of the crisis. The rate of return on industrial investment fell from 16.6 per cent in 1975 to 9.9 per cent last year (*OECD Survey*, July 1984). Low profits have meant low investment. The rate of new investment by industrial firms more than halved over the decade to 1982. Last year industrial investment fell by four per cent. As a result, the stock of industrial equipment has aged dramatically.

● Italy's three per cent growth rate for last year already looks threatened. Inflation runs



Facing the crisis: France's Francois Mitterrand (above) and Italy's Bettino Craxi (right)



at one of the highest levels in Europe. Interest rates have been raised to a punitive 16.5 per cent to prevent the balance of payments from running deep into the red. At nearly 10 per cent of gross national product, Italy's public sector borrowing requirement last year was the largest in the Western world. Because nearly half the country's imports and all its oil purchases are counted in dollars, the strong dollar has produced a soaring trade deficit. Bankruptcies are taking place on a scale not seen since the

Depression days of Mussolini.

### Austerity plans

Both socialist premiers have launched pro-capitalist austerity programmes to beat the crisis.

● Mitterrand's September budget cut taxes paid by corporations, raised indirect taxes paid by workers and announced a freeze on real wage levels for teachers and other public sector workers. The government has also

The *scala mobile* is the product of the past struggles of the Italian working class. It reflects the militancy of the Italian proletariat — and the conciliatory role of its Communist Party leadership.

The *scala mobile* was first agreed in 1946 at a time of turbulent working class activity and 200 per cent inflation. Workers won the bosses' recognition that wages must rise in line with inflation. In a display of its commitment to the shaky Italian state, the Communist Party agreed in return to a seven month wage truce and took a hard line against unofficial strikes.

The *scala mobile* was ratified after the 'hot autumn' of 1969. After five years of speed-ups, productivity deals and wage cuts, a wave of strike action shook Italy. Workers responded aggressively to the bosses' attempts to make them pay the price when crisis followed the country's *miracolo* boom years of the early sixties. Factory committees were formed all over the country. The bosses had to concede increases in real wages of more than 20 per cent.

The reaffirmed *scala mobile* formed the basis of an Italian social contract. The wage indexation system was held

## Wage war

out to low-paid workers as a more reliable means of securing pay rises than unofficial strikes. Union representatives received management recognition at workplace level in collaborationist works councils. The CGIL was drawn into national level consultations on taxation, health care, pensions, housing and aid for the impoverished South. Top union officials were given posts on numerous quangos, including the tripartite council to which economic and labour legislation is referred and the body running the unemployment relief fund — the aptly named *cassa integrazione*.

The *scala mobile* is now coming under direct attack from the bosses and the state. In a 14 February decree the government readjusted the quarterly wage indexation system to reduce wages. The Confindustria, Italy's CBI,

is demanding that the proportion of pay packets covered by the *scala mobile* be reduced from 80 to 20 per cent. The Italian labour bureaucracy is fighting back, but to save its own intimate relations with the state, not to defend working class living standards.

When the government issued a decree restricting the *scala mobile*, the communist-backed CGIL called a mass demonstration of defiance. The Communist Party launched a campaign for a national referendum to reverse Parliament's decision. This gesture led to conflict with both the Christian Democrat-inclined CISL and with a socialist minority within the CGIL. General Secretary of the smaller, Socialist-dominated UIL Giorgio Benvenuto opposed the referendum declaring that 'we must be realists...over

the past year Italy has suffered the lowest ever number of days lost in strikes and we must build on this' (*Avanti*, 18 September).

The socialists need have little fear about the communist officials leading industrial action to maintain wage levels. They have already approved in practice much of Craxi's decree. The party's feeble criticism of Craxi's attack on wages was that it was likely to prove 'ineffective' (*L'Unita*, 21 February). The party leaders' main objection is to the lack of consultation from the government over its wage-cutting plans. Their referendum campaign and public protests are designed to allow the rank and file to let off steam. They also have the object of putting pressure on the authorities to continue to recognise the labour leaders and uphold their high standing in society.

The leaders of the Italian labour movement offer nothing but blind alleys to the working class. This year strikes have fallen to a new low. Italian workers need to break with the collaborationist approach of their existing organisations if they are going to maintain their living standards through the battles ahead.

backed a savage restructuring programme for France's traditional manufacturing industries. Threatened redundancies include 80 000 in the motor industry, 57 000 in coalmining, 25 000 in steel and 4500 in shipbuilding. The government's refusal to bail out the bankrupt Creusot-Loire engineering consortium threatens to turn the Burgundy town of Le Creusot into a French Corby.

● Last month Craxi's government formally presented its 1985 budget to Parliament. It aims to curb spending on health, education, social security and on support for industry. It also aims to introduce a freeze on real wages for three million government employees. This further attack on wages follows the government's earlier drive to readjust the *scala mobile* system of raising wages in line with price rises. The effect of the government's changes in the pay indexation system at a time when inflation is running at 13 per cent will be to remove the equivalent of around £5 a week from every worker's pay packet by the end of the year.

### Bureaucratic paralysis

Both France and Italy have a weak and ineffectual labour bureaucracy. The response of the unions and the major labour movement parties to the employers' offensive has been to seek any compromise that will secure their own position. They are discovering that once they have betrayed their members there is nobody left to defend them or even vote for them.

● The membership of the French CGT —

the Communist Party-linked trade union federation — has slumped from 2.3 million in 1982 to 1.5 million today. The CGT is the major union for blue collar workers in manufacturing industry — the sector that has been hit most heavily by the recession. Its response to the shake-out of jobs has not been to lead a fight for the right to work, but to appeal for import controls and the repatriation of French investments abroad. As the government stepped up its attack over the summer, CGT leader Henri Krasucki reaffirmed his commitment to the modernisation of French industry. In a major newspaper interview he assured the public of his 'serious, loyal and above all flexible' approach to the country's economic problems (*Le Monde*, 24 August).

Meanwhile the Communist Party is disintegrating fast. Its membership has fallen by more than half since the late seventies. Its electoral support has slumped, particularly in key working class centres such as the area around Paris and big provincial cities like Lille and Marseilles. In its three years in government the Communist Party gave the government vital cooperation in pushing through thousands of redundancies in manufacturing industry. When the communists pulled out of the government in July, party leader Georges Marchais threatened to unleash a mass working class revolt against the government's rationalisation programme. But workers have become cynical and demoralised. Three months later there is no sign of revolt — only an increase in the tension between the party and the CGT, as

both wings of the decaying bureaucracy pursue their own desperate survival strategies.

● In Italy the overall level of unionisation has dropped by 15 per cent over the past three years. In the seventies the unions expanded to cover more than 50 per cent of the working class. They are now down below 40 per cent. While the membership of the Christian Democrat-backed yellow union CISL has remained buoyant, the number in the Communist Party-controlled CGIL has fallen to 4.5 million. Yet though the CGIL has lost members, the Communist Party itself has retained popular support better than any other Stalinist organisation in Western Europe. When party leader Enrico Berlinguer collapsed and died during the European election campaign in June, his funeral was attended by one million people. The Communist Party went on to win nearly 12 million votes in the election — the highest of any party in the EEC.

The Communist Party's success rests on a number of factors — its record in the wartime resistance, its base in local government, its strong organisational ties to the working class and the weakness of competing parties. The party has more than 3000 full-timers and a further 10 000 members in municipal office. It has kept up its popularity by running populist campaigns around issues like drugs, the mafia and corruption. But the Communist Party's long quest for respectability has rendered it irrelevant to the needs of the working class. It presents itself as 'the big national and popular party which fights for

Italy's modern development'. It still calls itself communist, yet it stands to the right of the British Labour Party. It survives only through the absence of any working class alternative.

### Room for a change

The disintegration of the old labour bureaucracy as a major capitalist offensive opens up reveals the urgent need for a fighting alternative leadership. The workers of France and Italy have often displayed their combativeness. They have shown that they are not inhibited about using force to fight force when they go into battle with the bosses. The fragmentation of the labour movement in Europe creates dangers and difficulties. It leaves workers ill-prepared and poorly organised against the employers and the state authorities. It allows one section of the bureaucracy to blame another — as conflicts among socialist and communist trade union federations and their associated parties illustrate.

The weakness of the official labour movement also creates scope for the emergence of an anti-capitalist alternative. The ruling classes have set about weakening the labour bureaucracy as part of the process of attacking the working class. But they have also removed a crucial buffer between the state and the working class. Europe's rulers calculate that they are strong enough to take on the working class directly. The working class of Europe needs to develop the anti-capitalist strategies and organisations that will prove them wrong.

In the first two rounds of the fight for jobs — at the big car plants of Peugeot and Renault — the bosses have won hands down. Workers have shown a consistent determination to take on their employers in strikes and occupations to save jobs. But they have been divided and demoralised by their unions' collaboration with the bosses' rationalisation plans. The unions have given way on point after point and have ended up sprawling in the corner.

Between them, Peugeot and Renault provide jobs directly for 230 000 people and indirectly for a total of nearly one million. Their directors have decided that to survive the recession in the motor trade, they need to cut the workforce by 30 per cent within three years. The bosses' first strategy has been to target the high proportion of immigrant workers in the industry for redundancy and repatriation. They have then tried to buy off the remaining immigrant and indigenous workers with spurious 'retraining' programmes. Thanks largely to the unions, the bosses have up to now been fairly successful.

### Redundancy and repatriation

Round one was fought out in the Peugeot group (which produces Peugeot, Citroen and Talbot cars) in the first eight months of this year. Peugeot is privately owned, relies heavily on immigrant labour and has a tradition of aggressive management techniques. The struggle began at the end of last year at the Talbot plant at Poissy near Paris. Workers who occupied the factory in defiance of redundancy plans were attacked by riot police and company scabs. They were evicted after fierce battles and 6500 workers finally went down the road — and in many cases out of the country altogether.

The main union in the car factories — the CGT — refused to put up even token resistance to the redundancies. It signalled its approval for the government's 'voluntary' repatriation scheme. The CGT's main complaint was that it had been excluded from talks between management and government on the rationalisation programme. The CGT's other concern was that it was being outflanked by the socialist-inclined CFDT, which tried to recruit disillusioned CGT members by calling for opposition to redundancies. However, the CFDT backed down as soon as it became clear that the strike was lost — and that pursuing this line further would mean confrontation with the government. The workers' judgement on the CGT was expressed in the March union elections

# It's a knockout



Caged in: French workers need to make a break with the past

at the plant, when its share of the vote fell from 42 to 26 per cent.

The next target in the Peugeot chain was the Citroen factory at Aulnay-sous-Bois, also in the industrial belt around Paris. When the company demanded 2900 voluntary redundancies, including 700 voluntary repatriations in May, the CGT saw an opportunity to restore its battered credibility. It won massive support for a strike and occupation at Aulnay which spread to the other Citroen plants in the Paris area. The workers' direct action delayed the redundancy package and it was two months before normal working resumed.

The government tried to smooth the course of the redundancy programme by insisting that Peugeot proceed more slowly, beginning with a smaller number of job cuts. The company bided its time until the summer holiday break. The government now agreed that 1900 redundancies would be a reasonable start. The CGT capitulated for the pathetic concession of a few months retraining on 70 per cent pay — and seats for the CGT leaders on the board supervising retraining. Retraining may sound good to the union bureaucrats, but it offers nothing to the workers. Since there are no jobs to retrain for, the scheme is just a delayed redundancy/repatriation scheme.

The CGT leader at Aulnay, Moroccan-born Akka Ghazi, indicated his union's low expectation of success in opposing repatriation by registering his candidature for the forthcoming elections in Morocco. Ghazi has assimilated the outlook of the French labour bureaucracy so fully that he customarily concludes speeches with the cry 'long live France and its industry!'

Black production line workers returning from holiday to Aulnay found the site sealed off by riot police. Steel mesh cages were set up at the factory entrance. Workers were forced to enter the cages for identification and a body search before entering the works. Workers on the redundancy list were turned away and those who objected were clubbed and arrested. Those hospitalised included the unfortunate Akka Ghazi who tried to make a late gesture of defiance by climbing over the fence.

Leaders of the CGT and the Communist Party professed their outrage at the bosses' terror tactics. But they had already given the green light to redundancies, so they were in a weak position to object to the methods used to enforce them. In August, CGT official Andre Sainjon explained the bureaucrats' view:

'We don't want another uncontrollable strike on our hands. On the other hand we don't know how the immigrants — in particular at Aulnay — will react to the offer of six months' training without job guarantees.' (*Le Canard Enchaîné*, 22 August)

The CGT's fear of losing face with its black members was now far outweighed by its desire to be seen as a moderate and responsible force. It did not want to be associated with the militant actions of immigrant workers.

### The retraining fraud

Round two of the redundancy struggle took place last month at the state-owned Renault company. Renault retains a

higher proportion of indigenous French workers — in the Paris area less than 10 per cent of the workforce is black. It also has a tradition of paternalistic management and close relations with the union leaders. Renault has already got rid of nearly 10 000 workers this year through early retirement and voluntary redundancy, with full union cooperation. CGT chief Henri Krasucki recently told the press that the situation was different from Peugeot because 'Renault workers are French' (*Le Monde*, 3 October). The Communist Party daily paper *L'Humanité* regularly features Renault as a model employer and the bureaucrats are keen to preserve good relations.

However, when Renault announced its package of 15 000 redundancies last month the CGT had to make some sort of stand. But its call for token strike action met with very little response from Renault workers. In fact management stepped in 'at the very moment the strike was beginning to run out of steam' to save the union's face. *The Times* astutely summed up the bosses' skilful use of the union:

'The Renault management deliberately decided to provide an honourable exit to a union which was in danger of seeing its action collapse. Renault has no desire to humiliate the CGT. It is the strongest union in the company, and management needs its cooperation if its modernisation plans are to succeed with a minimum of disruption.' (5 October)

The union's gesture effectively demoralised resistance and the company went ahead with its plans. These include a big productivity drive as well as redundancies and repatriation for immigrant workers. Token retraining is also a central part of the Renault package.

The debacle at Renault, following the defeat at Peugeot, amounts to a serious setback to the French working class. It should alert French workers to the disastrous strategies recommended by the leaders of the official labour movement. The labour bureaucrats' subservience to the French establishment can only lead to deeper racial divisions and further demoralisation in the working class.

French motor workers need a strategy that can give their often displayed militancy the sort of lead against the employers and the government that could halt the tide of job losses and strike defeats. *Gareth Evans*

## Oedipus complex?

Andrew Taylor, *The politics of the Yorkshire miners*, Croom Helm 1984, pp332, hbk £19.95



THE FIRST FOOTNOTE in Andrew Taylor's study of the Yorkshire miners touches on the key controversy in the National Union of Mineworkers since nationalisation. It also indirectly raises issues at the centre of the current miners' strike. Taylor, the lecturer son of left-wing Yorkshire leader Jack, attempts to define the terms 'left' and 'right' in the context of the modern NUM.

He defines the left as 'believing in industrial action as essential for the defence of miners' interests and opposing too great a reliance on party-political action'. He identifies the right as 'believing in the disutility of industrial action and supporting negotiation and conciliation with management'. According to Taylor, the right is characteristically pro-nationalisation and pro-Labour Party. The left traditionally puts a higher priority on maintaining wages than saving jobs, while the right emphasises saving jobs even at the expense of accepting low wages.

A glance at the record shows the inadequacy of these definitions. The most successful industrial action in the history of the NUM in 1972 and 1974 was led, albeit reluctantly, by a right-wing leadership. On the other hand, the present left-wing leaders have always upheld the procedures of negotiation and conciliation. They have never questioned the NUM's commitment to public ownership and the Labour Party. Indeed, Taylor's own account provides much valuable background information from the post-war history of the NUM which throws light on the extensive common ground between right and left in the union. Let's look a bit more closely.

In his first chapter Taylor looks at the impact of nationalisation. He rightly emphasises the key point that it gave rise to 'a conviction that there was no distinction between the interests of the government and the interests of the mineworkers and their union'. The Yorkshire leaders promoted a 'Help the Nation' drive for higher output and denounced unofficial strikes as 'sabotage'. At national level the left was an even more ardent supporter of higher productivity and opponent of unofficial action than the right. In Yorkshire a solid right-wing leadership was consolidated. The outlook of class collaboration was shared by right and left alike. It was summed up in the national executive's statement that 'there are now no opposing sides in the industry'.

In 1956-57, oil began to replace coal as a source of energy and the long decline of British coalmining accelerated. Taylor notes two key aspects of the NUM's response. In 1958 the Yorkshire area put a resolution to the NUM conference to remove a clause in the union's constitution that effectively ruled out national industrial action. Right-wing area leader Sam Bullough moved the resolution 'on the grounds that it would enhance the NUM's bargaining power'.

The second aspect of the NUM's response to the contraction of the industry was to press the government to adopt a national fuel policy embodying a commitment to increase coal output. A union special conference in 1960 adopted a target of 200 million tonnes a year. When the Tory government rejected the NUM's proposals, the union looked to a future Labour government to pursue its strategy for the industry. The policy of using industrial action to push the government to adopt a different corporate strategy for the industry thus emerged under the NUM's solidly right-wing leadership in the fifties. In the sixties and seventies it became the defining characteristic of the rising left which now rules the union.

### Labour's betrayals

As Taylor shows, the experience of the 1964-70 Labour governments contributed decisively to the rise of the left in Yorkshire and in the national NUM. In the early sixties the miners placed their

# reviews

faith in the return of a Labour government. At their first meeting with Fred Lee, the new minister responsible for the industry, Taylor records that the NUM was 'speedily disabused' of any notion that the Labour government would raise output or stop pit closures. Lee told the NUM conference that 'efficiency, costs and the resulting prices are absolutely paramount'. In terms strikingly similar to those used in recent months by the Tories, he insisted that 'uneconomic pits, not just exhausted pits, would be closed and the remainder would be modernised and then employ fewer miners'.

Instead of saving jobs, the Labour government speeded up the pace of closures. Within a year of its election the government announced that it had abandoned its promised 200 million tonne target in favour of a cutback to 170-180 million tonnes. When the NUM turned to the TUC for support it backed the government. In its 1965 report the TUC declared that the government 'had gone as far as could be reasonably expected in existing circumstances' to meet its commitments. Any miner who is impressed by Labour politicians' promises and TUC offers of solidarity today should recall this record of betrayal.

The effect of the Labour government's rationalisation policy was particularly traumatic in Yorkshire. The area had been relatively spared in the earlier shake-out of the industry. In 1965 the Yorkshire Coal Board announced that 18 pits — 14 of them in the Barnsley area — would close within three years. Another 10 were earmarked for later closure. At the same time the bosses introduced the National Power Loading Agreement which meant cuts in money wages for many Yorkshire miners. Rank and file miners were bitterly resentful at the policies of the Labour government. They were increasingly critical of union leaders at national and area level who proved unable or unwilling to defend miners' living standards. Pressure mounted steadily for industrial action.



Yorkshire miners' leader Jack Taylor

In March 1966 the NUM executive called an overtime ban over the rejection of the union's wage claim. This was a significant step because it was the first official industrial action proposed by the executive since the formation of the modern NUM in 1944. At a special union conference a young Yorkshire delegate called Arthur Scargill emphasised the need to use industrial action to press the government to re-adopt the 200 million tonne output target. The executive, still under right-wing control, agreed that it had to 'do something dramatic, something salutary, to compel the NCB, and if necessary the government, to face the situation in the industry'.

By the late sixties the leaders of the NUM were forced into taking a more aggressive stand. They had to show the employers and the government that they meant business. More importantly, they had to keep on top of the rising tide of anger and militancy at rank and file level. Unofficial action erupted in Yorkshire in 1969 and 1970, but loyalty to the Labour government still restrained the union at national level. The miners finally won redress for the grievances of the previous decade in the victorious 1972 and 1974 strikes in which Yorkshire played a leading part. The miners were now no longer held back by loyalty to Labour. The left rode to power in the NUM in the late seventies on a wave of rank and file hostility against employers, governments and moderate union leaders.

The post-war leadership of the NUM accepted limited horizons. The old right was strongly influenced by a fatalistic assessment of the prospects for the industry, formed over a long

period of decline. It preferred negotiation to industrial action which it considered could only weaken the industry further. It became imbued with moderation and remote from the rank and file. The Middle East oil crisis gave the new left in the early seventies a much more optimistic assessment of the prospects for British coalmining. The left was closer to an increasingly restive rank and file. Taylor explains how the 'panel' system of linking up groups of NUM branches in a particular area helped to form a left-wing alternative to the existing area leadership in Yorkshire. The left argued that industrial action was necessary to push the government into realising the industry's full potential.

### Consensus

What the right and left had in common was that both their strategies for defending miners' jobs began from an assessment of the market prospects of the National Coal Board. What really changed was the wider economic climate and the mood of the rank and file. The left's approach was simply a shift of emphasis within the framework of collaboration set up over the post-war period. The right could also lead industrial action when pushed. And Scargill's *Plan for Coal* is only an updated version of the old expansionist fuel policy produced by the right in the fifties. Taylor comments accurately that the object of the tripartite process that finally endorsed the *Plan for Coal* in 1974 was 'to secure the cooperation of the NUM, negating the possibility of strike action'.

Taylor goes far in revealing the political weaknesses of the NUM left. But he fails to trace them to their origin in the NUM tradition of identifying miners' interests with the market position of the coalmining industry. This outlook has dominated the NUM since nationalisation and the left has yet to challenge it. This is why today's left leadership cannot put forward a coherent strategy to defend miners' jobs in conditions of deepening recession in the industry. For all his insights, Taylor ends up apologising for the left and exaggerating its resistance to management and government attacks.

It is not the case that the left's opposition to the Social Contract and productivity deals in the seventies was 'absolute'. Scargill objected to the terms of Labour's deal with the unions — not the collaborationist principle behind it. The *Plan for Coal* was no more than a Social Contract on a smaller scale and it led directly to productivity deals. Scargill argued for national rather than local deals. But, having conceded the principle of linking pay to output, he ended up having to accept area deals introduced by back door methods. Nor was the left any more 'absolute' in its resistance to pit closures. Closures have continued apace both in Yorkshire and nationally under Scargill's leadership as under his right-wing predecessors.

Taylor's book contains much of interest and value. He examines critically the relationship between the miners and the Labour Party, especially in Yorkshire. He shows that despite giving solid financial, organisational and electoral support to Labour for decades the miners have received precious little in return. Taylor documents the contemptuous attitude of even NUM-sponsored MPs to the miners. The Yorkshire miners particularly resented Barnsley MP Roy Mason who refused to sponsor a demand for early retirement, condemned unofficial strikes and became a minister for pit closures under Harold Wilson. Yet Taylor notes a continuing 'refusal to challenge Labour in deference to the party's electoral strategy'.

Taylor also goes into some detail on the conduct of recent major strikes in the Yorkshire coalfield. He includes the unofficial strikes of the sixties and the big national actions of 1972 and 1974. He notes the key to the success of the 1972 strike was rank and file initiative:

'The conduct of the strike was in the hands of the branches who created a network of contacts with other union branches which were so vital to the miners' success.'

This element of grass roots involvement and control has been sadly lacking in the current dispute.

Taylor's account of the Yorkshire miners is well worth reading by anybody grappling with the problems of the current dispute. Yet it lacks a coherent analysis. Taylor seems inhibited from drawing the conclusions towards which his book unmistakably points. These are that the future of the miners depends on breaking with the collaborationist strategy of both right and left wings of the bureaucracy and cutting the union's ties to the Labour Party. Perhaps he cannot face slaying his own father.

Mike Freeman

## The right stuff

John Lea and Jock Young, *What is to be done about law and order?*, Penguin 1984, pp284, pbk £2.95



WHAT IS TO BE DONE about John Lea and Jock Young? Since the 1981 riots these two academics have made a virtual industry out of radical criminology. Their latest offering, published under the auspices of the Socialist Society's *What is to be done* series, is a systematic presentation of their policy proposals on law and order for the Labour Party.

Lea and Young make two points: first, that the left must take the issue of crime more seriously; and second, that until it does so it will be incapable of breaking the right's political monopoly over the law and order issue. Lea and Young take the Home Office, the police and right-wing criminologists to task for underestimating the crime rate and ignoring the 'dark figure' of unreported crime. At the same time, they are critical of the right's dramatisation of the problem and disagree with its shock-treatment solutions. They castigate the left for its 'idealism' and for romanticising crime as anti-establishment when in reality it is individualistic and directed primarily at the working class.

Lea and Young insist that crime is a burning issue for the working class and that 'a new left realism' must attempt to come to grips with it. The left must face up to the truth, they argue, and recognise that 'it is in the interests of working class people that crime is controlled and it is in their interest that the agencies of the state deal with crime in a just and effective fashion'. The law is not merely an instrument of 'ruling class domination', they continue, 'it has a legitimate component to it, in terms of the protection of working class interests'.

Lea and Young like to keep their distance from the 'hang 'em and flog 'em' brigade and media hysteria about the 'decline into barbarism'. Yet their pleas for the left to take the issue of crime to heart — already a *fait accompli* in the Labour Party — only play into the hands of the establishment and strengthen its law and order offensive. Crime is *not* a working class issue. Establishment hysteria about crime, muggings, violent picket lines and intimidation serves a specific purpose. It is designed to rally the most backward sections of society behind state attacks on blacks, miners or anybody who happens to be chosen as the state's 'enemy within'. The establishment uses the issues of crime and law and order as an ideological weapon to cohere a public consensus in favour of increased repression *against* the working class. Rather than expose the anti-working class character of the law and order debate, Lea and Young indulge it.

Crime is a loaded word — and the ruling class can give it any meaning it likes. But it is obvious that most crime, such as robbery or shoplifting, is committed by individuals for personal gain and is not anti-establishment. It is also obvious that crime is the natural consequence of a system that degrades, impoverishes, atomises and does violence to the working class. Acts of crime may well affect the working class more than any other section of society, but it doesn't automatically follow that the working class should take up the cudgels for the establishment's law and order lobby. It can *never* be in the interests of the working class that 'the agencies of the state deal with crime in a just and effective fashion' as Lea and Young contend. To endorse this view is to give the state a free hand to strengthen its repressive apparatus. It is inconceivable that the law can be, on the one hand, an instrument of 'ruling class domination' and on the other hand the defender of the working class. Lea and Young would like to have it both ways, but most workers know whose side the law is on.

Any discussion about crime today can only legitimise state repression against the working class. Rather than go along with the state's criminalisation strategy and its radical apologists like Lea and Young, workers should direct their energies against the system that brands the oppressed as criminals and keeps the working class in chains.

Fran Eden

## Still searching

Madhu Kishwar and Ruth Vanita eds, *In search of answers: Indian women's voices from Manushi*, Zed Press 1984, pp312, pbk £6.95, hbk £18.95



*IN SEARCH OF answers* is a collection of articles from the influential Indian feminist journal *Manushi*. In her introduction, one of the founders of *Manushi*, Madhu Kishwar, notes the imbalance in feminist writings on Indian women:

'A large part of the thinking, writing and efforts to change the conditions of the lives of Indian women is confined to a narrow stratum of urban, educated middle class women...while the reality of the lives of the vast majority of Indian women has been largely ignored.'

*In search of answers*, unfortunately, does little to break with this tradition.

For the majority of women in India life is indeed grim. The backwardness of the Indian economy subjects women to a far greater intensity of oppression than in the advanced capitalist countries. Eighty per cent of India's population live in rural areas; most are peasants and landless labourers. Women's lives centre around the constant struggle for survival — procuring the most basic necessities such as food, fuel and water. The inadequacy of technology means that for many women a working day of more than 15 hours is normal. Hundreds of thousands of villages have no source of clean water. Obtaining it requires hours of toil by women.

More than three quarters of all illnesses in backward capitalist countries are caused by polluted water. India has one of the highest infant mortality rates in the world; in at least 80 per cent of these deaths, diarrhoea, chiefly caused by contaminated water, plays a major part. The high infant mortality rate adds yet another burden on women: they are forced to bear more children so that at least some may survive into adulthood. Millions of women die each year from tetanus and other infections developed during childbirth because there is no clean water, or because rusty, dirty knives or stones are used to cut the umbilical cord, or because they have to carry on their long hours of work right up to giving birth. The maternal mortality rate in India is one of the highest in the world.

As well as enduring long hours of domestic work, most women are forced to find wage-labour to survive. Women perform the most menial, exhausting jobs in agriculture, such as transplanting paddy and stone picking, for exceptionally low wages. Nowadays even these jobs are increasingly denied to women, particularly in areas like the Punjab where new technology has been introduced into agriculture.

The oppression of women in backward capitalist countries is directly rooted in the backwardness of the economy and the social relations imposed by imperialism. Only by smashing imperialism and developing the forces of production to the extent that women can be freed from domestic servitude, will we be able to fight for women's liberation.

Yet this is something that the women's movement in India has failed to confront. *In search of answers* locates women's oppression within the family. The family is seen as an ahistorical institution which in itself is oppressive. The state oppresses women only indirectly by legitimising the family:

'An exploitative family structure receives crucial support from the government and the state through various laws and rules of behaviour which legitimise the authority of men over the lives of the women members of the family.'

The oppression of women is reduced to 'powerful, invisible forces at work', and the fight against women's oppression is reduced to a fight against the particular forms of oppression that Indian women suffer. Thus a major focus of the women's movement is the struggle against drunkenness in men. Indian feminists spend much of their time smashing up liquor pots and picketing breweries.

Both the level of drunkenness and violence against women are major problems in Indian life. But women do not get beaten up and raped simply because men get drunk. Men beat up women because they occupy an inferior position in society and because they are forced to be so dependent upon men. The fact that violence against women is much more pronounced in India than in advanced capitalist countries is a reflection of the greater intensity of women's oppression in the backward capitalist world.

Indian feminists argue that the class violence of the rich peasants and capitalist farmers should be met, not with organised resistance, but by building 'social pressures so that the possession and use of weapons become a matter of shame and social disgrace, rather than, as at present, a symbol of social power and status'. Ultimately, the very backwardness of India is seen as a force for women's liberation. Mahatma Gandhi has become the hero of the women's movement:

'Gandhi was one of the few people to make creative use of our powerful cultural traditions. He was able to inspire people to perform difficult contemporary tasks, using age-old symbols...Our cultural traditions have tremendous potential within them to combat reactionary and anti-women ideas.'

Gandhi preached the harmony of the oppressed and the oppressor, lauded the virtues of the traditional family, and saw the solution to India's problems in a return to a pre-capitalist mode of production. That the women's movement should turn to him for inspiration shows the degree to which it is out of touch with the 'reality of the lives of Indian women'. Gandhi's India is in turmoil. From Kashmir to Tamil Nadu, workers and peasants have taken to the streets in a plethora of struggles against the state. Those in search of an answer to the oppression of women will find it in these struggles, not in the women's movement.

Kenan Malik

## Still slaving

Ruth Schwartz Cowan, *More work for mother: the ironies of household technology from the open hearth to the microwave*, Basic Books, New York 1983, pp257, hbk \$17.95



WOMEN'S MAGAZINES such as *Good Housekeeping* are full of advice to their readers about what sort of kitchen gadgets will lighten the burden of cooking in the home. By contrast, feminist magazines such as *Spare Rib* are full of complaints that the division of labour between the sexes in the home has always worked to women's disadvantage. They argue that men have always oppressed women and that revolutionary communism, therefore, will offer women little recompense for their struggles. Ruth Schwartz Cowan shows how short-sighted each of these two perspectives is.

### It wasn't always that way

Cowan, a New York academic, has taken as her subject domestic work in America. She confirms that there, as in other countries, 'housework' arose as a category differentiated from other kinds of work only with the rise of capitalism and the social, collective system of labour that characterised it. Before the American bourgeois revolution of 1776, the English word 'husband' accurately reflected the role of American men: while they *husbanded* agriculture outside the home, this was intimately related to work inside it — men were *house-bonded* too.

It was capitalist industrialisation which made women oppressed. Instead of tending his cattle, tanning their hides and making leather into shoes for his children, the American man left his wife at home and went out to make shoes in factories. It was men, not women, who enjoyed social intercourse through factory work because women's role as child-bearers and house-cleaners tied them to the home. While men's traditional work became part of the social and collective labour of the factories, women's domestic work remained as privatised, individual toil in the

home. Although women were later drawn into social production, their primary role was as domestic slaves, reproducing male labour-power for capital at no cost.

Men are merely agents in the oppression of women. Capitalist social relations cast wage-labour as the preserve of men, as serious and productive of value and of profit; and they cast domestic work as the pastime of women, as unimportant and not productive of value and profit. The widely held belief that men are responsible for women's oppression is not only fatalistic, it also contradicts historical fact.

### Work, work, work

To argue that women's oppression is specific to capitalism is not to call on women to take on pre-capitalist lifestyles. Without capitalist industrialisation women would not now make up 40 per cent of the US workforce. Without it, Cowan also shows, there would for instance be no nickel-cadmium resistance coils for domestic toasters, irons, hot water urns and hair curlers.

However, as Cowan proves, the *Good Housekeeping* vision of freedom through the domestic appliances pumped out by capitalist industry is spurious. An individual gadget may save time; but as gadgets multiply and productivity in the home rises, women find that they are still spending just as much time doing the housework. Between the wars, even middle class American housewives spent 56 hours a week doing housework, despite the advent of wooden Kelvinator fridges. By 1965 the average American housewife did 54 hours a week. The spread of computers into American homes now promises to make the high productivity, long hours syndrome even worse. Home computers may well force American women to take on low-paid commercial work (word processing, etc) in addition to their family responsibilities.

Cowan fails to follow through the logic of her arguments. She concludes that the allocation of housework to the female sex is 'cast in stainless steel', and that salvation lies only in disrespect for manufacturers' instructions.

*More work for mother* has a fascinating chapter on attempts, under capitalism, to socialise domestic work. Despite herself, Cowan shows that the industrially-organised cleaning of domestic floors and domestic linen failed only because it was not profitable. She tries to make out that collectivist arrangements are alien to her country's psychology: 'Americans act so as to preserve family life'. But Cowan herself recognises the primary function of the family as an economic unit under capitalism.

Revolutionary communism will turn domestic work into a public industry, abolish the family as an economic unit and so leave people free to choose how they wish to live. Cowan's refusal to forge ahead to this conclusion reflects the isolation of the more honest kind of American feminism from the struggles of the international working class. But *More work for mother* is a feat of science and strongly recommended.

Gemma Forest

## The perfect match

James Adams, *The unnatural alliance: Israel and South Africa*, Quartet Books 1984, pp218, hbk £9.95



JAMES ADAMS could not have chosen a more inappropriate title for his book. In common with many British liberals, Adams cannot understand why Israel and South Africa have developed such a close relationship. He views Israel as a state which was established as part of the struggle against anti-semitism and South Africa as a state which rests on institutionalised and virulent racism. Adams' own material goes some way in helping to resolve this apparent paradox.

Israel was never meant to fight anti-semitism. Zionism — the belief in an independent Jewish state — was a reaction to anti-semitism. Both movements have in common the belief that Jews and non-Jews can never live together in peace. Indeed, Zionists accept that anti-semitism is a natural phenomenon. The collaboration between Zionists and anti-semites is well documented in Lenni Brenner's *Zionism in the age of the dictators* (Crown Helm 1983).

The Zionist and apartheid regimes both involve the oppression of the indigenous population. To

maintain their rule, the Israeli and South African states must deny the Palestinian and South African masses even the most basic of democratic rights. In Israel, the Jewish National Fund (JNF) owns or administers most of the land. Non-Jews, even if they are Israeli citizens, are forbidden to own, live on or open a business on JNF land. Israel and South Africa are caught in a cycle of violence and repression, as black South Africans and the Palestinian masses continue to fight back against the states which oppress them. Both owe their existence to the imperialist powers for whom they provide a vital service. South Africa plays an important role in policing the whole of Southern Africa. Israel does a similar job for imperialism in the Middle East. Without imperialist backing both states would be in trouble.

The ties that bind South Africa and Israel are perfectly natural. The relationship cannot be explained by analysing the importance of South Africa's Jewish community as Adams does. Zionism and Apartheid are compatible because they have a lot in common. That's why South Africa's General Smuts was one of the earliest sponsors of the Zionist movement. Both countries have an interest in helping each other police their regions more effectively. Over the years, they have established close political, economic and military links.

*The unnatural alliance* is a good piece of investigative journalism. It details the ins and outs of the South African-Israeli relationship, especially since the collapse of the Portuguese empire in Southern Africa in the mid-seventies. It also confirms that we have every interest in breaking up this happy couple.

Daniel Nassim

## Backing Britain, but...

Arthur Garston and Desmond Rice, *The sinking of the Belgrano*, Secker and Warburg 1984, pp218, hbk £8.95



ACCORDING TO GARSTON AND RICE and a host of Labour MPs, the sinking of the Argentinian cruiser, *The General Belgrano*, was an act of British bloodletting. Two years ago on 1 May the Argentinian Air Force attacked the British fleet. That night the *Belgrano* was sunk by a single torpedo from the *HMS Conqueror* and 365 Argentinians were killed. This event occurred in the middle of a war in which Argentina challenged British imperialism's claim over the Malvinas. Yet two years later, Labour politicians have not let the issue sink.

The recent flurry of parliamentary and journalistic debate, Cabinet leaks and calls for a full public inquiry into the sinking of the *Belgrano* reflects the vulnerability of the Tories in the middle of the miners' strike. But most of all, it indicates the stupidity of the Labour Party. For two years Labour MPs have conducted a senseless campaign to discover some ulterior motive for the sinking of the *Belgrano*. Labour MP Tam Dalyell has made the Falklands War his pet parliamentary preoccupation. Books like this one and a score of Labour left wingers have helped him keep the issue alive. Dalyell opposed the war from the start because he did not think it was in Britain's best interests. Like Garston and Rice, he still has not grasped that British imperialism had no choice but to teach Argentina a lesson.

The Labour Party backed Britain all the way in its war against Argentina, only baulking at the bloodshed. But if you back Britain's imperialist objectives in a war then there's no point complaining about the measures necessary to achieve those objectives. As defence secretary Michael Heseltine put it so succinctly at the Tory Party conference, the *Belgrano* was a legitimate military target. Even the Argentinian military has accepted what Labour cannot stomach, stating that it would have sunk a British ship in similar circumstances. After nearly a century of loyal service with British imperialism, the Labour Party should have learned that backing Britain means backing British butchery against the oppressed.

Grant French

Write to . . .

# the next step

BM RCP London WC1N 3XX

# Letters

## German nationalism

In the final form in which it went into print, my article on Germany ('Germany — a Reich once again', *the next step*, September) did not make sufficiently clear where we stand in relation to the question of German re-unification. In fact, the last sentence suggests that German workers should fight for the re-unification of their country and 'link up to take on German imperialism and its supporters East and West and set about re-uniting Germany under the control of the working class'. In the copy I submitted the last paragraph contained no mention of re-unification. It stated only that the German working class should take on West German imperialism.

The drive towards an imperialist re-division of the world has placed the German national question firmly on the historical agenda. It is important that the working class adopts a clear position on this confusing issue. After the end of the Second World War the German nation was dismembered, its Western and Eastern halves respectively taken under US and Soviet domination.

The division of Germany was a flagrant denial of the German people's right to self-determination. Not surprisingly, it deepened national resentment in the working class. The ruling class and the labour bureaucracy saw to it that workers' opposition to the partition of their country was channelled into chauvinist anti-Sovietism and anti-communism and, to a lesser extent, anti-Americanism. This ideology provided the backdrop for the reconstruction of West German imperialism under US tutelage.

As long as Germany remains divided there is an objective basis for national resentment among German workers. In the absence of an independent working class outlook, German nationalism is and always has been used by the German ruling class to cohere domestic support.

This factor has to be a major consideration in determining our attitude to the demand for German re-unification. The article in *the next step* showed that West Germany is an aggressive imperialist power, intent on expanding its influence over the East. To call for German re-unification now can only mean calling for re-unification under imperialist control. To add phrases such as 'under workers' control' does not solve the problem.

The dangers of adaptation to German nationalism are underlined by the experience of the German working class movement in the twenties. The Communist Party tried to relate to the nationalist resentment against the Versailles Treaty, which ratified Germany's defeat after the First World War, by promoting a programme of 'national revolution' in direct competition with the fascists.

The result was that class politics were submerged in a tide of patriotic fervour. The Communist Party became marginalised by the more consistent nationalists in the Nazi party. The German revolutionary movement was destroyed.

Today the German national question is again a potential death trap for German workers. To avoid falling into it, revolutionaries must advance an independent approach to the issue. The German national question will

only be resolved in the context of the revolutionary overthrow of German capitalism. It will also involve a major working class upheaval in Eastern Europe against the bureaucratic dictatorships.

The scale of political instability that the drive towards re-unification will produce throughout Central Europe will be enormous. The working class will only be able to play an independent role in this process if it develops an anti-imperialist outlook.

Only once independent working class politics have taken root among a section of the German working class can its justified aspiration for unity take on a progressive anti-capitalist character.

The first step in this direction must be to start building that movement by organising around demands which challenge German imperialism, racism and chauvinism. Raising the demand for German re-unification achieves the precise opposite of what is required: it unites workers behind the bosses.

Sabena Norton  
Glasgow

## Sccum

On Monday 1 October the Special Claims Control Unit came to Stepney. Popularly known as the Sccum, they are the roving section of the Department of Health and Social Security charged with uncovering fraudulent social security claims. Throughout the past month they have been operating out of the local supplementary benefit office in Nelson Street.

The Sccum do not possess any direct means by which they can identify illegal claims. Instead, they proceed by a strategy of selective harassment of specifically targeted groups within the locality. In London's East End such priority targets include single parent families (potential cohabitation cases) and Asian women (potential homeworkers in Stepney's twilight sweated rag trade).

The number of fraudulent claims successfully prosecuted by the DHSS provides no real indication of the true value of the Sccum's activities. The essential service they perform is in their policing and criminalisation of the most vulnerable sections of the working class — the unemployed, women and blacks. Sccum exists to help foster the divisions that allow the state to implement its anti-working class programmes, including privatisation and massive cutbacks in public sector jobs and services.

In Stepney the arrival of the Sccum was greeted with a demonstration by local claimants' activists, which was designed to intimidate and harass the harassers. Each of the unit's four members was photographed as he entered the office on the Monday morning, and each was dogged in his tracks as he left. An attempt was made to record the license plate numbers of their cars for circulation.

Trade unionists from the CPSA and SCPS at Nelson Street showed their support for the claimants' demands — an end to all Sccum activity in the area — by joining the demonstration as they arrived for work. But few of them were willing to endorse the claimants' tactics, which were described as extreme and provocative.

At a time when the government's offensive against

civil servants is beginning to intensify rapidly, and when staff in DHSS offices are increasingly being forced to take strike action against an aggressive management (such as in Poplar, Stoke Newington and Westminster), it is pointless to condemn as extreme the tactics of claimants who are fighting back.

The claimants cannot win on their own. The fight against the Sccum cannot be won from the outside. It is up to the DHSS workers in the offices to take the lead in combating the Sccum's divisive and criminalising strategy.

In the first place, counter staff should make a point of advising all new claimants of the presence of the unit. They should also be informed that they are not required to admit Sccum snoopers into their homes. Secondly, they should be prepared to pass to claimants' representatives all relevant information about Sccum intentions in their area. Thirdly, and most importantly, CPSA and SCPS militants should begin building support in their workplaces behind the demand for the complete abolition of the Special Claims Control Units and their Department of Employment equivalents, the Regional Benefit Investigation Teams (Rabbits).

In the interests of the whole of our class, civil servants have a responsibility to defend those sections the state considers it easiest to consign to penury, misery and despair.

Mick Sullivan  
London

## A tax

I am reading *Taking Control* and have found this book one of the most useful guides for trade unionists that I have yet come across. I work for the Inland Revenue. In September, the Broad Left of the Inland Revenue Staff Federation (IRSF) held its third national meeting. The main topic was the 1985 pay claim.

After last year's debacle, there was a consensus of opinion that our members would be approached with a view to taking industrial action if no satisfactory offer was made. However, at the meeting there was no clear outline of what action to take if the membership was willing to fight. The only plan put forward was one from Militant supporters, who argued that at least the accounts offices should be brought out because 'anyone would rather sit at home on full pay than go to work'.

This attitude reveals a lack of contact with the rank and file in the revenue collection section and seems to ignore the civil service dispute of 1981 when the whole of the tax gathering machinery was stopped for 26 weeks and still the government did not move. Not only that, but support from other civil service unions understandably diminished as time went on because industrial action was selective. The end result in 1981 was defeat and jobs in the collection section were cut from 9000 to approximately 7000, with a further 2000 redundancies planned by management (with union agreement) to come over the next two years.

Some members at the Broad Left meeting opposed a call to involve DHSS workers. They argued that the public would be alienated by what would be seen as an attack on the old and employed. I argued that strike action was not designed to attack other sections of the working class. It was the only effective

weapon we had in defence of pay and jobs.

If the civil service unions embark on a course of industrial action in 1985 to obtain a decent living wage for all civil servants, then they can't tie one hand behind their backs in a struggle with such a ruthless enemy as this government.

Selective action can only be a stepping stone in any dispute. Any course of action which diminishes the effect of a strike only helps the employer. If we are forced to take action over pay it must be a no-holds-barred fight to the end, involving everyone.

Many rank and file members of the IRSF and other civil service unions were disgusted by the acceptance of this year's 4.5 per cent offer by the Council of Civil Service Unions. This means a further cut in real terms in the living standards of our members. The effect of this decision by the leadership is that many rank and file members have drawn further away from supporting the unions.

We have to turn the tide by involving the whole membership throughout the civil service in a campaign to regain this lost ground. Defeat for the second time in four years would decimate us and lead to large-scale victimisations. So if any group within the union seeks to minimise the effects of industrial action, then we would be defeated before we even start.

IRSF branch committee member  
Yorkshire

## Careerists

Your article 'Labour and the miners' strike' (*the next step*, September) highlighted the way the Labour leadership nationally has exploited the solidarity work of party activists to build its own influence over the course of the strike. I want to tell you how this has worked out in practice in my area.

In Brighton this summer, supermarket collections were organised by people in and around the Labour Party in the local miners' support group. At the same time as these collections attracted the attention of the local police, leaders of the council's minority Labour group spotted the opportunity to enhance their own reputations.

Despite the arguments of some activists that there should be no discussions with the police, our aspiring statesmen wrote to Brighton's police chief to establish guidelines on the legality of street collections. They then organised a 'mass' food collection involving the majority of Labour councillors. Councillor Steve Bassam claimed a great victory and promised that 'Labour group members will continue with similar events over the weeks and months of the dispute'.

Needless to say, they have not organised any more collections. Their objective of capturing several columns in the local press had already been achieved. Some Labour Party members made excuses by arguing that at least the exercise had publicised the miners' strike. But the councillors had only used the strike to publicise themselves and their position of moralistic support for miners' families. My experience in Brighton has shown that the only way to fight for jobs is outside the Labour Party, building an independent party rather than the reputations of the Labour careerists.

Myself and another former Labour Party supporter, who were both prominent in

organising food collections in the Brighton miners' support group, are now working with the RCP. This week we set up a regular collection outside a supermarket where we not only stock up on food and money for the miners, but also argue for the active support which will win the strike.

Liz Groves  
Brighton

## Servants

*the next step* and *The miners' next step* have pointed out the dangers of the NUM's collaborationist approach in the present miners' strike. Other publications and organisations either do not see it as important or are fully in favour of it. The Communist Party in particular has identified the interests of workers as being the same as the coal industry. It's instructive to see where such a view has led the CP in the past.

The CP scabbed on miners' strikes throughout the Second World War and did all it could to get miners back to work. The Stalinists did not stop playing foreman when hostilities ceased. In August 1945, NUM bureaucrat and leading Stalinist Arthur Horner was appointed the union's National Coal Production Officer. The *Daily Worker* (forerunner of the *Morning Star*) called this 'a splendid initiative'. The miners' union also paid for eight area production officers, who were to ensure that every feasible idea which might help increase production is examined' according to Horner.

The result was a speed-up drive to make miners work faster and harder. In such a dangerous industry this only led to more injuries and deaths. Horner claimed that workers, supervisors and managers 'can no longer afford to regard each other as enemies, but rather as "Servants of the State" called upon to undertake vital services on its behalf' (*Labour Monthly*, October 1945).

Fifteen months later, Horner revealed that this exercise in class collaboration had cost his union £20 000 — a quarter of a million pounds at today's prices. 'This', he said, 'gives it the distinction of being the only trade union in the country ever to have utilised its funds to advance production'.

In the summer of 1947 CP General Secretary Harry Pollitt reflected in his pamphlet *Looking ahead*:

'During the whole fight from the day war ended to the day nationalisation of the mines became a fact, our comrades set the personal example in the pits in increasing output, in eliminating absenteeism, in trying to make pit production committees work. Did our comrades get any bouquets for this activity? They did not. They were called "pacemakers" and "speeders up" by their own colleagues.'

Whatever their efforts on behalf of the coal magnates, and later the nationalised coal industry, Horner and his cohorts could not prevent strikes from breaking out. Miners were responsible for 80 per cent of more than two million working days lost due to industrial action in 1946.

The miners who rebelled against their leaders in the late forties were, however, only reacting to the consequences of the NUM's policies, rather than challenging the union's collaborationist outlook itself. The nationalisation of the mines

in 1947 was generally seen by miners as a progressive step. Although they took strike action after nationalisation, it was still seen as 'their' industry.

Scargill and McGahey may not call for speed-ups at work. The CP may support the current miners' strike. But the Stalinists still see the interests of the miners as synonymous with those of the coal industry. The problem does not merely lie with the CP or fellow travellers like Scargill. Collaboration is rife throughout the NUM. It is this legacy of the traditional left in the labour movement that is the main problem in the miners' strike today.

Paul Foster  
London

(This letter has been shortened)

## Video

Perhaps this suggestion might be of some use. Maybe the NUM can video or film all the meetings they have with the coal board. The video could be shown to striking miners directly after meetings with the board. It's possible the filming of negotiations would have a two-way use. Firstly, it could keep miners in the know regarding what their representatives and the coal board are up to. The film could also be a valuable historical record for future use.

Leonard Buckley  
Derby

## Victory

At Glasgow School of Art in early October, Revolutionary Communist Students won an important victory in support of the miners, despite opposition from both Labour and Tory supporters, at the first general meeting of term. The agenda originally revolved around the usual subjects of canteen food, hostel washing machines and an attempt to get a bar in the school. The RCS were alone in raising political debate around the fight for miners' jobs.

The RCS argued that the college should twin with Oakley colliery and the miners' wives organisation. It should also donate the sum of £250 for the miners and their families. All the facilities of the college could be opened up to the miners, including transport. Finally, weekly collections of food and money should be instituted.

In attempting to amend the motion, Labour supporters wanted the collections to be channelled through the union bureaucrats who run Glasgow Trades Council. We strenuously insisted that, on the contrary, support should go where it was most needed, to the miners and their wives. Union officials control most of the miners' funds and they have been reluctant to cough up for transport for pickets throughout the dispute. Labour's evasive amendment was summarily rejected by the student body.

When the right wing insisted that students resented money going to the miners, they were proved wrong by a massive majority. Students are in a good position to offer practical solidarity with the miners. When the case for effective action is put, there is every possibility of winning support.

Alison Hill  
Glasgow

# Meetings



# Activities

## Become an RCP supporter

### What you give

- financial support to the party
- commitment to sell *the next step*

### What you get

- membership of a supporters' group
- weekly political discussion and activities
- monthly bulletin on party news

### Want to join?

### RCP supporters' groups meet in

Ashton	Every Tuesday
Birmingham	Every Wednesday
Bradford	Every Monday
Brighton	Every Thursday
Bristol	Phone 01-729 0414
Cardiff	Every Thursday
Coventry	Every Tuesday
Doncaster	Every Friday
Edinburgh	Every Monday
Glasgow	Every Tuesday
Huddersfield	Every Wednesday
Leeds	Every Thursday
Liverpool	Every Tuesday
London	Every Friday
Manchester	Every Monday
Newcastle	Every Wednesday
Nottingham	Every Wednesday
Oldham	Every Wednesday
Portsmouth	Every Thursday
Rotherham	Every Wednesday
Sheffield	Every Thursday
Wakefield	Every Thursday
Wythenshawe	Every Thursday

New supporters' groups are being formed in a number of other areas. Phone Judy Harrison on 01-729 0414 for details or see sellers of *the next step*.

### Revolutionary Communist Students

Back to school? Or starting at a new college? Join the Revolutionary Communist Society and take part in meetings, debates, miners' solidarity work, anti-imperialist activities and social events.

RCS meetings on everything from 'what is the RCP?' to the miners' strike and the Irish War are happening in colleges all over Britain. Come along and sign up.

Phone 01-729 0414 for details of REVOLUTIONARY COMMUNIST SOCIETIES at colleges in your area.

All meetings 7<sup>30</sup>pm  
Thursday 1 November

**Portsmouth**  
Portsmouth Central Library  
Guild Hall Square

**Brighton**  
Springfield Hotel  
Springfield Road  
(near London Road station)

Tuesday 6 November

**Coventry**  
Barras Green Social Club  
Coventry Street

**Edinburgh**  
Trades Council  
Picardy Place

**Wakefield**  
Raven Pub  
Bullring

## Fight to the finish

### National Speaking Tour Victory to the miners No sell-out

Wednesday 7 November Thursday 8 November

**Leeds**  
Trades Club  
Savile Mount  
(off Chapeltown Road)

**Birmingham**  
Digbeth Civic Hall  
Digbeth

**Sheffield**  
The Hallamshire Hotel  
West Street  
Sheffield 1

**Nottingham**  
Fagin's  
Goldsmith Street

**Glasgow**  
McLelland Galleries  
(West Hall)  
Sanchiehall Street

**Manchester**  
Star and Garter  
Fairfield Street  
Manchester 1

Tuesday 13 November

**Newcastle**  
Friends Meeting House  
1 Archbold Terrace  
(opposite Jesmond Metro Station)

**London**  
Holborn Library  
Theobalds Road  
(near Holborn Ⓧ)

Wednesday 14 November

**Bradford**  
Central Library  
City Centre

Thursday 15 November

**Liverpool**  
AUEW House  
Mount Pleasant

**South Wales  
trade union dayschool  
Saturday 10 November  
10am - 6pm plus social  
The Law Building  
University College Cardiff  
Museum Avenue**

Phone 01-729 0414 for details

**Half day meeting for striking miners  
Sheffield Saturday 17 November  
2pm - 6pm plus social  
Students' union,  
Sheffield University  
Western Bank**

## Women and the unions Weekend conference Saturday 3 November

10am-8pm at Emmanuel Hall, corner of Broomsleigh Street and Dornell Street, London NW6 (nearest Ⓧ West Hampstead)  
Saturday night social - food drink and dancing £4 (£2 unwaged) or £2.50 (£1 unwaged) for one day only. A crèche and refreshments will be available.  
Phone Kate Marshall on 01-729 0414

## TAKING CONTROL

LONDON  
Evening classes

A series of evening classes for trade unionists in London. The course, which runs through November, is being run by Mike Freeman - author of *Taking Control*. It looks at the problems faced by trade unionists today and how to fight back effectively. The classes are open to everybody who wants to start rebuilding in the unions.  
Every Monday, 7<sup>30</sup>pm at John Barnes Library, 275 Camden Road, N7  
If you would like to attend contact Kirk Williams on 01-729 0414

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## Join the RCP

If you would like to become a supporter of the Revolutionary Communist Party or would like to find out more about us, please write to:

The General Secretary  
BM RCP  
London WC1N 3XX  
or phone  
01-729 0414



Kate Marshall will answer all enquiries by return of post

# the next step

review of the Revolutionary Communist Party

Irish Freedom Movement Conference

# FIGHT FOR IRISH FREEDOM!



Chris Black (retires)

At 2.54am on Friday 12 October, an IRA bomb ripped apart Brighton's Grand Hotel, killed four people, and almost tore the heart out of the Tory government.

The IRA's audacious attack on the British war Cabinet pierced the security forces' much-vaunted 'ring of steel' around the Tory Party conference. It highlighted the mortal threat the Irish liberation struggle poses to the foundations of the British state.

In the seventies, Labour Prime Minister Harold Wilson warned the British establishment that the struggle for Irish freedom was closer to home than any 'backyard': it was in Britain's 'front room'. Last month the IRA made the same point more forcefully by carrying the Irish War into Margaret Thatcher's bathroom.

All sides of British politics rallied to back the establishment against what the *Financial Times* called 'the most violent challenge to constitutional authority in modern British political history'. Labour leader Neil Kinnock got up early to condemn the republican attack. Tory backbenchers resurrected demands for hanging IRA volunteers. *The Sunday Times* railed against the killing of a 'harmless' Tory MP. *The Daily Mirror* vowed to put aside its differences with Thatcher and back her against the Irish freedom fighters. 'The mad bombers', declared the pro-Labour *Mirror*, 'must not win'.

These histrionics from Westminster and Fleet Street seek to mask the real issues in the Irish War. The IRA is no collection of 'mad bombers'. And, as recent events in Northern Ireland show, the British ruling class is far from being 'harmless'. In the days that followed the Brighton bombing, Britain stepped up its war against the nationalist community in the Six Counties.

On Tuesday 16 October, two Irish youth joy-riding in West Belfast were rammed by a joint British Army/Royal Ulster Constabulary patrol. As 18 year old Stephen McMenamin tried to escape, a British soldier shot him in the back. The critically-injured Belfast youth came close to being the twenty

## Lessons of the Irish War

Saturday 24 November, Digbeth Civic Hall, Birmingham

The war and the law in Ireland, 1984

Ten years of the Prevention of Terrorism Act - from Birmingham to Brighton

Ireland and the miners' strike - what's the connection?

Tickets £2 waged/£1 unwaged. Transport from all over Britain. Phone Mick Hume on 01-729 0414 write to BM IFM, London WC1N 3XX

third victim of the selective execution policy operated by the Crown forces over the past two years.

On the same day supergrass Raymond Gilmour began giving evidence against 37 Irish nationalists accused, on his word alone, of republican activities. Gilmour's first act in the witness box was to get his own date of birth wrong. But the 'evidence' of paid perjurers who don't know when they were born is good enough to send Irish men and women to jail in the no-jury courts which Britain runs in occupied Ireland.

In Britain the state used the Prevention of Terrorism Act to pick up two Irishmen within hours of the bombing. Police announced that neither was suspected of involvement in the attack. Their detention was meant as a warning to Irish people and anti-imperialists in Britain to keep their heads down in the wake of Brighton.

After suffering British terror for 15 years, the Irish people have learned the hard way that they have to fight for their freedom. The IRA attack in Brighton aimed to take the Irish liberation struggle to the centre of Britain's imperial power.

The Irish Freedom Movement gives unconditional support to those fighting to free Ireland from British rule. We stand shoulder to shoulder with the Irish people in their battle to defeat the British warmongers. Every act of violence in the Irish War is the responsibility of the British state. And taking sides with the Irish people in a movement to drive imperialism out of Ireland is the responsibility of the British working class.

On 24 November the Irish Freedom Movement conference in Birmingham will mark the tenth anniversary of the introduction of the Prevention of Terrorism Act. The aim of our conference and campaign is to win British workers to the struggle for Ireland's victory, and the British establishment's defeat. The lesson of the Irish War is that those who are oppressed and exploited by the British ruling class have no choice but to fight for freedom.