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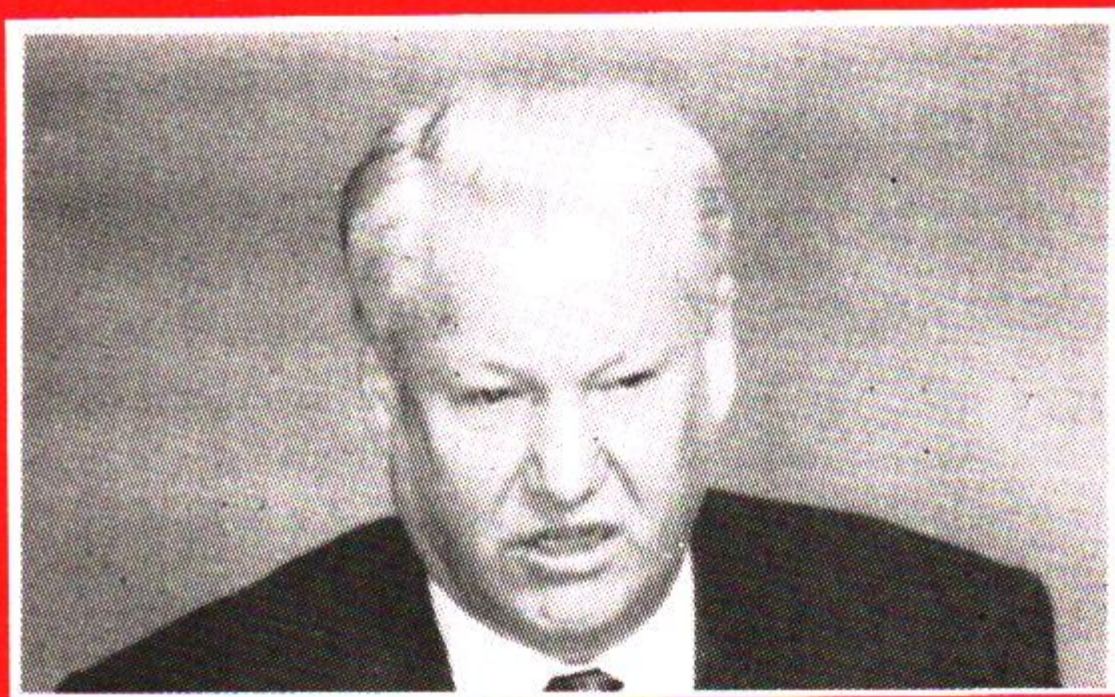
Black Revolt,
USA

The Marxist voice of the labour movement

Issue No.11 - April 1993

Solidarity Price £2

Britain's Spring of Discontent



Russia: Yeltsin on the edge

Contents

- Labour Movement Focus...4
- Scottish Labour Conference....5
- Tories Attack Lambeth...6
- Economics...8
- Crime and Punishment...9
- Russia...11
- Questions For Socialists: The Case Against Import Controls..16
- Italy...19
- French Elections...20
- Books....23
- Black Revolt, USA...24
- History of the Trade Unions (Part 3) ...29

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Miners Fight Closure Threats and Intimidation

Miners at Littleton Colliery walked out on April 1 following an increase in intimidation by management.

The Friday before we had met with management to agree safety cover for the one-day strike on April 2nd and everything was friendly enough.

But this morning (April 1st) we were informed that British Coal area office had told management to tell us that all men on 100% or below bonus would lose their bonus for the whole of the week if they struck on Friday. And that affects the worst paid men underground. The shift immediately walked out.

We were also told that at the 10 pits which are due to shut the men would lose their whole week's wages if they did not work on Friday because they are on a "guaranteed" wage, which means they have to "sign on" every morning to say they are available for work.

Management have also stopped the check-off to the union and told us we are losing the

right to our union office on site.

When the shift walked out management said that if we didn't provide safety cover by 12 noon the electricity would be turned off flooding the pit - and so basically closing it. The whitewash by the Tories to appease the backbench revolt over the pit closures received mass media coverage and rightly so.

Intimidation

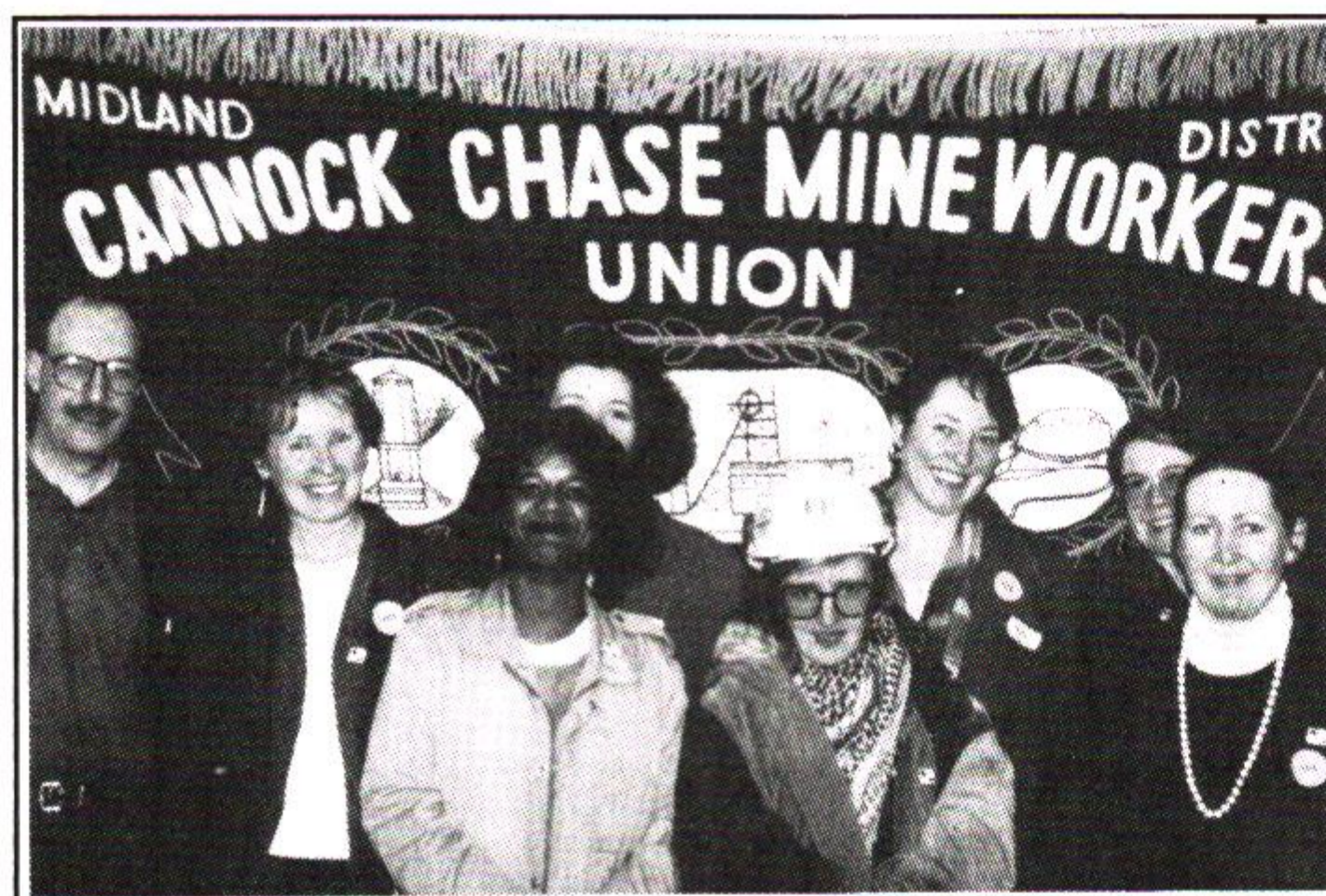
But what hasn't received any real coverage is the daily war being waged on miners and our union, the NUM.

One aspect of this British Coal pressure is that nearly 10,000 men have left the industry since October, so achieving one third of what they set out to do last October.

But a combination of many things have driven men to sell their jobs - the fear of no money being on offer after March, the lack of any real action by the TUC, long drawn out tactics by the government.

No matter what Michael Heseltine and Neil

Clarke say the ultimate aim is to privatise our industry with a possible 12 pits only being open. So what about those who want to stay in the industry and are willing to fight? Pressure is now being put on men to accept new working practices. I can't say what is going on at other pits but here, because of the possibility of



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closure last year, a short term plan was put into force so that the quickest and easiest seams could be mined, virtually rapping the pit.

Now, management say, as we have put all our eggs in one basket we must accept changes that will "secure our future." These changes include moving from a three shift system to a four shift system and a seven and a quarter hour shift to an eight hour shift. The night shift face changes from an 11pm - 6.15am shift to a two shift system with shifts running from 6pm to 2am one week and 12pm to 8am the next week.



NUT Conference

Defend Education With Action Not Words

As delegates gather in Brighton for the 1993 NUT conference this Easter, they will be aware that throughout the country the effects of Tory policies on education are becoming acute.

For over a decade teachers have witnessed a gradual deterioration of the education system because of constant interfering by the Tories. They have experienced an ill-founded but unrelenting barrage of criticism and propaganda against their teaching standards and methods. They have felt the strain of a massively increased workload, the fatigue of having to introduce initiative after dubious initiative.

They have struggled to maintain a decent learning environment for a huge section of the country's youth who have experienced increasing poverty and despair.

They have looked to their union leadership in anticipation of resistance and all they have seen is vacillation and posturing.

All these conditions are serious but delegates know that the Tory project in education is now entering the crucial phase. If it is allowed to succeed the system could be damaged in a way that is irreparable for decades.

But at the same time there are issues and opportunities that could galvanise all teachers to fight back against the Tories' interference. The Tories intend to reintroduce a selective, class-based educational system. They believe, correctly, that it is dangerous to educate the working class to aspirations that capitalism

cannot deliver. To achieve their aim they have three strategies:

1. To destroy Local Education Authorities
2. To destroy the effectiveness of the education unions
3. To undermine the comprehensive system

Almost all the changes the Tories have introduced have been part of these strategies. Local Management of Schools (LMS), opting out, league tables of exam results and performance-related pay all contribute to the grand design to dismantle a comprehensive education system which, in itself, has made only small faltering steps towards providing equal education opportunities for all children.

As well as destroying opportunities for children these strategies have attacked the conditions of service, equal opportunity rights and employment security of teachers and education workers.

Teachers see that a boycott of the government-imposed tests is winnable and that one victory could provide the springboard to further resistance

We now face the real threat of nation-wide redundancies and the abandonment of the national pay structure.

Teachers want to fight back against a bewildering barrage of depredations. The educational issue of SATs testing has recently become a focus for their frustration and resentment. Teachers see that a boycott of the government imposed tests is winnable and that one victory could provide the springboard to further resistance. Anger is building amongst members that the NUT has not yet taken up the call for a total boycott of all SATs work.

This year's conference will see many issues hotly debated, but action on SATs could provide the turning point that we are looking for.

**Tim Hales,
General Secretary, Leeds NUT**

Social Effects

These changes would mean a loss of all overtime, thus taking a third of gross pay away, not to mention the social effect on our families which would be unbearable.

But the real plan now starts to emerge. The management's view is that even though we were not on the 31-pit closure list now that 12 pits are to be "saved" we will all be fighting for a smaller market. They want pit to fight pit to see who will survive and who will fall by the wayside and at the same time getting men, through fear, to accept changes in working practices that the union has fought against for years.

I'm sure that my pit has been singled out for special attention because we had the biggest majority for industrial action, and in what has always been seen as a moderate area.

The next few weeks will see many attacks at local level on our union, but if the support we have seen since October from the people of Britain and especially the rank and file trade union movement we can win every fight we encounter.

Sean Coughlin, NUM, Littleton

TUC must take up the struggle

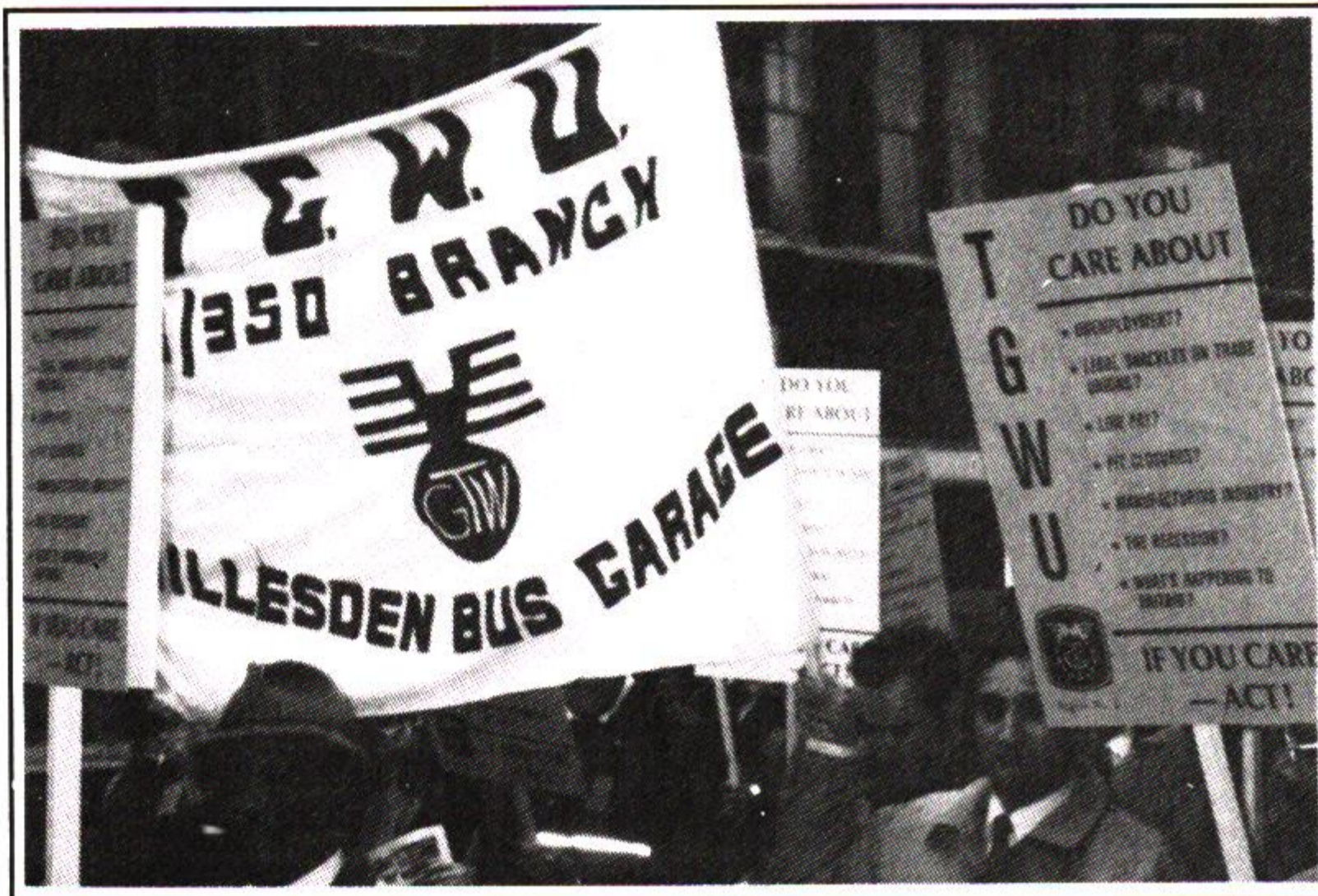
Today's struggle is similar to the '84/5 miners' strike but this time we have more support and unlike '84/5 this support will not just fizzle out, I hope. The pit closures are just part of an attack on our class by this Tory government, that is why we need to link up the struggles of the RMT and all the other trade union struggles.

Last October the local community were totally devastated by the announcement of the closure of the local pit but we are more determined than ever to fight to keep the pit open. The local labour movement have been really marvellous in their support. But this is just the start. I want to see the national TUC leadership step up the struggle and force this rotten government out of office and a Labour government with real socialist policies.

That's the only answer.

Steve Sullivan, Parkside NUM spoke to Socialist Appeal.

Bus Workers Fight Must Be Won



Bus workers strike back

Mark, a midi bus driver at Catford Garage and TGWU branch committee member, spoke to Socialist Appeal.

"The strike is the only way to change the policies of London Buses relating to pay, conditions and pensions. It is virtually the only chance of turning things about. In this job it feels like you work, then sleep then more work. The last couple of years have seen drastic changes in the hours, breaks and running times. In order to keep on time often involves breaking the speed limit. If this continues serious accidents will be inevitable. I've gone off route because of the number of routes you are required to drive and because of tiredness. Stress is a serious problem - the pressure of driving on London's congested roads has been added to by the introduction of attendance bonuses and disciplinary codes.

We are now at a point where the dispute could go either way. The TGWU should escalate the non-cooperation policy and continue to call one day stoppages. The management are not reacting in the belief that members will think that the action is pointless and opposition to management's impositions will wane.

Many members believe that they could not afford an all-out strike. But during the dispute we have had no criticism from the public, which is unique and the feeling is the same all over - the time is right for coordinated action. The TUC should organise a one-day general strike. We are conditioned to accept "looking after number one" and this is the reason for where we are now. My sympathies lie with labour and socialism and not with the Tories."

Cough Up!

More horror stories of how the Tories' NHS reforms are damging the health service come to light every day. The latest is a simple case of Extra Contractual Referral (ECR) - which to you and I means a Southampton Hospital is having to pay £1,900 a day or £60,000 a month to keep a local resident in a Coventry hospital. The problem arises, because under the government's internal market, the Southampton health authority is contracted to buy in its acute services from the city's General Hospital. However, because the patient had no relatives in the area he was sent to his home town of Coventry following a serious accident. And Coventry's Walsgrave National Health Trust Hospital slapped a £1,900 a day bill on the intensive care unit bed, virtually wiping out the whole of Southampton's ECR budget and savings in one go.

Gremlins

The gremlins crept into the typesetting of last month's issue. On page 14 the error read: "The million protestant workers will be won over - or bombed into a capitalist united Ireland."

This should of course have read: "The million protestant workers will never be won over - or bombed into - a capitalist united Ireland."

COUNCIL CUTS LIES

Tory local government minister John Redwood has been "lying about the scale of local government cutbacks," according to a new report.

The report, *Community Watch*, based on a survey carried out for the TGWU and GMB states that there will be "actual cuts in budgets of £679 million," and that cuts of that scale will result in 57,161 local authority job losses over the next nine months.

GPT Plessey

We want what is ours

"The company has made millions and we want a share of the profits - even if we have to fight for it."

Labour's Left Gain

The left made sweeping gains at the AGM of Sherbourne Labour Party branch in Coventry. Left wingers won three of the four key posts, with John McSorley - researcher for millionaire right wing Coventry NW MP Geoffrey Robinson - being defeated in the contest for secretary.

Unions at Telecommunications giant GPT Plessey in Nottingham are threatening strike action over a 5.9% wage claim.

Workers at the Beeston plant have rejected attempts to hold wage rises down to below inflation and claim that as the company is millions of pounds in the black they are due a share of the profits. One worker told Socialist Appeal: "It was from our work that they made these profits, they've made millions and we want a share - even if we have to fight for it. We know the state of the order books and they

can't pull the wool over our eyes."

At the time of going to press the unions at the site were discussing balloting on strike action to secure the claim.

■ GPT Plessey's parent company GEC - the 18th ranked company in Britain according to the Financial Times 500 - made profits of £829 million in the last financial year, up 1.3% on 1991-92 and yet GPT management still claim they cannot afford the 5.9% wage rise!

Scottish Labour Party Conference

Opportunities Go Begging

The Labour leadership's attempt to send the party lurching further to the right was hampered at last month's Scottish Conference.

The delegates assembled in Inverness showed signs of restlessness with Labour's discredited "recipe for success." However, the craving for right-

wing policies is far from satisfied.

Delegates voted that Clause 4, Part IV

chose to adopt its most ostrich-like posture. When resolutions on building the youth section were discussed, an USDAW motion "concerned about the inability of the Labour Party...to recruit, motivate and organise young people," was passed. This resolution, among other things, sought to seek the views of young party members. However, these young members have no Young Socialists (YS) branches in Scotland through which to express their views and ideas. A motion from Kilmarnock calling for a relaunch of the YS was voted down while an amendment and Glasgow Shettleston to afford the YS the same rights as the Women's Section was not put to conference apparently on the whim of the chair.

Interestingly, the two youth places to the Scottish Executive were elected by twenty "youth" delegates, none of whom were elected by a youth branch.

Previously the delegates from the YS branches, of which about 70 existed in Scotland, would have carried out this task. Without an autonomous youth section where young members can argue and

debate politics and organise campaigning activity the party will hold no attraction for youth.

With the Tories water privatisation plans regularly showing opposition of 90% in opinion polls this was the perfect opportunity for Labour to mount an offensive.

However, while the delegates were prepared to push "non-cooperation policies with the Scottish Office" and support a campaign that included "extra-parliamentary activity", Falkirk East's composite calling for "non-violent civil disobedience" was remitted to the Executive.

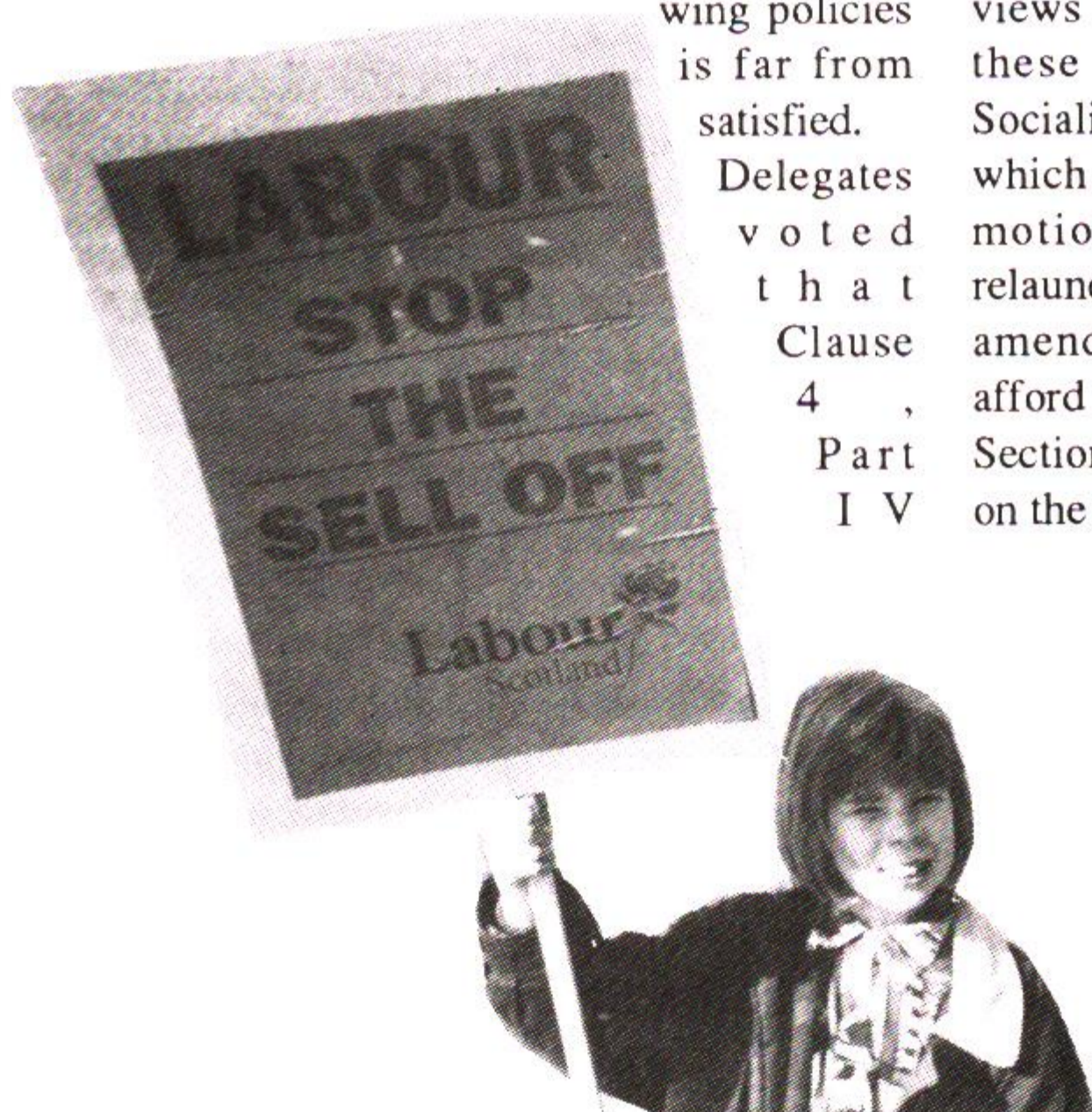
With the SNP pledged to a campaign of civil disobedience, labour are in danger of looking ineffective. The leadership must state clearly that an incoming Labour government will renationalise water and offer no compensation to private investors.

Labour's plans for councils to organise a referendum on water privatisation would be an excellent springboard to launch a campaign, including the possibility of a non-payment campaign and industrial action by water workers, which could force the Tories to retreat.

The most sobering experience of the conference was the attendance of workers from Timex - locked out by management - and Leyland-Daf - facing the prospect of closure after the company's collapse. The real world of redundancy and lock-outs stood uncomfortably with the fatal attraction Labour still has for the market economy.

Inevitably, current struggles will be reflected through the unions and the Labour Party, prompting calls for socialist planning and a democratic plan of production. It is these ideas that Labour needs to encourage and build.

Ian Hogg, Delegate, Paisley North CLP



of the Party's constitution (which expresses its socialist aspirations) should have "a more prominent role" as should "public ownership." On the other hand, conference rejected a resolution critical of the lack of radicalism which is allowing the SNP to attract support. It was on this point that conference

London Labour Party AGM

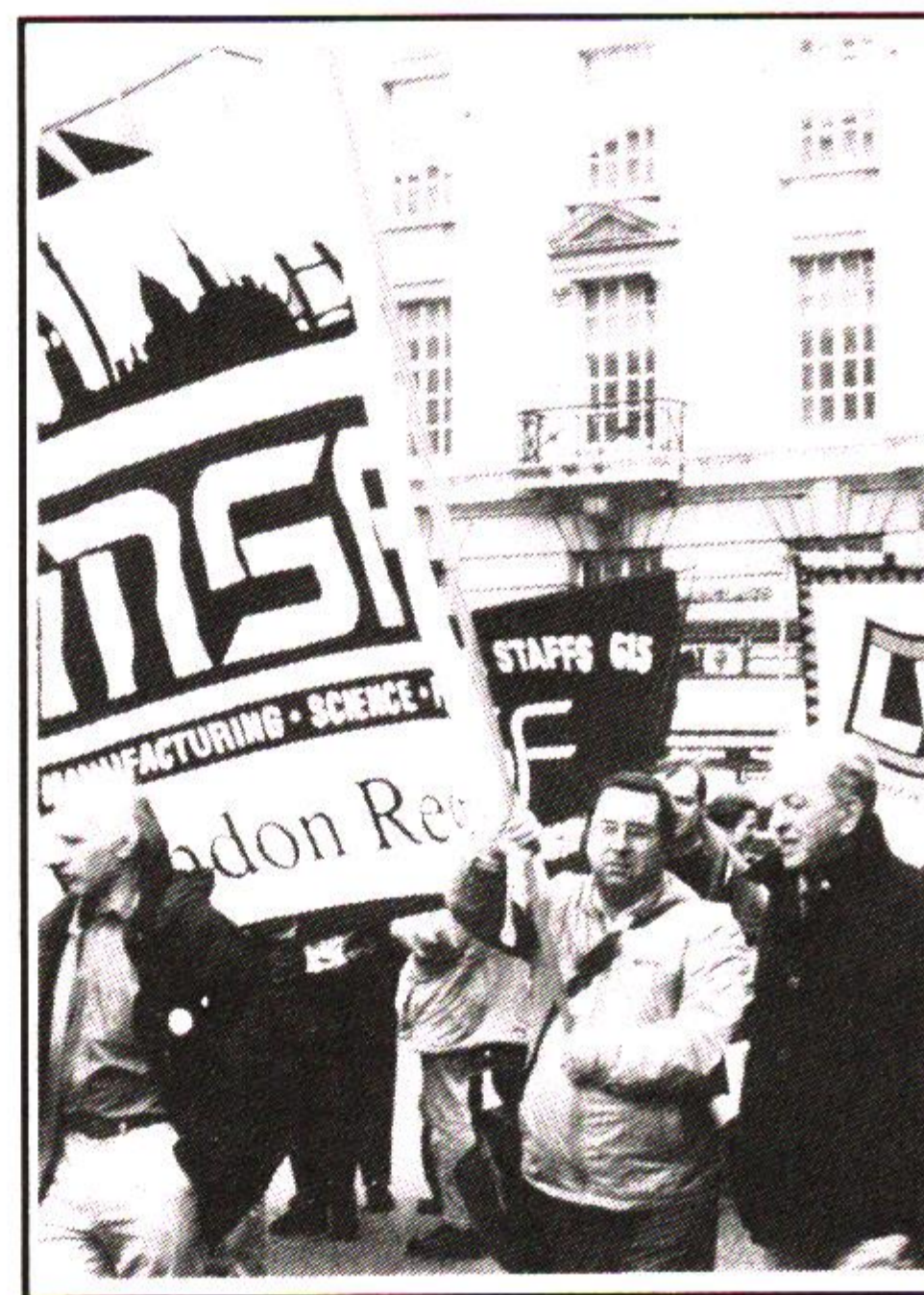
London Labour Party conference decisively rejected any attempts to break the union link. Speakers pointed out that far from being more "democratic" breaking the link with the trade unions would weaken the party and coupled with proposals for One Member One Vote (OMOV) would lead to more power in the hands of MPs and less in the hands of rank and file members.

Conference also reaffirmed Labour's commitment to universal benefits, opposing recent statements by some right-wing party leaders that universal benefits should be abandoned.

The meeting also overwhelmingly endorsed a resolution calling for a campaigning stand against racism, which while welcome, unfortunately failed to take up the root cause of racism, namely capitalism.

The left increased its representation on the National Policy Forum and the Regional Executive Committee.

But while the meeting failed to really point any clear way forward for Labour there was a definite view that more "left" policies were needed to revive the party's electoral fortunes and tackle the economic chaos the Tories had wrought on Britain.



Lambeth Councils elections show need for Labour to...

DEFEND PUBLIC SERVICES!

The disastrous loss of Council seats by Labour in Lambeth is the result of years of cutbacks, neglect and worsening services. The votes of Labour supporters have been taken for granted - and now the chickens have come home to roost. The right wing Labour policies - of accepting the cuts - in effect of handing down the cuts in services demanded by the Tories, has served to demoralise Labour voters.

In Angell Town Ward (Norwood), a rock-solid Labour majority was lost to the Liberals; in Bishops Ward (Vauxhall) a 1000-vote Labour majority was thrown away - the Liberals won the seat by 750 votes. In both instances the campaigns were run along the lines demanded by the Labour leadership, with right wing candidates. The Labour Party, instead of becoming the focal point for mobilising opposition to government-inspired attacks on local authorities, in many instances is seen as an apologist for the crumbling conditions on council estates, and the axing of services.

Liberals Benefit

The Liberals, who are a paler version of the Tories are reaping the rewards from this. The Lambeth Labour Council budget (passed by only one vote) put through cuts

Bishops Ward By-Election		
	1990	1993
Labour	1764	749
Conservative	702	300
Liberal	399	1503
Green	270	-
Militant Labour	-	336

of 12 million, and rent rises of at least 6 per week. The Liberals, so that they could say they never voted for cuts, did not even propose their own budget - as if they could wash their hands of the whole affair! Labour's policy of inaction in the face of Tory cut-backs must be reversed. Cuts will mean job losses in a borough with 1 in 4 out of work. In Lambeth, Southwark, Lewisham, and Wandsworth (according to official figures) each job vacancy is being chased by 160 job seekers.

Charges of corruption have been made by Lambeth Chief Executive Herman Ouseley, and plans laid for an "independent" inquiry. Socialists must be absolutely clear on this - we are opposed to corruption and malpractices; the stealing of resources from the Council means losses in jobs and services to

the ordinary people of the Borough. However, we can have no trust in a so-called "independent" inquiry. All such inquiries will inevitably be biased against the working class and the interests of Council workers. It will be used to attack all those who have stood up to the government's robbing of resources from areas like Lambeth. Only an inquiry initiated by the labour movement can really look into the running (and running down) of Council services. An inquiry should comprise of Council trade unions, tenants organisations, and Labour and community organisations. Such an inquiry should also expose the massive "fraud" carried out against local authorities - in Lambeth about £100m is paid out every year in loan repayments to financial institutions. That money could be used to retain jobs and improve the quality of life in the Borough.

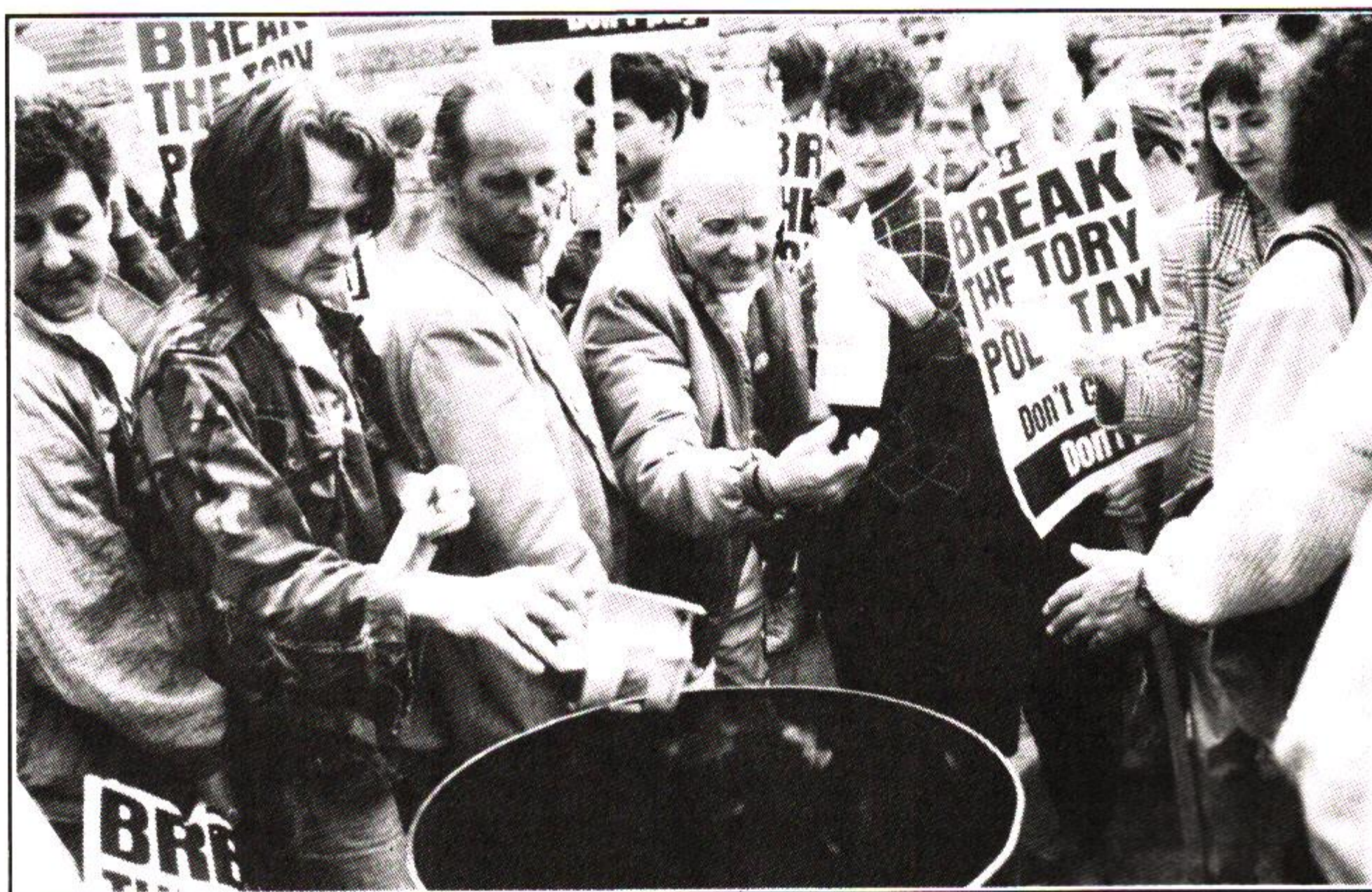
Lambeth Council, as with all other local authorities, is not run under the democratic control of the workforce and users of local services. Any inquiry will have to propose ways of providing services, with the democratic involvement of the people of the Borough. This will need to be linked to a campaign to demand the return of the millions of pounds taken from Lambeth by the Tories.

The labour movement should expose the huge reduction in funds given to Councils by the government over the last 14 years. In 1979, 67% of Council funds came from central government; by 1990 this had fallen to 46%. The Tory strategy has been to progressively reduce public services, whether in local or national government, encourage school "opt-outs" using extra funding for grant maintained schools as a bribe, and bring in Compulsory Competitive Tendering to privatise services. Local initiatives against the cuts by the trade unions and community organisations should be supported. However, there is a vital need to link these campaigns up from borough to borough, and to demand a national response. A Conference should be called of national trade union and Labour representatives to fight cuts. The demand must be raised for Labour nationally to declare opposition to the Tories plans.

Dented Shield

The policy of the Labour leadership has been to implement the Tory cuts in spending, and to wait till Labour is back in power. This so-called "dented shield" policy has been in operation for a decade, and has completely failed. The "shield" has been left somewhere to gather dust. Labour's defeats in the General Elections of 1987 and 1992 left this policy in tatters, and Neil Kinnock was forced to bow out.

Kinnock had berated the (then Marxist-led) Liverpool Labour Council in the mid-1980's. In 1984-85 some 20 Labour Councils embarked on a policy of not setting a rate to force the government to reverse its policy of cutting the central government financial support (Rate Support Grant).



The poll tax battle could have been a focal point for a labour movement campaign to defend services.

However, apart from Liverpool and Lambeth, the other Councils shamefacedly caved in. An opportunity to knock back the Tories was lost. Kinnock attacked the Liverpool Council at the 1985 Labour Conference, demagogically using the question of the issuing of redundancy notices - redundancies which were never made! In fact the Liverpool Council at that time had implemented important reforms in housing and created thousands of jobs. Those concessions were wrested from the Tories through mass struggles. Now, thousands of real redundancies are threatened nationally, and the Labour leaders are silent. Kinnock's replacement, John Smith, has learnt not one lesson of the recent period.

Defend Council Services

The Labour Party is the party of the working class. The attempts of Smith and the right wing to cut off the Party's trade union links (the organic link with working class struggles) will fail. Despite its present leadership, which suffers from a shallow absence of socialist principles of any kind, the Labour Party will be transformed and retransformed over a period of time. The struggles to defend and improve Council services, inevitably come up against the problem of how to change Labour's policies. It is pointless "opting out" of this problem. Futile attempts to set up "alternative" parties will lead to nowhere. Numerous organisations - (the 57 varieties of pseudo-"Marxist" parties) - have attempted to pose themselves as an alternative to Labour. All these experiments have ended in disaster - with the demoralising of their supporters. If the left of the Labour Party followed a walk-out of the Party, as advocated by some, this would lead to a further strengthening of the right wing (pro-cuts) section of the Labour Party, and increase their grip on the Party. This is the lesson of the last Council elections in Liverpool in May 1992. The "Militant"-run "Broad Left" stood candidates against Labour in 22 seats (in 8 of them they were the sitting candidates) yet the Broad Left won only one seat! Far from combatting the right wing, this "independent" strategy led to isolation and defeat. As the saying goes, "The road to hell is paved with good intentions". The Tories brought in the Poll Tax in 1990 - in line with their philosophy of transferring wealth away from the poor to the rich. The fact that it cost 19 billion to implement this "simple" Tax was of little concern to them - they were hell bent on implementing it to please their backers and to shore up their authority. Their "ideal" Tax was scuppered when millions of people refused to pay it. From 1st April 1993 the Council Tax will come in, which represents a retreat by the Tories back to a rates-type system. The Council Tax is not based on individuals, but

is intended to be based on the value of the property (flat, house, etc), though many will appeal against their "banding" due to incorrect valuations. In addition, the government, wary of their failure over the Poll Tax, has brought in rebates for sections of the lower paid, unemployed and pensioners. Despite problems, it will be seen as an improvement, when compared to its disastrous predecessor, the Poll Tax. Nevertheless, the main problem, that of central government funding, has not been resolved. The government's lack of funding means that Council Tax bills will be higher than they could be; these bills taken together with the rent increases will mean many families will find it difficult to make ends meet; in addition there may be Council Tax "capping", to enforce cuts. Labour should demand a massive injection of funds into local government, to provide services and to keep the Council Tax bills low.

Linked to the campaign to defend jobs and

services must be the transforming of the Labour and trade union organisations. This should also include re-vitalising of the tenants associations as fighting organisations. The mass of working people and their families look to Labour for a solution - despite temporary periods of disillusionment. "Socialist Appeal" supports the building of the Labour Party as a campaigning party, that fights for the needs of working class people, and takes up a socialist programme. Such a programme should involve the taking into public ownership of the commanding heights of the economy, including the banks and finance companies, under democratic control and management. The banks, under a socialist Labour government, would give cheap loans to local authorities. Such a government will be able to defeat the Tories and implement a socialist plan to tackle unemployment, poor housing conditions, a lack of education facilities, and inadequate Council services.

Shop workers need fighting lead against new attacks

The announcement of 3000 redundancies at British Home Stores may have been greeted with alarm by some of the press but for shopworkers it was not unexpected. The current recession has taken its toll on the high streets more than most.

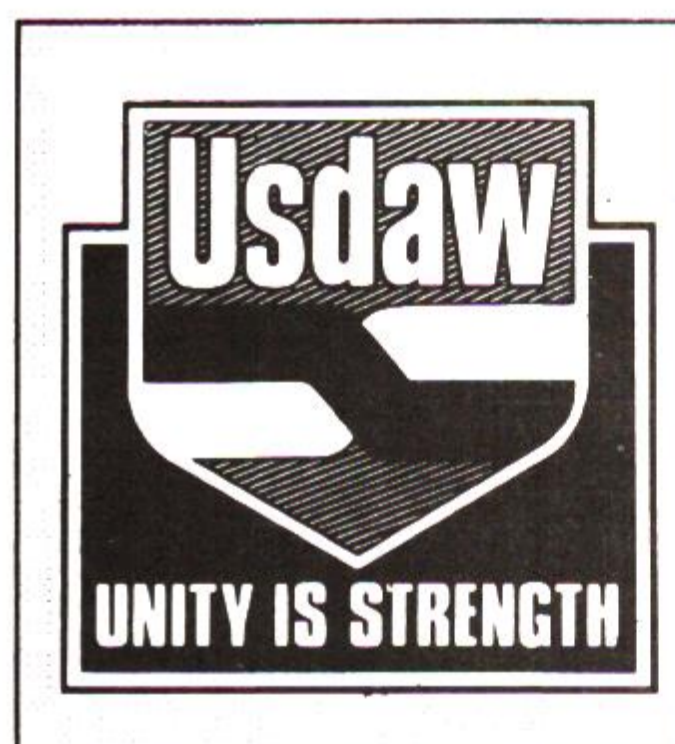
The 3000 BHS workers plight sums up the reality of life today in the retail sector. With redundancy payments totalling £2 million (less than the £2.8 million bonus awarded three months ago to then BHS boss David Dworkin) the company's bosses showed their disdain for their workers.

And in an all-too-common move in the industry today BHS announced that it was replacing 800 full-time jobs with part-time ones and that some of those sacked would be re-employed as part-timers, inevitably on different (i.e. worse) terms and conditions. BHS claimed it was to improve the staffing of their stores at peak times but in reality the move was aimed at cutting the costs of employing full-time labour with the company saving on National Insurance and pension contributions.

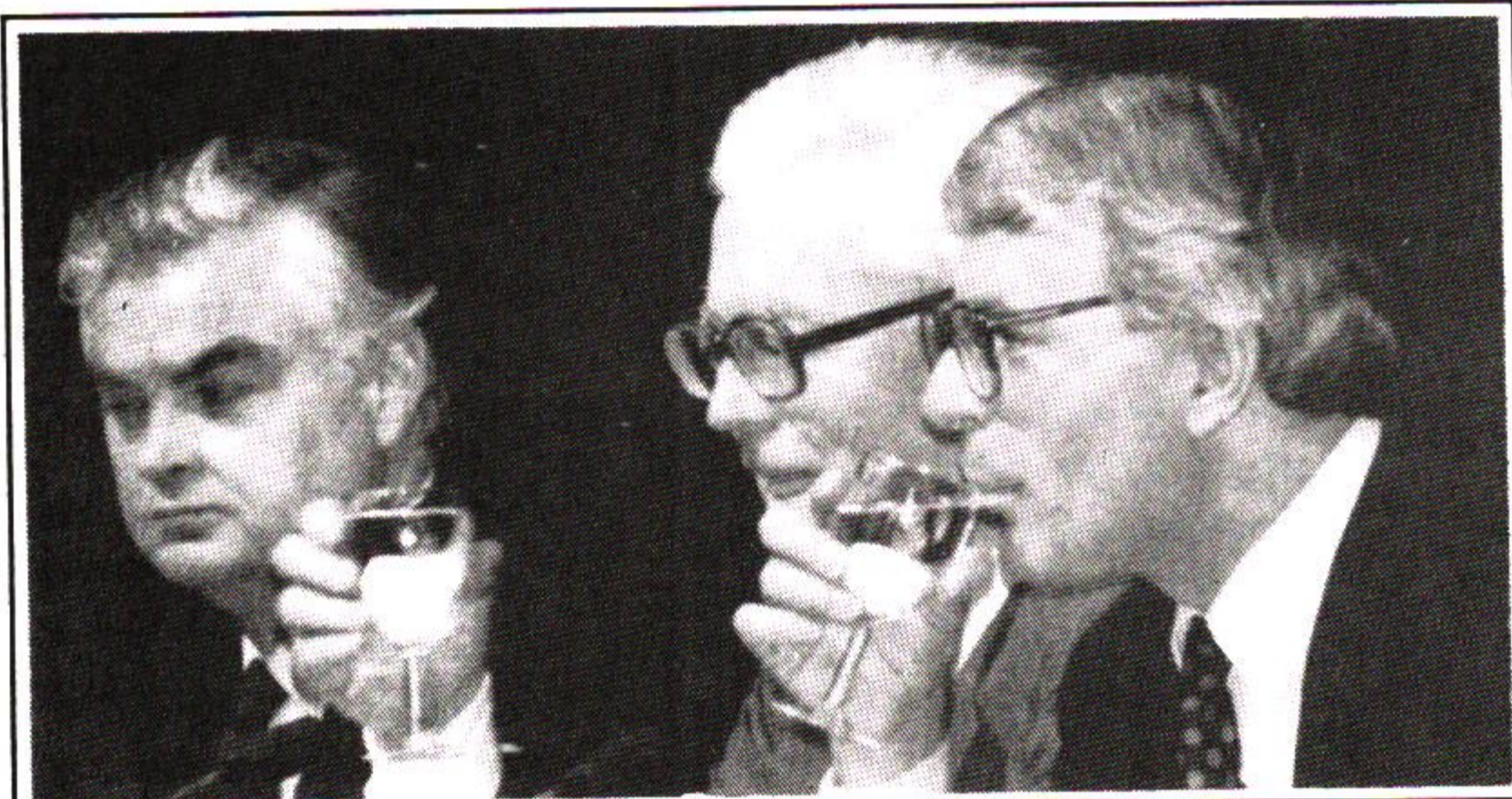
At the same time BHS was able to hand out a £414,000 salary to Dworkin as well as his whopping bonus. However for shop workers the basic wage at BHS remains £120 a week, with only a small rise to £133, once training is completed. BHS is not the only store or group to

have carried out such attacks. Allied Maples, Littlewoods and the Burton Group - the list goes on and on. With the prospect of single-time payments for Sunday trading too there has never been a more important time for shop workers to unite and act to defend their basic conditions. USDAW conference could provide

the platform to set out a clear strategy. Individual disputes have broken out or been threatened, as at Burtons, but there has been no concerted campaign to fight wage freezes, job losses or management-imposed changes in conditions. It is time for a clear strategy to defend our members, including full support for those fighting redundancies and a campaign of opposition to all job losses. The union leadership must put its full weight behind such a campaign - not in words but in action.



Poor Pay the Price as VATman Returns



Partners in crime?

Chancellor Lamont's decision to charge VAT on domestic fuel is a particularly vicious attack on the poor, the unemployed and the old who spend more of their pitifully small incomes on energy than the average person because they spend more time at home by necessity, in addition to having generally lower incomes. The likely increase in heating bills, once fully applied, is likely to be around £2.30 a week, while pensions will rise only £1.20 in line with inflation. And pensioners cannot expect any help in the cold weather. So niggardly are the government's cold weather payments that during this last winter, payments (£6 a week) were triggered off in just one out of 61 weather stations across the country.

A new study by some Cambridge economists finds that VAT on heating will hit the poorest 10% of income earners seven times harder than the top 10%.

In 1987 there were nearly one million pensioners entitled to supplementary benefit who did not claim it, and another 2.5 million who had incomes just above the benefit level. Over three million pensioners will pay 17.5% more for fuel by 1995 with no help from the Tories.

Breadline Britain

A new report by the Child Poverty Action Group has exposed the level of poverty in Britain today. The Tories stopped providing figures on those living on or below the supplementary benefit level in the mid 1980s so they could hide the true extent of poverty. But the CPAG have compiled new data. It shows that in 1989 (before the mass unemployment of the 1990s) there were 11 million people living in families where the home income was less than £77 a week, or £109 a week at today's prices. That was 20% of the population compared with just 14% when Thatcher came to power in 1979. A further 3 million were living on family incomes just above that level. The study also showed that 50% of single parents and 42% of single pensioners were living at or below a poverty level (based on 50% of average income after housing costs are covered.)

In the ten years to 1989 the poorest 10% of the people suffered an absolute decline in real incomes of 4%, while average real incomes rose 30%.

Coal Industry: The Not-So-Free Market

Michael Heseltine in his Commons speech presenting the mis-named White Paper, *The Prospects for Coal*, continues to parrot the argument that coal is not competitive in the market, which is why pits must close.

But this so-called energy market is not a free one at all. While Britain's major natural resource, coal, is refused subsidies which could help provide the nation with light, heating and fuel, its energy rivals are heavily subsidised. Most people know the nuclear industry receives over £1 billion a year via a special levy on electricity prices which the consumers, working people, the unemployed and elderly, pay for. But not so many know that gas is also subsidised. The government's supposed to garner for the state some of the profits that the oil companies make from North Sea oil and gas. But in 1991 the government actually paid back £141 million in tax repayments to the oil companies for "developing" the oil. It's a tidy subsidy which kept gas prices artificially low and so enabled the electricity

generating companies to build gas powered stations in the dash for gas and so driving coal-fired stations from the market. Heseltine argues that some British miners could have a job if they could increase productivity even further and so cut the costs of coal to the private power companies and compete with imports. In the last few years British Coal has lowered its prices to the power companies by 35%, but they have raised the price of electricity to industry and homes by the same amount. So much for the market passing on lower costs. There is no "free market" in energy - but nor should there be! A free market would place the British people and economy at the mercy of the movement of world oil prices (threatening to rise at the moment), to further devaluation of sterling (making coal imports and French electricity more expensive) and of course closing down virtually all the pits and nuclear power stations in Britain permanently (because even if the "market" changed in the future to make the pits and coal-fired power stations

"competitive" they could never be re-opened.)

So under the not so free market 30,000 miners are to lose their jobs along with tens of thousands of others, costing the taxpayer huge amounts in redundancy payments, and around £10 million per pit in lost tax per year - a cost far exceeding any subsidy needed to keep this vital part of the energy industry open.

A planned fuel policy would look not at short-term political motives but the long-term needs. It would use the various sources of fuel to provide a secure supply for generations ahead. It would invest in research for cleaner safer methods of providing fuel. That would mean a plan for the mines, the oil and gas fields, the power stations and the distribution of energy. In other words, democratically run, and publicly owned electricity, gas, nuclear, coal and oil industries, no longer in the hands of overpaid directors running huge privately owned energy monopolies which literally hold the "power" over the British people.

Crime and Punishment



"The Daily Express today launches a campaign aimed at filling the moral vacuum which threatens to engulf Britain's youth." This was the reaction of the Tories and their press to the genuine horror felt by millions of ordinary people to the abduction and murder of toddler James Bulger in Liverpool. Alastair Wilson looks at the issues the capitalist press never mentioned.

Rather than ask any serious questions about why and how such a crime as the murder of Liverpool toddler James Bulger could take place in the last decade of the twentieth century, in the supposedly "advanced" country of Britain, John Major, in typically complacent and hypocritical form, believed society "should condemn more and understand less."

The tabloid press have had a field day. On just two adjacent pages of the *Daily Express* (1.3.93) we could read the headlines:

"Teenage torture pair walk free," "Joyride gang in trailer terror," "TV uproar over riot in 'Casualty'," "Women ignore rape girl, 15," and "Knife threat to babies."

This is the atmosphere in which the Tories would want us to conduct a serious debate on the issues of crime. A whole campaign of fear and terror has been whipped up and then Home Secretary, Kenneth Clarke, came forward with the government's policy response: the incarceration of 12 to 15 year olds who "consistently offend."

The Tories are attempting to paint a picture of moral breakdown in order to promote their reactionary social policies. Rather than tackle the massive problems of poverty, unemployment and homelessness, they would rather lock up a few hundred children. Not only does this divert attention from the real issues, but a few "training centres" are a

lot cheaper than comprehensive policies to tackle the social devastation created by capitalism. The Tories simplistic posture in relation to people's real concerns about crime is echoed throughout the establishment. William Rees Mogg, well known spokesman for the ruling class and chairman of the Broadcasting Standards Council put it very simply: "I think the teaching of morality should be a requirement in schools. Children should be encouraged to discuss, say, the ten commandments."

Tory Discipline

For Kenneth Clarke himself, the reason for violence amongst young people does not require much thought or analysis: "I think young people, all of us, become accustomed to watching casual violence as entertainment. I do think it is one explanation why the threshold of violence is lower. I'm sure people don't lose their temper any more frequently than they used to. But they turn more quickly to violence when they do - young men in particular."

Graham Riddick, Tory MP for Colne Valley, added his thoughts: "One of the biggest problems facing society is the number of children and teenagers brought up without the restraining and disciplining figure of a father. Many of those youngsters get into crime."

Labour spokesman, Tony Blair, has also scandalously joined the fray, calling for a "moral reawakening".

"We cannot exist in a moral vacuum," he said, "If we do not learn and then teach the value of what is right and wrong, then the result is simply moral chaos which engulfs us all."

Rather than campaign for real socialist policies that could eradicate the basis for crime, Labour's frontbench is once again attempting to imitate the Tories as part of their "modern" approach to policy.

Crime Figures

Of course, there has been a massive increase in crime rates under the Tories. During the current recession, the number of notified burglaries has increased by 52%. According to the insurance companies £1 billion of property is being stolen every year. But as far as serious violent crime is concerned, and in particular serious crimes committed by young people, there is no evidence that there has been any increase. On the contrary, according to the Howard League for Penal Reform, there has been a steady decline in the number of offenders under 17. From a peak of 221,000 it has dropped to 149,000 in 1991: a 31% decrease. Amongst 10 to 13 year olds the decrease has been even greater: 43%.

The Tories policy of introducing new "training centres" for young offenders is an attempt to return to the days of the "short, sharp shock." But all evidence points out to the total failure of such systems. 80% of all boys who have come out of custody since 1985 have subsequently reoffended within two years. The rate is virtually the same for both borstal and approved school, so why should Clarke's "training centres" be any different?

"The graduates of Mr. Clarke's mini prisons," according to Stephen Shaw of the Prison Reform Trust, "will be filling the adult jails for years to come."

When capitalism tells people to desire fast cars, is it any wonder that a section of the most despairing section of working class youth turn to "joyriding." Risking life, limb and arrest for a quick fix of speed and excitement. An estimated 80% of these young offenders given custodial sentences reoffend, yet only 4% of "joyriders" involved in the eighty or so "motor projects" reoffend. These projects involve the youth in car mechanics, doing up old cars and racing them. But these projects receive only £400,000 in government aid, compared to the millions Clarke's "secure training centres" will cost.

All institutions for the "care" of young people, whether borstal or local authority homes, have an appalling record. Seldom a

week goes by without some new scandal about maltreatment; physical, psychological and sexual abuse. Three 15 year old boys have committed suicide in prison in the last three years. In 1991 there were 60 recorded incidents of attempted suicide or self mutilation by boys and girls aged 16 and under in prisons around the country. And this is the reality of Kenneth Clarke's "solution" to the problems of young offenders! As Major said, don't "understand" but "condemn."

The Tories would like to tell us that crime has nothing to do with the state of society and everything to do with individual wickedness

The Tories would like to tell us that crime has nothing to do with the state of society and all to do with individual wickedness. But the *Independent* revealed (18.2.93) that "two boys, believed to be those who abducted James (Bulger), were begging in the precinct on Thursday and Friday. They approached a number of shoppers." But this is something that John Major and the tabloids would rather not contemplate. Serious violent crimes like the murder of James Bulger are not on the increase. The *Independent*, in its editorial 16.2.93, admits as much, "It is no comfort to be told by experts that the average Briton has more chance of being killed on the road than by all the murderers and psychopaths still at large, or that violent crime probably remains less common than it was when our

great-grandparents were children."

In fact the levels of child abduction are lower now than in the 1940's. And of course if we go even further back, child abduction, murder and prostitution were endemic problems in nineteenth century Britain. The nineteenth century saw a series of similar "moral panics."

The prohibition of child labour (for under nine year olds at least) in 1833 led to such a panic as bourgeois "public opinion" became horrified at the idleness and lack of discipline amongst those children "freed" from the rigours of the mill and factory. This was not an unimportant factor in the introduction of compulsory school attendance for working class children. The school had to replace the workplace as the disciplining agent for bourgeois "morality". The social deprivation, poverty and homelessness that existed was a breeding ground for crime. Frederick Engels wrote in 1845, "Thus are the workers cast out and ignored by the class in power, morally as well as physically and mentally. The only provision made for them is the law, which fastens upon them when they become obnoxious to the bourgeoisie. Like the dullest of brutes, they are treated to but one form of education, the whip, in the shape of force, not convincing but intimidating. There is, therefore, no cause for surprise if the workers, treated as brutes, actually become such." (*The Condition of the Working Class in England*).

He went on, "He is poor, life offers him no charm, almost every enjoyment is denied him, the penalties of the law have no further terrors for him; why should he restrain his desires, why leave to the rich the enjoyment of his birthright, why not seize a part of it for himself? What inducement has the proletariat not to steal?"

A letter appeared in the *Manchester Guardian* in 1844, "Mr Editor, For some time past our main streets are haunted by swarms of beggars, who try to awaken the pity of passers-by in a most shameless and annoying manner, by exposing their tattered

clothing, sickly aspect, and disgusting wounds and deformities. I should think that when one not only pays the poor rate, but also contributes largely to the charitable institutions, one had done enough to earn a right to be spared such disagreeable and impertinent molestations. And why else do we pay such high rates for the maintenance of the municipal police, if they do not even protect us so far as to make it possible to go to or out of town in peace? Your obedient servant, A Lady."

Victorian Conditions

How little things seem to have changed! At one stage in the mid nineteenth century over 10% of the total population of England and Wales were declared paupers. The introduction of the 1834 Poor Law was an early attempt to cut the cost of keeping the poor and unemployed alive. Poor relief was only made available "indoors" in the notorious workhouses, brutalising even further the impoverished section of workers. The reasons seem all too familiar, the old system was accused of "protecting the lazy, vicious, and improvident; calculated to destroy the bonds of family life, hinder the accumulation of capital, scatter that which is already accumulated, and ruin the taxpayers. Moreover, in the provision of aliment, it sets a premium upon illegitimate children." (Report of Poor Law Commissioners).

Of course, working people had hoped these conditions were something long gone. But the Tories have brought many of the same conditions back to haunt this country. Homelessness, poverty, unemployment, alcohol and drug abuse: lead to degradation and crime, just as they have done throughout the whole history of capitalism. As long as this system continues, all the hypocritical condemnations of the Tories will achieve nothing. Only a socialist society offers working class people a genuine way forward. Our task is to build it.

Step Up the Fightback

(continued from back page)

action. "We have to make a stand before there's nothing left," is the view.

Local Authority workers have already taken strike action in defence of jobs in South Tyneside, Yorkshire, the West Midlands and London. Busworkers are engaged on a series of 24 hour strikes. The same is true of engineers and foremen at Fords over compulsory redundancies. ASLEF is balloting for action. The FBU have dug their heels in against the 1.5% wage offer. "We

are not going back to poverty pay, which we endured before our national strike", said Ken Cameron, FBU General Secretary.

"There will be no return to the days when firefighters had to rely on free school meals and family income support....We will take strike action, if necessary, and we will carry on until victory."

It is time the TUC followed the lead of those in the front line. The TUC - the general staff of the labour movement - must throw its weight behind a real struggle to defeat the

Tory government. The Tories - as the experience since October has proved - are not influenced by words, but deeds.

As a focal point the TUC should name the day for a 24 hour general strike against the government. If this was coupled to a determined campaign nationally, the Major government could be forced to resign.

A Labour government, pledged to socialist policies, could offer a way out of the nightmare of unemployment in a planned and harmonious use of resources, not for profit but for human need. The April 2 strike must be the starting point.

The Eighteenth Brumaire of Boris Yeltsin

"The party of order proved....that it knew neither how to rule nor how to serve; neither how to live or how to die; neither how to suffer the republic nor how to overthrow it; neither to uphold the constitution nor how to throw it overboard; neither how to co-operate with the President nor how to deal with him."

Karl Marx: "The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte"

Besieged by angry crowds, shouting their support for one or other of the warring factions, the four-day extraordinary session of the Russian parliament ended in a humiliating defeat for Boris Yeltsin.

Heedless of the threat and bluster of the Yeltsinites, the hardliners and their "centrist" allies in the congress voted to reduce still further the President's powers, overruling his attempt to introduce rule by decree, sacking his representatives in the provinces, and demanding the formation of a new government "of national accord".

Yeltsin's demand for a referendum on April 25th was accepted, but its content was radically altered in a way that skillfully outmanoeuvred the President. Yeltsin's idea was to use the referendum as a "vote of confidence" - for or against Yeltsin. This is the method of the plebiscite - the classical method of Bonapartist politicians bidding for absolute power.

In the West, Yeltsin is held up as the hero of the hour - the great saviour of democracy - the man who stood on a tank to defend the rights of parliament. Now the self same Russian parliament has turned into his most deadly opponent. What do these forces really represent? Should Socialists support one side or the other? Yeltsin is frequently described as a "populist". That is merely a nice way of saying that he is a demagogue. But he is a very peculiar one because he lacks the programme of a demagogue. What does he offer the Russian people? Boris Yeltsin is the chief representative of the nascent Russian capitalist class. This is composed in its great majority of spivs, crooks, mafiosi and similar undesirables.

As predicted by the Marxists, Russian capitalism is corrupt capitalism. It is even worse than the notorious "crony capitalism" of Marcos in the Philippines. The French nineteenth-cen-

tury socialist Proudhon invented the celebrated phrase: "property is theft". From a strictly scientific point of view that is incorrect but in present day Russia it comes close to the truth. Even bourgeois visitors from the West have been shocked by the greedy corrupt rapaciousness of the "apostles of the market" in Russia. One prominent strategist of capital of came back recently "*saddened by the pervasive sordidness and decay, the rampant corruption masquerading as capitalism.....I left with a palpable sense of foreboding.*" he added, "*that sinister events are waiting to happen.*"

Reform Programme

Yet these same Western "experts" are the ones who have been egging Yeltsin on to push ahead with his "reforms" as quickly as possible, regardless of the consequences. Yeltsin himself is a faithful image of the class he represents: ambitious but provincial, forceful but ignorant, he is pushing forward with a policy which is enriching a tiny handful, but impoverishing countless millions. Blind, deaf, and usually drunk to boot, he is unconcerned at the massive amount of misery and suffering caused by the mad dash for the "market."

The Economist, which has consistently backed the most rapid implementation of privatisation, recently described what must be a fairly typical scene in Moscow nowadays. One man walked into a car-dealers shop and bought seven Cadillacs at \$50,000 each and an armoured one at \$300,000. He paid cash.

Now take the other side of the coin. Last November, the government specified a "minimum subsistence level" (which basically consists of a diet of bread and potatoes, with nothing for clothes, footwear etc.). That was 3,285 roubles a month (\$7.30 at current rates). Almost 30% of the population were earning less than this amount.

By January, the "minimum subsistence level" was estimated at 5,073 roubles a month (\$8.87). However, a pensioner gets only 4,275 roubles a month, and the official minimum wage was set on January the first at a mere 2,250 - less than half the official level of the bare means of existence.

These figures paint a devastating picture of extreme social inequality, poverty and despair. Corruption is all-pervading. The black markets and mafiosi, who have contacts at the highest level of government are, in effect, engaged in plundering the state. A large amount of the "hard currency" earned through Russia's exports have ended up in Swiss bank accounts. The West tried to push Yeltsin down the road of rapid privatisation in the hope that they could make it irreversible. But all the promises of big quantities of aid have come to nothing. Last year only \$10 billion was forthcoming - insignificant amounts compared to what is needed - and most of that was in credits and loans which will go back to the West with interest. The experience of capitalism in Russia has not been a happy one and there is worse to come.

The most cursory glance at the economic statistics spell absolute catastrophe. Since 1991, Russia has experienced a collapse which puts anything in the West in the shade.

In 1991, gross domestic product fell by 22%. In 1992 there was a further fall of 19%, and this year, the economy is set to fall by a further 12%. The figures for industrial output are still more alarming. In 1991, there was a negative growth of 8%, in 1992, 16%, and this year the fall could accelerate to a horrendous 19%. Under Stalinist rule, unemployment in the USSR was practically unknown. As late as 1991, the rate of unemployment was a mere 300,000. Last year it rose to a million. This year it is expected to reach 4 to 5 million.

These figures (which undoubtedly under-state



Yeltsin pleads with US business for aid.

the true extent of the problem) are still relatively low. But if Yeltsin's programme is carried out, with wholesale closures of factories, unemployment would rocket to 25 to 50 millions - an absolute nightmare.

This partly explains the actions of Congress, in resisting Yeltsin's reform programme. The bulk of the parliamentary deputies are bureaucrats of the old regime, factory managers, collective farm chairmen, army officers and the like. They represent the so-called "Military Industrial Complex", whose interests are directly threatened by Yeltsin's reforms.

Unlike the Yeltsinites, this bloc does not have a clear-cut programme. It is made up of different interest groups, united in opposing the mad dash to a full-blown market economy for different reasons.

The inevitable consequences of massive privatisation would be the wholesale bankruptcy of heavy industry and mass factory closures. This would not only mean unemployment for millions of workers, but would, at a stroke, undermine the base of the income, power and privilege of the managerial caste.

Power and Privilege

While a section of the Congress would probably welcome a return to Stalinism, most of them are not opposed to capitalism, but want a more gradual approach, which would safeguard their power and privileges, and guarantee that they - and not the upstarts, spivs and foreigners - would be the owners of the privatised firms.

This is why the Congress has stonewalled and sabotaged Yeltsin's privatisation programme. In reality about 30% of enterprises have been sold off, nearly all of them small businesses, shops, restaurants and the like. That counts for very little. In point of fact, even in a healthy workers' state, these enterprises would not be nationalised. The decisive section of the economy remains in the hands of the state.

The deadlock between the two right wings of the bureaucracy has had fatal consequences for the economy, which now has the worst of all worlds: all the disadvantages of bureaucratic rule and bungling, corruption and mismanagement together with all the chaos, swindling and downright robbery of capitalism in its crudest and most criminal form.

There are no real political parties in Congress, only rival groups and coalitions representing different interest groups. The managerial wing of the bureaucracy is represented by the Industrial Union of Arkady Volsty. The Industrial Wing have demanded, and got, the continuation of state subsidies to industry.

It is a measure of the waste and inefficiency of bureaucratic control that such massive subsidies are needed at all. In the absence of workers control and management, with no proper checking and accounting, tens of thousands of gigantic enterprises are churning out huge quantities of shoddy and worthless goods which

nobody wants. The goods are stock-piled, unsold. The firms run up colossal debt. Wages are not paid, or paid "in kind" with piles of useless products. The result is huge and chronic indebtedness in industry.

To stop the factories going bust, the state has to intervene with billions of roubles in subsidies. Last year, these had reached the astronomical figure of seven trillion roubles. This had to be "written off" by the central bank. But already by March this year, it was back up to four trillion roubles - or 100% of the total gross domestic product.

Trotsky explained decades ago that "inflation is the syphilis of a planned economy". To plug the debt of the industrial sector, the central bank (which is answerable to Congress not the President) has resorted to printing vast amounts of money, which is not worth the paper it is printed on. The result is hyperinflation which is spiralling out of control.

One of the most important gains of a nationalised planned economy is that both unemployment and inflation can be abolished. Most prices in the Soviet Union had not been increased since the 1920's. Now that gain has been wiped out. Since January 1992, the Russian people have been faced with the most

Russian people have been faced with the most appalling price rises. Millions have been reduced to destitution, their savings made worthless overnight.

appalling price rises. Millions have been reduced to destitution, their savings made worthless overnight.

The level of inflation at the start of this year was a staggering 2,500%. By the end of 1993, it will top 3,000%. The effect on living standards can be imagined. In fact, one has to imagine it because the Russian authorities do not issue the figures. But we know that in 1992, real wages fell by 20% -officially. In practice, the fall will have been much worse.

All these factors have produced a profound sense of discontent, anger and frustration. The majority of the working class probably had very little real enthusiasm for "the market" to begin with. But the layer of petit-bourgeois, intellectuals, professional people and others, who were firm supporters of Yeltsin and his

reforms have been swiftly disillusioned. One such person was recently interviewed by a Western economist, who asked him what he thought about democracy. The answer given is a very good insight into the psychology of millions of ordinary Russians at the present time: "Freedom? Yes, we have it. But freedom for what? To die of appendicitis? To buy a Western anorak for DM 200, when the average wages are DM 5 per week. Freedom to bribe teachers \$1,000 a year to teach our children or to pay \$50 to see a decent doctor?"

No Workers' Movement

Even the reactionary Tory Daily Express (23rd March) points to the corruption and racketeering in Russia, for example in the housing sector, "Until the downfall of Communism," it says, "rents in the Soviet Union hadn't risen since the 1920's. Citizens had a constitutional right to cheap housing and, in theory, were rewarded with 12 square metres of living space per person allocated by all-powerful apparatchiks." And the article goes on to describe the growth of the "property market" in Moscow which "highlight like nothing else, the difference between the 'haves' and 'have nots'. For example, a five-room apartment "three minutes from McDonalds in Pushkin Square" was on sale for \$200,000 (remember the average wage is 75-80 cents, or about 50 p a day). The article mentions the fact that old people are being persuaded to make a will, signing over their flats for a sum of money, and then murdered for the sake of their property. Such are the "blessings" bestowed by the "free market" on the Russian people.

Yet despite all the suffering and the fact that the mood has undoubtedly swung decisively against the market, there is no big movement of the working class. This fact, far from being a surprise, was predicted in advance by the supporters of Socialist Appeal in answer to certain ex-Marxists who, in the summer of 1991 argued in favour of giving critical support to the movement around Yeltsin, alleging - quite falsely - that it represented the beginnings of a revolutionary movement of the working class. There is no point in going back to that polemic - except to say that everything that has happened since then is a complete confirmation of what we said at the time. Incidentally, we might ask those comrades whether they are now prepared to come out in defence of the Russian parliament against Yeltsin just as previously they defended the Russian parliament with Yeltsin.

The truth of the matter is that there was no movement of the Russian working class in 1991 and there is no movement of the Russian working class now. Whoever does not understand this fact and the reasons for it, will be completely unable to understand the development of events in Russia, which are entirely conditioned by the fact that the proletariat has not yet intervened as an independent force.

There is not an atom of pessimism in these assertions. We do not doubt that the Russian workers will intervene, and will do so in the most dramatic and decisive manner. But it would be the height of stupidity to confuse the future with the present. We have to set out from things as they are, not as we would like them to be.

The relative passivity of the Russian working class (up to the present) has puzzled even bourgeois commentators. In reality, there is no mystery about it.

In the first place, the working class of Russia has been completely transformed by decades of industrialisation. The old generation has largely died and been replaced by an entirely new proletariat, drawn from the countryside, which did not have the same traditions.

More important, decades of one-party, totalitarian rule has had a deadening effect on the masses consciousness. Trotsky explains that, while revolution is the locomotive of history, reaction - especially in the form of a totalitarian dictatorship - throws consciousness back.

Stalinist Legacy

The Stalinist one-party state, with its oppression, corruption, lies and hypocrisy, particularly repelled the young generation. It is a monstrous fact - but a fact nevertheless - that the name of Lenin is widely associated with the crimes of the Stalinists in the minds of a significant layer of the population.

There were undoubtedly illusions in capitalism, in "democracy", in the West, especially among the middle layers - the intellectuals and professional people - and even among certain layers of workers, though not to same extent and full of contradictions. We have the glaring contradiction that big sections of the miners supported - and possibly still support - Yeltsin. But, in the first place, this support is undoubtedly declining fast. In the second place, it is far from being an unambiguous and unqualified support for capitalism.

The right-wing "Economist" published an interview with the Yeltsinite leader of the Vorkuta miners, Ivan Guridov, who in January led a take-over of the Vorgashorshaya mine. Guridov is a self-confessed admirer of capitalism. But the "Economist" correspondent clearly went away dissatisfied from his interview: "yet having seized the trappings of power, Mr Guridov has little idea what to do with them. He talks grandly about how he is *"100% for free markets and privatisation"* but in the next breath says he will not allow the mine's coal to be sold through middlemen and will *"oppose selling the enterprise to an owner who will tell the workers what to do"*. (ECONOMIST March 6th)

In reality, the Guridovs of this world are not at all representative of the mass of the Russian workers - or even, at this time, of a decisive layer of middle class. Privatisation, the market, "reform" - all this has spelt ruin for the people



"Communist" protestors besiege the Russian parliament

of Russia and all the peoples of the former Soviet Union.

If they do not move at the present time it is because they see no alternative.

If a powerful revolutionary party existed, Russia even now would be on the brink of revolution. But no such party exists. The tiny wing of the bureaucracy, represented by people like Kargalitsky and Medvedev, who presented a "left" image, are extremely muddled. The biggest party, ironically, is the Communist Party, which has about half a million members but is tarred by the brush of the old regime.

Yeltsin's Power Struggle

Given the absence of a clear alternative, it is not at all difficult to understand the psychology of the average Russian worker at the present time: "we tried 'Communism' - that failed. We tried capitalism - that also failed. Nothing is any good. All the politicians are the same. Yeltsin, Khazbulatov - they are all for themselves. Nobody is for us"

The prevailing mood of despair will have been enormously increased by the demoralising daily grind, the struggle for existence, the constant worry about feeding your family, which leaves little time for concern about the comings and goings in the Kremlin and the Congress of Deputies. Of course, the mood can change, and change suddenly. But at the moment, it has a profound effect upon the way in which events unfold. Trotsky had envisaged that the restoration of capitalism in the USSR would result from civil war. The working class would fight to defend the nationalised economy and the plan. For the reasons sketched above, that did not happen in the way Trotsky anticipated. The rot had also gone much further.

The delay in the movement of the masses is now the decisive factor in the situation. The struggle between Yeltsin and the Congress is a graphic illustration of the unbearable contradictions in society. But it is a struggle being fought out at the top. The masses are reduced to the role of apathetic and cynical onlookers. Yeltsin, desperate to get support from his "friends" in the West, tries to frighten them with the spectre of a "New October Revolu-

tion" - if he is removed, that is! Translated into English (or American) it means: *"You'd better help me, or look out! Send some money quick!"*

For their part, the Western governments take Yeltsin's warnings very seriously. They openly speculate in the press about the danger of a revolution - or a counter-revolution - or a civil war - or the disintegration of Russia - or a new dictatorship.....And, in point of fact, their worries are well-founded. The fate of the world is tied up with the destiny of Russia.

Therefore they have fallen over themselves to give Yeltsin their blessing. The cash, however, is a little bit slow in putting in an appearance. The Europeans look to Washington, Washington looks to Japan, Japan looks to the map of the Sakhalin Islands, and hastily puts its hands back in its pockets.

They are naturally all in favour of "democracy". But unfortunately, Boris Yeltsin long ago realised an elementary truth: that democracy and the introduction of a market economy in Russia are two completely incompatible propositions.

Role of Congress

For months, Yeltsin has been manoeuvring to set himself up as the new dictator, presiding over the restoration of capitalism with an iron hand. However Congress had other ideas. The different factions in parliament could not agree on very much, but they could all agree on one thing: **YELTSIN MUST BE STOPPED**. The managers wanted to halt the reform programme. The regional bureaucrats, who run their Republics like feudal barons, wanted more autonomy a weak centre, not a dictator. The military caste wanted to recover its lost prestige and privileged conditions, and bitterly resented the break-up of the Soviet Union, the loss of Eastern Europe, and the humiliating dependence upon US imperialism on the world stage in general, and Yugoslavia in particular. The struggle came to a head in December, when Congress forced the resignation of arch-reformer Gaidar as Prime Minister. Yeltsin manoeuvred to gain time, while preparing a counter-stroke. An uneasy compromise was arrived at, whereby Yeltsin accepted the loss

of his chief henchman, while Congress accepted holding of a referendum in the Spring. Words are cheap, as a worker knows. An agreement is only a piece of paper reflecting the balance of forces at a given moment.

Referendum Bid

The aim of the referendum was, in theory, to work out a new constitution. The present one, left over from the Gorbachev era, has already been amended 300 times and is full of contradictions. In practice, however, nobody pays a bit of attention to the constitution. What matters is the relative strength of the parties locked in battle. And that can only be measured in struggle, not in constitutional committees, though the latter can be used as weapons in the struggle, as we have seen. Immediately upon concluding the December deal, both sides commenced manoeuvring. Yeltsin decided to make a bid for absolute power, based on rule by decree and a plebiscite, the classical method of Bonapartism. Khasbulatov, the speaker of the Russian parliament, set out to undermine Yeltsin, eliminating his powers one by one, and leaving him as a paper president, to be cast aside when the opportunity presented itself. The first step was to remove Yeltsin's main weapon - the referendum. Khasbulatov persuaded the bureaucracies of the Republics to come out against it. These provincial bureaucrats oppose any step leading to a strong centre, so his task was easy. In general, the crisis in Russia has given an enormous impetus to centrifugal tendencies. First, the break up of the USSR. Now even the unity of the Russian Federation is being threatened. Abdulatov, chairman of the nationality committee of Congress warned that the Federation was in danger *"because laws are not being observed, because there is a power crisis and economic reforms are not conclusive."* (Economist, 30th January).

Counter-revolution

It is estimated that Russia's 88 regions (blasts) have already passed 14,000 regulations which directly contradict Moscow's laws.

The main issue at stake in the power struggle between Yeltsin and the parliament is - who controls the state? Who will the army, the police and the bureaucrats obey?

Counter-revolution, like revolution, has its own laws. This is a moment which requires decisive action. If it is missed, it may not return for a long time. Yanayev and the other plotters made a mess of the coup in 1991, precisely because they failed to take decisive action against Yeltsin. But Yeltsin appears to have made a similar mistake.

In all probability, Yeltsin could have assumed dictatorial powers immediately after the failure of the coup. But he seems to have left it too late. Even his fervent admirers in the West doubt that he can now succeed:

"Between August 1991 and early 1992, Mr

Yeltsin could have dismissed parliament without loud complaint. Since then, his popularity has slipped. So now he has to try to rebuild the state with the consent of parliament. The surprise is how far parliament has managed to outmanoeuvre him." (The Economist Jan 23). Khasbulatov, the consummate bureaucrat, is a skilful manipulator. But that does not explain his success. The experience of market reforms has been a harsh lesson. The average wage in Russia today buys only three-fifths of what it could buy immediately before prices were liberalised in January 1992, and is lower, in real terms, than the average wage in 1985, before "perestroika" began. That is the main reason for Yeltsin's difficulties. And time is not on his side.

Counter-Demonstrations

The noisy demonstrations of hard-liners, waiving portraits of Stalin and beating empty pans is only the tip of the iceberg. The Yeltsinites have attempted to mobilise counter-demonstrations. But the mood of the petit-bourgeois masses is not what it was in the Summer of 1991. The overwhelming majority of workers look with cynical contempt at the conflicts at the top: *"A plague on both your houses"* would be the cynical response.

Inside congress, Yeltsin's support has effectively collapsed. This was shown in the voting at the four-day extraordinary session at the end of March, there Yeltsin only escaped impeachment by a paltry 72 votes, out of a total of 1,003. The hired hacks of the Western press have tried to play down the dimensions of the defeat, but it was devastating.

Even prior to this, Yeltsin's weakness was shown when he attempted to stage a walk-out, which, had it succeeded, would have deprived Congress of a quorum, and prevented it from continuing. But only a few deputies followed him. The session continued, denouncing Yeltsin's attempt to rule by decree and overruling his decisions.

At one point, it seemed that they would impeach Yeltsin and put vice-president Alexan-

The main reason for this inconclusive stand-off is the fear of both Yeltsin and Khasbulatov that an open split could finally provoke the intervention of the masses

der Rutskoy in his place. But they drew back for fear of the consequences of an open split between president and parliament.

Thus we arrive at the present uneasy compromise. Yeltsin remains, though largely stripped of his powers. The referendum is to go ahead in April, but parliament has changed the wording to include a question, whether you approve of Yeltsin's reform policy.

In reality, nothing has been resolved. Yeltsin is increasingly desperate, and attempts to outmanoeuvre Congress, now addressing street rallies, now flirting with the army.

The main reason for this inconclusive stand-off is the fear of both Yeltsin and Khasbulatov that an open split could finally provoke the intervention of the masses. The prevailing mood of apathy and revulsion can rapidly turn to fury if the situation lead to a complete breakdown. Then Yeltsin's demagogic warnings about a "New October" could come true. This is a prospect which terrifies the leaders of the West, who are desperate to prevent things coming to a head. However, the present unstable equilibrium cannot last long. No society can survive the kind of stress and strain which Russia suffers from. Something will have to give. The most likely outcome will be in the form of a military coup. Given the depth of the economic collapse, the threat of complete social breakdown, and the disintegration of Russia, this will probably be sooner, rather than later.

Rule By Decree

Both Yeltsin and parliament are constantly wooing the military. Naturally, Yeltsin cannot rule by decree without the backing of the army and police. He appears to have the support of the top generals. But this does not extend to the middle and lower ranking officers, who are seething with discontent, and blame Yeltsin for all their woes. In the event of an open split, it is highly unlikely that these layers would obey the president.

The latest proposal is to hold elections in October. But, even if these are held (and that is a possibility), they would solve nothing. Under present circumstances, it is unlikely a new Congress would be fundamentally different to the present one. It is not likely that Yeltsin would get the majority he seeks. On the contrary, the hardship caused by economic collapse would be far greater than at present. If by a miracle, Yeltsin did get a majority, he would presumably push ahead with his reforms at a faster pace - selling off the land to the gangsters and speculators, de-nationalising industry, causing massive unemployment and chaos. But this is equally the road to a military takeover, especially if it led to a breakdown of social "order" and the break-up of Russia. Equally, if Congress emerged strengthened, or Yeltsin were defeated, they would move towards re-centralisation of the economy, with a "strong" president, either

Khasbulatov or, more probably Rutskey. Either way, the possibility of establishing a Western-type democracy in Russia is nil.

In the absence of a mass movement, under conditions of terrible economic, social and political chaos, the intervention of the military is only a matter of time. The Bonapartist tendencies of Yeltsin are only an expression of the impasse of society. Things cannot continue like this for long.

The officer caste is seething with discontent at the loss of their power, privileges and prestige. Many officers withdrawn from Eastern Europe have no homes, but live in tents. The loss of Eastern Europe, the break-up of the Soviet Union, the breakdown of discipline, the programme of disarmament and plans to cut down and reorganise the armed forces - have led to a wave of demoralisation. 3,000 army officers are on trial for corruption. But corruption is now a way of life for the whole of society.

Foreign Policy

The foreign policy of Yeltsin has been the last straw. After the betrayal of Iraq comes the refusal to support Serbia, Russia's traditional ally. The hard-liners make no secret of their sympathy for the Serb cause and their indignation at Yeltsin's kow-towing to the West.

As a sop to the military, Yeltsin recently approached the UN with a formal request to recognise Russia as the "guarantor of peace" (!) in the former Soviet Union. This would give Russia a free hand to intervene militarily in all the territories of the USSR. In fact, it is already doing so. Russian troops are fighting the Georgian army over Abkhazia, and also intervening in Moldova in defence of the puppet Republic of Trans-Dneiper?

The likelihood of a military intervention will increase in the coming months, as the general situation worsens.

What direction would a military regime in Moscow take - towards capitalism or back to Stalinism? To this question, it is not possible to give an unqualified answer. But it would be a serious mistake to imagine that the second option was ruled out. On the contrary, it is implicit in the entire situation.

It is true that the military caste, at this moment in time, probably goes along with the general drift towards capitalism and "the market". They have no understanding and no clear programme, other than the defence of their own caste interests. But therein lies the problem.

The result achieved by the reform programme has been particularly disastrous for the military. The economy is in ruins, with no sign of improvement. The promised foreign aid has not materialised.

The natural tendency of the military would be to go back towards re-centralising the economy. Indeed, irrespective of their long-term interests, they would have no alternative in the short-term but to re-centralise to stave off complete collapse. Such a policy would have an immediate impact in getting things moving again.

They would deal a heavy blow against the mafia and black marketeers, who would be dealt with after the usual way of the Russian military. The same fate would await the most corrupt officials. Probably Yeltsin and his followers would go the same way.

The combination of centralisation and terror would have an effect in developing the productive forces at least for a time. Nor would such a regime necessarily meet with serious opposition from the working class. The depth of the collapse means for most people "anything's better than what we have now".

Totalitarian Regime

This kind of a regime would use the methods of terror, but selectively. It could not go back to the methods of Stalin. To begin with, it would have to give certain concessions to the bureaucracies of the provinces, who would insist on a certain degree of autonomy. On the other hand, over a period Moscow would take back all the lost territories of the former Soviet Union. In any case, not one of these states is really viable or independent. Decades of central planning has meant that they are all heavily dependent on the Russian market. Experience has shown that there is no easy replacement for this. Some would come back into the fold



It is necessary to revive the genuine ideas of Lenin and the Marxists

willingly, especially the central Asian republics which despite all the crimes of Stalinism benefited most from the Union. Byelorussia would join immediately. Even in Lithuania, the fact that elections led to the victory of the former stalinists who favour closer links to Russia indicates that the experience of capitalism has not been a happy one in the Baltic states either.

From a military point of view, only the Ukraine would present a serious obstacle to the Russian army. But despite the nationalist pretensions

of the ruling clique in Kiev, the Ukraine is also heavily dependent on Russia, especially for oil. On the other hand, the pipelines connecting Russia's natural gas to Western Europe pass through the Ukraine.

For months Russia and the Ukraine have been making belligerent noises over all kinds of things - the Black Sea fleet, nuclear missiles, the Crimea etc. But at the end of the day they are unlikely to come to blows. A war would be a bloody and costly affair for both sides.

The Ukrainian economy is in deep troubles. The currency is even lower than the rouble. A coup in Moscow would probably be followed by one in Kiev within a few months. The most likely outcome would be a deal between the ruling cliques establishing a kind of condominium between Russia, the Ukraine and probably "brother slavs" in Byelorussia.

This perspective would vary only slightly in the event of a turn towards capitalism. What kind of animal would a capitalist military dictatorship in Russia be? Certainly not vegetarian - it would be a mighty, aggressive imperialist state like Tsarist Russia but with a more powerful industrial and military base - hardly a prospect to enthuse the Western powers.

In short, Russia has entered into a new and convulsive stage, which will be protracted

over a period of three, five or ten years.

The illusions in capitalism have largely been dissipated or being so. All that is preventing a big movement of the Russian proletariat is the lack of a perspective. But that will change.

If a Bonapartist regime in Russia moved in a capitalist direction, that would only exacerbate the contradictions of society. It would be a very unstable regime because it would lack a mass base. In a short time Yeltsin's threat of a new October would become a reality.

Even if the Stalinists took over, after they had succeeded in stabilising the economy, the workers would begin to question the regime. It would never be possible to recreate a stable totalitarian regime. The perspective would then be a political revolution against the bureaucracy within a few years.

Once the logjam is broken and the multimillioned proletariat of Russia flexes its muscles, the process would

even more rapidly move to a denouement - either the political or social revolution depending on circumstances.

A new edition of the October revolution on a higher level as a result of the development of the productive forces over a period of seven decades would have an even bigger impact than the "ten days that shook the world". It would transform the entire planet. Out of a nightmare of hopelessness, despair and reaction would be born a vision of hope, showing the way forward for the whole of humanity.

Alan Woods

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Questions
for
Socialists
No.4

Import Controls or Socialist Plan?

The Tories' announcement that it intended to close 31 pits, coming as it did in the same period that huge job losses were announced by BT, British Gas, Fords and many others, sparked off the marvellous demonstrations in London at the end of last year. The fight to save the pits captured the imagination of workers all over Britain representing as it did the fight to save jobs. How could these pits, along with the other threatened sections of British industry be saved?

Without a fighting lead from the tops of the TUC and with no socialist alternative being offered by the leadership of the Labour Party many workers looked for a way out on the basis of the present system.

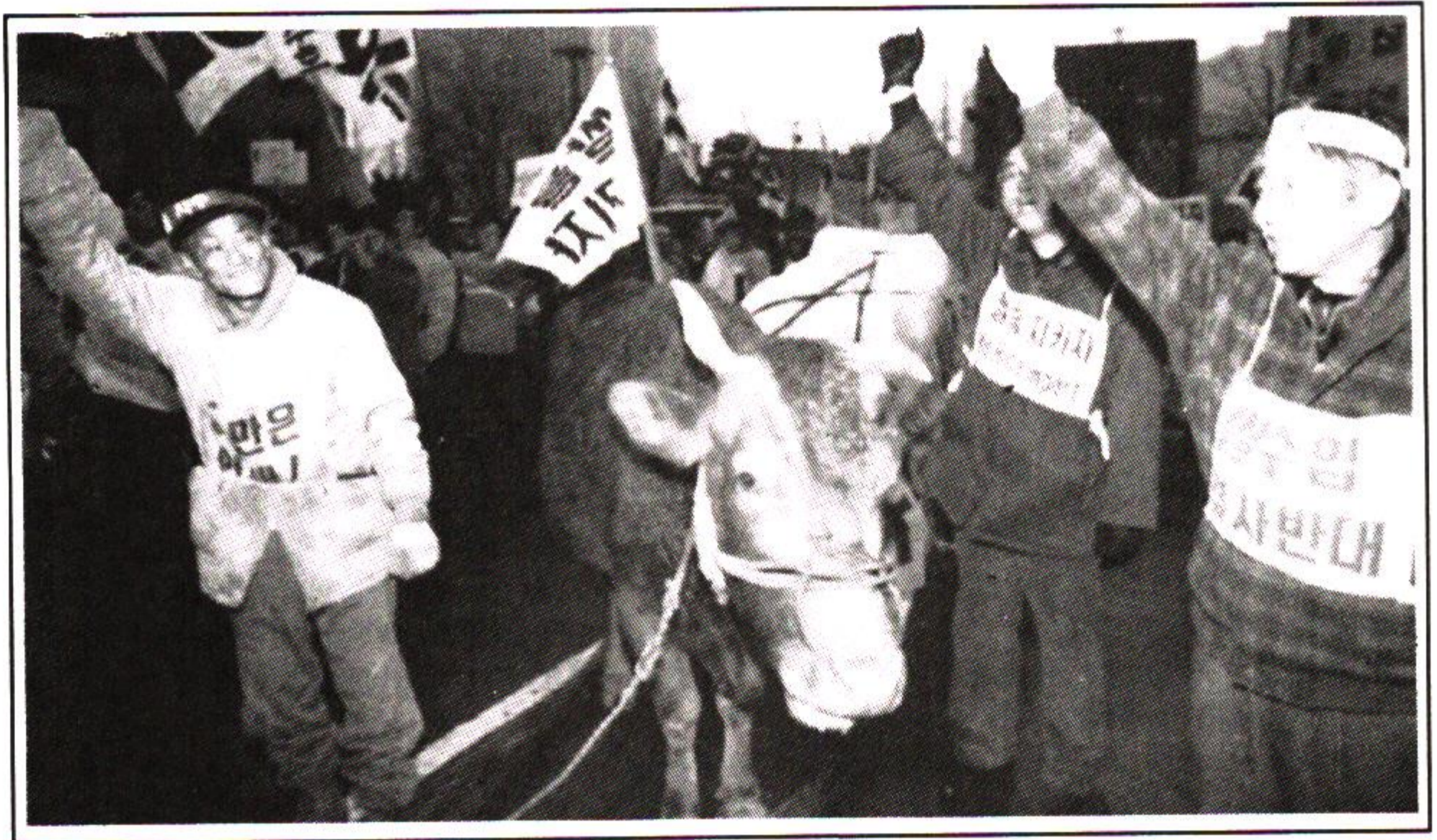
The old policy of import controls came out from its hiding place, particularly in relation to the coal industry, but not only there. The idea of preventing the import of heavily subsidised coal from Germany, and equally subsidised nuclear electricity from France as well as the coal produced by cheap labour in South Africa, Poland and elsewhere, was raised by some on the left and on the right of the Labour movement.

British Industry

It was also raised by a small section of Tories and businessmen, fearful of either losing support in their mining constituencies or of the social and economic effect of a further decimation of British industry. Many of the other policy prescriptions of the left in the past such as exchange controls and devaluation were already redundant as a result of the ERM debacle. Although no doubt even these will be resurrected in the future though.

But the idea of import controls appears to have gained some support not only from a section of miners, who understandably are desperately trying to save their industry and their communities, but other sections of the Labour movement generally.

The main attraction of import controls is that they appear to offer an easy way out. The innate conservatism of the human mind, which tends to lag behind the development



Korean farmers demonstrate against the import of rice from the US - but import controls are no solution to the worldwide decimation of jobs.

of the productive forces and technique, and resists the idea of fundamental change until it is left with no other alternative, means that the great majority of society, including the working-class, will desperately seek solutions which do not imply a sudden and decisive break with the past.

In the first instance many workers will seek the "line of least resistance". As the crisis develops, all sorts of quack theories and panaceas will inevitably rise to meet this demand. **Import controls, it would seem, are easy to understand, and apparently just as easy to apply, and therefore have all the compelling attraction of an instant "miracle cure" for a nasty and painful disease. But beware, before swallowing the medicine take the manufacturers advice, read the label carefully, what will be the consequences and side-effects of such a policy?**

We all know from bitter experience, any economic policy that is defended by the bosses is almost certain to be in direct contradiction to the interests of working people. Far from being an argument in favour then, the fact that a section of died-in-the-wool reactionaries in the Tory party and the CBI put forward this policy should in itself make us think twice before adopting

the same position. These Tories who claimed to support the miners showed their true colours when the white paper was announced. The workers can trust only their own forces and their own organisations in the fight to defend jobs.

Chorus of Protectionism

But aren't import controls a socialist policy? Why would a section of the bosses support import controls? In whose interests would this policy work? What effect would their introduction have on jobs and prices? If they are really such a good idea, why haven't they been implemented already? These are the questions every thinking worker should consider before joining in this new chorus of protectionism.

The advocates of import controls argue that their introduction would afford British industry, or rather specific sections of it, the coal industry for example, a breathing space, "protecting" at least the domestic market for home produce, allowing the capitalists the time they need to re-tool and re-equip industry. That task accomplished, the "temporary" measure of import controls could be dispensed with, and Britain would once again be set to become the "workshop of the world." (And these people are

supposed to be the realists!) Even then, they argue, controls would only apply to those parts of the economy which were seriously threatened, no-one is calling for controls on all imports, only on those affecting certain selected industries. Clearly these arguments won't bear up to a thorough examination. In the first place the difference between "selective" controls and general ones is mere sleight of hand. We would ask the supporters of these "selective" controls which sections of British industry are safe, secure and without the need of protection?

In reality, almost all of what remains of British manufacturing is under threat at the present time. In other words import controls would have to embrace the decisive sections of manufacturing, precisely those subject to the most cut-throat competition internationally.

In a period of generally expanding world trade, the supporters of import controls might argue that with trade growing for everyone, Britain's overseas rivals "wouldn't mind" if Britain protected some of its own industry. Whether this is true or not we are clearly not in such a period of general expansion. **That is precisely why the decisive sections of the British capitalists have rejected the idea of introducing protectionist measures to date, at least in an open and undisguised form. They fear retaliation from their foreign rivals which would seriously damage the British economy, which is heavily dependent on the world market.**

Cut-throat Competition

Of course there's no honour amongst thieves. Disguised import controls have existed for a long time in the form of quotas, state subsidies and a whole list of legal regulations tending to limit imports and "protect" national industries. The steady growth of these tendencies is an expression of the cut-throat competition in a situation of contracting world markets. The fact that British capitalists may be forced to introduce import controls by the rising tide of protectionism internationally is all the more reason why we should oppose them.

Now, some workers, still harbouring illusions that it is possible to find a way out on the basis of capitalism, will be prepared to embrace import controls as a "practical" solution to the problem of unemployment, at least in the short term. **In reality, however, whilst the introduction of "selective" controls might save some industries, and even then only temporarily, it would be at the expense of others.** The increased price of goods which would inevitably flow from such a measure, would reduce the ability of British workers to buy other goods provok-

ing crises in other sections of the national economy. In other words it would at best mean the transference of unemployment from one industry to another, at worst, with the development of a trade war an economic disaster in which there could be no winners but British capitalism would be hit especially hard, and as usual it would be the workers who would be asked to pay with more unemployment and price rises.

Just what effect would this policy have on prices? **The British capitalists freed from competition with their foreign rivals would increase their prices and, without any incentive to undercut the price of British goods, foreign capitalists would raise the price of those imports that were allowed in. In other words workers would be forced to pay for keeping their jobs with another variation of a pay cut.**

Price Rises Inevitable

In addition, British industry is heavily reliant on the import of machine tools and semi-manufactures as well as raw materials, so if import controls were placed on these it would increase the operating costs of British industry further undermining its competitiveness, leading to more job losses.

As far as the coal industry is concerned, British deep-mined coal is already the cheapest in Europe, the reason it can't compete with German coal is because the German capitalists have at least had the common sense to subsidise it and treat it as a strategic reserve, the British bosses, however prefer to rely on the anarchy of "market forces".

So much for the economic consequences of

import controls, but for socialists the matter does not rest there. Behind all the "Buy British" campaigns and appeals to save British jobs from the "enemy without", lurks a real threat to the class consciousness of workers and to replace the instinctive bonds of international class solidarity with the poison of nationalism.

Moral Arguments

At this point we should also examine the most insidious of the arguments for import controls, the argument of the "moral high ground". If we look at the example of coal, some on the left argue that while not supporting import controls as such, we should oppose the import of coal from South Africa and Colombia because to do otherwise would be to support the racist regime of the one and the enforced child-labour of the other. In other words, slyly disguised import controls masquerading as "internationalism". Why not ban all imports from these countries? What about all the other brutal regimes in the world?

The only effective way to assist the struggle of workers in other countries is for us to concentrate on stepping up the fight against our own capitalists, not to side with them against their foreign rivals. Of course it comes as no surprise that reactionaries on the right can spout such nationalist claptrap but for Labour representatives, especially those on the left to do likewise is unacceptable. It shows in practice where the defence of import controls ultimately leads - to a common front of British workers with British bosses against foreign workers and their employers.



Greek workers march for jobs - it is not workers abroad who are to blame for the loss of jobs but capitalism itself



Workers need internationalism

Let us be clear, the blame for the appalling decline of British industry lies not with unfair competition from abroad, or still less with workers in other countries, but fairly and squarely on the shoulders of the British bosses and the entire capitalist system.

None of this, however, should be interpreted as meaning that we are great defenders of "free trade". Just because we oppose one capitalist policy does not mean that we defend another. In any case, how can the "market" possibly be the solution when, as we have shown, it is precisely the market and free trade, i.e. capitalism, which has created this mess in the first place. The market isn't the answer it's the problem. Karl Marx explained over a hundred years ago that neither "free trade" nor "protection" could solve the problems facing workers. So what is the solution?

Coal Industry

If we take the coal industry as an example again, what is needed is not the free play of market forces, or controls on imports, but an integrated energy plan. But you can't plan what you don't control and you can't control what you don't own. In other words, the nationalisation of gas, oil and electricity is what's required. Not the kind of nationalisation that we have seen in the past, however, where industries were state funded, but run as private industries, with the workers having no say in the matter. A socialist policy of nationalisation would have to enable workers to run industry democratically. Production could then be planned in the interests of society, making the most efficient use of resources, and protecting the

health and safety of the workers, the local community, and the environment in general. Some on the left of the Labour movement have raised a kind of halfway house position of some nationalisation, particularly of the privatised utilities, combined with controls on imports.

While we would of course agree with the call to renationalise these industries, (along the above lines and only compensating those shareholders in genuine need) the privatisation of which has led not to increased competition but the creation of private monopolies which have raised prices, cut services and jobs, clearly this would not be enough. To enable the economy to be planned, will require the nationalisation of the banks, financial institutions and big monopolies too.

A Labour Party proposing to control capitalism, especially if it proposes

nationalising key sections of the economy would face sabotage and a vicious campaign through the media, the courts and the other arms of the capitalist state to prevent it gaining power. That being the case why propose tinkering with the system why not abolish it altogether.

As unemployment continues to rise, and the prospect of a return to the "good old days" fades, we can be sure from past experience that the leaders of the labour movement including those on the left will continue to rummage in the dustbin of history for all kinds of ways of shoring up decrepit and decaying capitalism, and all this in the name of "modernisation". There are none so blind

**No control can be established over the economy while the purse strings remain in the hands of the capitalists.
No job is safe while production is based on profit and the anarchy of the market**

as those who refuse to see. All they are doing is prolonging the death-agony of the system and lending it a more violent and convulsive character.

The dialectical contradiction of reformism is that it always succeeds in achieving end results diametrically opposed to their stated intentions. They imagine that they are being practical when in reality they are utopian. They imagine that they are defending a socialist policy when in fact they are advocating a reactionary nationalist position, and are doomed to have their clothes stolen by the most reactionary elements as the tendency toward protectionism grows internationally.

Leadership's Role

It is the task of a leadership to lead, not to tail-end the bosses and their representatives. The call for import controls is no substitute for a fighting socialist policy against redundancies and unemployment. It only serves to divert workers attention from the fundamental issues and in particular the fight against their own bosses, the "enemy within", by pointing a finger at foreign workers as well as foreign capitalists. **The only answer to this crisis is indeed the most modern policy of all, socialism.**

No control can be established over the economy while the purse strings remain in the hands of the capitalists. No job is safe and there will be no end to the colossal waste of human resources that unemployment represents while production is based on profit and the anarchy of the market.

A socialist plan of production, based on the nationalisation of the commanding heights of the economy, under democratic control by the workers, could not only save jobs but eradicate unemployment. Once the profit motive is removed all the talent of human resources currently wasted could be employed. Such a socialist plan would be an inspiration to the workers of Europe and the rest of the world. On the basis of a common plan of production throughout Europe, trade could be managed without threatening jobs, but by the harmonious pooling of resources. A Labour leadership committed to such a programme would not only be more likely to win elections but could rely on the support of the working class against any attempted sabotage by the capitalists, who would not simply hand over its privileges without a fight. As the old saying goes, a thing isn't worth having unless it's worth fighting for, and what could be more worth fighting for than an end to the uncertainty, chaos and misery of capitalism, and the building of a socialist future.

Phil Mitchinson

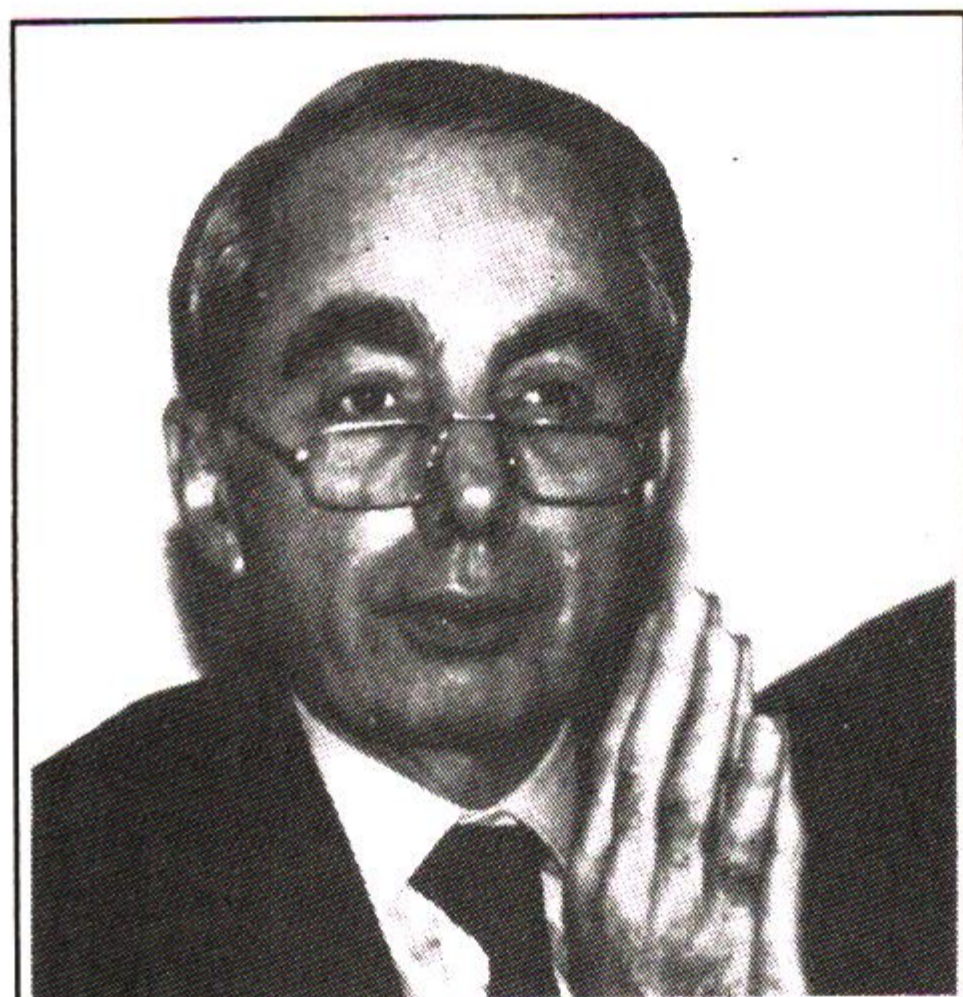
Not one "bad apple" but... Rotten to the Core

A year of investigations into corruption has thrown the Italian political situation into turmoil. Claudio Bellotti and Fernando D'Alessandro, members of the Editorial Board of *Falce Martello* assess the reasons, implications and solutions to the current crisis.

By December, the number of people under investigation for corruption had exceeded 600. According to Cossutta (chairman of Rifondazione Comunista - PRC) the MPs involved number more than 200. Among their number are Bettino Craxi, ex-secretary of the Socialist Party (PSI) and ex-Prime Minister, the ex-mayors of Milan, Pillitteri and Tognoli (PSI), the spokesman for the ex-secretary of the Christian Democrats (DC), the ex-minister for the civil service, Gaspari (DC), the secretary of the Republican Party (PRI) La Malfa and other prominent politicians. Now the prominent DC leaders, Andreotti, Garva and Pomicino are accused of links with the mafia

Lockheed Scandal

This is certainly not the first time that outrageous cases of political corruption have come to light. At the beginning of the 1970s the Iri-Petronim scandal showed up the connection between the big petrol companies and the PRI. In 1976 the Lockheed scandal broke out, involving two Christian Democrat ministers and one Social Democrat. The difference in the current "Clean Hands" investigation is that for the first time a judicial inquiry has not limited itself to looking for a few "rotten apples" or "dishonest" businessmen, **but openly declared that there is an organic link between capitalists and state functionaries, a link based on**



Prime Minister Amato - facing a political crisis

the systematic and continuous use of corruption.

The question arises why the magistrates have decided to carry out such an investigation at this time. Why hasn't the investigation been covered up or limited as has happened in the past? As far back as three years ago magistrates in Milan brought to light a part of the system of bribes that is being investigated now and yet, at that time, the inquiry ended with the arrest of a few "small fry". So what has changed? The answer lies in looking at the development and origins of the inquiry.

The "Clean Hands" investigation started on the initiative of the industrialists who began denouncing corrupt politicians. The fundamental reason why the industrialists decided to act was the explosion of the economic crisis.

The fall in profits and the crisis in industry posed the problem of cutting the costs of a system of corruption and patronage which has been devouring as much as 10-15 thousand billion lira annually (about £5-8 billion).

Economic Crisis

However, it is not just a question of the cost of corruption itself but of the huge national debt accumulated over the years, which has now reached the figure of 1,600,000 billion lira (104% of GDP), the highest in Europe apart from Greece.

The Italian bourgeoisie for years had literally bought a period of relative "social peace." For a whole period state spending accounted for 20% of the home market. Due to the revolutionary movement of the Italian working class in the 1970s, the bourgeoisie dared not confront the working class in a direct clash, but had to play for time spending more and more state funds. All this sooner or later had to be paid for by someone, but so long has it lasted that state financing actually provided economic growth. Now that the bourgeoisie, through the Amato government, is seriously beginning to cut social spending and stepping up its privatisation programme,, the Italian

economy is facing the opposite situation. The state now has to make the workers pay for the national debt accumulated in the past. The 25% devaluation of the lira as a result of the currency crisis last year is simply the result of years of printing money (fictitious capital) to finance state spending.

Tackling this question means huge cuts and a massive privatisation programme, which in its turn means a wave of sackings in the public or ex-public sector. All this means a clash between the capitalists and the DC and PSI, who have been taking the lion's share under this system. Recent months have seen the formation of a new current in the DC, led by Segni, directly supported by the Confindustria and by all the capitalist press, and the rapid growth of a party like the Northern League, which bases its support on the middle classes' fear of having to pay part of the price of the economic crisis. The aim of the capitalists is to utilise the crisis of the DC to create a party more directly controlled by them and less costly. The three tracks of this project are: the development of the Segni current into the

It is not a question of a few dishonest businessmen but of a full alliance between the industrialists and local councillors at the expense of workers and consumers

nucleus of a "new" bourgeois party (or rather of a "cleaned-up" DC), electoral reform, which means the abolition of the proportional representation system to be replaced by a "first-past-the-post" system making it possible to govern with a minority of the votes, and finally, a campaign to present all this as a "reform" by which the "poor honest, blackmailed businessmen" can clean up political life.

The campaign against corruption therefore has two causes, one political (to create support for the bosses' "reforms") and one economic (saving on bribes and social expenditure) - both these causes are closely linked to the economic crisis. Nevertheless, in conducting this campaign the bourgeoisie has been forced to reveal

part of the real functioning of bourgeois democracy. The magistrates are demonstrating beyond all doubt that all the firms in transport, building and so on were paying bribes as a tax in exchange for which local politicians guaranteed a "fair" and controlled division of the market for state contracts. It is not a question of a few "dishonest businessmen" but of a full alliance between industrialists and local councillors at the expense of workers and consumers. The accusations against Andreotti and others are the consequence however of a political operation which the Italian bourgeois had initiated and has now gone well beyond its initial intentions.

The myth of the efficiency of capitalism and the market, which is supposed to select the best companies by competition, is exposed. In the same way it shows how the so-called representative institutions (parliament, councils) are nothing but business committees of the capitalists.

Golden Opportunity

This corruption scandal could have been a golden opportunity for the PDS and the PRC (the two parties formed from the split of the old communist party when it changed its name in 1991) to expose capitalism for what it is. There is a general feeling of "*first they lined their pockets and now we have to pay the bill.*" In September and October there was a magnificent movement of the working class. For the first time in many years the working class seemed to be on the march again and its potential strength was clear to everyone, especially the youth. Unfortunately the movement was derailed by the leadership of the trade unions. The problem however is not just a lack of leadership worthy of the name, but also that a layer of PDS councillors in Milan and other cities have been involved in the corruption scandals. This has had a demoralising effect on many workers. Many have drawn the conclusion that "all parties are the same" and this is being used by the media to push home the idea of a new electoral system to replace the "old corrupt system." Due to the lack of a credible alternative some form of "majority" system will undoubtedly emerge. However, with the various factional interests involved, the bourgeoisie is finding it hard to get agreement.

While the majority of the PDS leadership is in favour of a change in the system, its left wing around Ingrao is against. The PRC is facing problems over the question. It is clearly against the new system, but limits itself to "*defending the constitution.*" Not having a clear socialist alternative to the bosses' plans it leaves open the possibility for the capitalist press to portray it as a party that wants to defend the old corrupt system. It is also identified too closely with Stalin-

ism to become a credible alternative. Now the inquiry has reached the main centres of capitalism in Italy: Fiat, Fininvest, the Ferruzzi group, Gardini and Berlusconi have all been affected in some way by the arrests, and that explains why the government is discussing what measures to take to find a so-called political solution to the scandal, i.e. some form of general amnesty!

Market for Politics

Although the "Clean Hands" investigation is forcing hundreds of local and national politicians into "early retirement" it will never be able to put an end to political corruption, which is an integral part of capitalism. So long as there exists a market economy there will also be a "*market for politics*" - for votes, positions, contracts and so on.

The proposal for a kind of amnesty shows that the Italian ruling class still today goes by the principle: "*Let everything change so that nothing will change.*"

In the final analysis this corruption scandal serves as a means of putting pressure on a group of politicians who served the capitalists well for over 40 years, but have now become an obstacle to the bosses' economic policies. For now, the magistrates are revered as heroes. However, once the parliamentary system is changed the bosses will continue with the policies already begun by the Amato government. All this is preparing a new clash with the Italian working class, a new "Hot Autumn" as in 1969. In the course of those clashes workers will rediscover their revolutionary traditions and all the traditional mass organisations - the PDS, the RC, the trade unions and even the PSI - will be put to the test. This will lay the basis for a movement to abolish this rotten capitalist system and with it all the corruption accumulated over decades. It is either that or a movement in the direction of reaction at a later stage along the lines of the Gladio Conspiracy. There is no middle road.

France: Behind the Socialists Defeat



FOLLOWING THE legislative elections France is headed for another period of so-called cohabitation between a right-wing government and President Mitterand. The Socialist Party (PS) received less than 20% of the votes in the first round. The Communist Party (PCF) polled less than 10%. The left as a whole scored its lowest post-war vote. Neither of the left parties won a single seat outright in the first round.

The alliance of the two ecology parties won just under 8% in the first round, while the openly pro-capitalist parties won a landslide victory with almost 40% of the vote.

The National Front, the extreme right-wing racist party made further progress scoring 12.8% of the vote.

In the second round the alliance of right parties, the RPR and UDF won over 450 of the 577 seats, with the Socialist Party and their allies winning around 67 seats. Among the hundreds of seats lost by the PS was Michel Rocard's seat, the man who was tipped to be the PS's next presidential candidate.

The main reason for the defeat of the left is undoubtedly the economic recession which French capitalism is currently going through, and in particular, the sharp rise in unemployment which has taken place as French companies have been forced to slash labour costs in order to face up to the falling demand for goods and services.

According to government statistics over 3

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Last Christmas, the spokesmen of the major capitalist governments expressed strong hopes that the Uruguay Round of the GATT world trade talks would be signed in February of this year after six years of negotiation.

The GATT deal would, they argued, lead to an increase in trade and therefore production of over 1% a year on the annual growth rate of each capitalist economy and would help bring capitalism out of recession.

Many, including this writer, expected some form of deal to be signed, although expecting such a deal to bring about much more limited benefits for capitalism. However, it is now clear that the Uruguay Round has been filed away for at least another year.

The US have threatened trade sanctions against the EC and Japan and has not only not been prepared to reach a deal but has demanded further concessions.

The chief US negotiator, Mickey

Kentor, has threatened sanctions against European companies providing goods for the US government (worth \$45-50 million a year) unless the EC stops adding a 3% tariff to every contract price that US companies submit for EC contracts. These amounts are small, but they highlight the dangers of a trade war. Now, with the victory of the French right-wing parties in the election there is talk of France repudiating the EC-US farm deal to cut subsidies to European farmers which supposedly prepared the way for a Uruguay Round deal. If that happens, then the GATT deal is dead. These new tensions come at a time when GATT reported an increase in the volume of world trade growth from 3% in 1991 to 4.5% in 1992, the first such acceleration for 4 years. This improvement was based on the economic recovery in North America and the Pacific Rim. Since the 1950s trade has always grown faster than world capitalist

output (as economies became more globally integrated and trade barriers were lowered). As the GATT report points out this has been "a source of strength in a weak economic environment, especially for slower growing economies" by providing new markets when there is a decline in the home market. If trade were to slow to a rate below output growth it would pose serious problems for the world capitalist economy, particularly the main exporting countries. This year GATT expects similar growth to 1992, but there are doubts, because world trade growth slowed in the second half of 1992 as Japan and Europe fell into recession. Import growth in Germany fell to just 2% compared to 13% in 1991. If the trade frictions grow, then world trade growth could grind to a halt, just when the major capitalist exporters are trying to get out of recession.

Michael Roberts

million people are officially unemployed, with a further 600,000 reduced to living on a monthly state handout of 2200F (about £200), and with an estimated 300,000 unemployed arbitrarily removed from the figures.

But that is not all. Over recent years the PS leadership have been implicated in a whole series of corruption scandals which in turn only served to underline the total political and moral degeneration of the party leaders, who have completely turned their backs on the interests of working people over the past 12 years.

Workers and their families, confronted with worsening working conditions, unemployment, bad housing, debt, the rising cost of living, the growth of racism and all the other pressures of capitalism which bear down on the working class, have been simply abandoned to their fate by the Socialist Party government which busied itself with "managing" the capitalist economy and state, revelling in the prestige, income and privileges which come with governmental power.

Pro-capitalist Policies

Capitalist policies at home were reflected in capitalist policies abroad. In particular, the vicious imperialist standpoint of the PS leadership during the Gulf War, which served to sicken many PS militants and voters. In government the PS faced pressure from the bosses. They adopted an austerity programme under the pressure of the employer class. Over the years pro-capitalist policies have worn down support for the left parties. In the 1986 legislative elections, the left suffered defeat by the capitalist parties. **However, the attempt by the Chirac government to imitate Thatcherite policies led rapidly to widespread social discontent.** In November and December of 1986, the students moved into

action on a massive scale in opposition to the government's education reform programme. A national rail strike followed shortly afterwards. Within two years, the right-wing parties were once again thrown out of power.

In spite of the scale of the electoral success of the right wing parties, the present RPR-UDF victory is, if anything, even more fragile than that of 1986, given that the economic growth of the 1980s, which tended to soften the relations between the classes, has now given way to a deep recession.

Chirac Government

In a different economic climate, the 1986 crisis would have probably led to a pre-revolutionary situation such as that which arose in 1968. As it was, the working class, whilst sympathetic to the student movement, did not move into action on a massive scale in defence of its own interests, and after a one-day general strike called by the CGT, the Chirac government withdrew the education programme and regained temporary control of the situation until its defeat in 1988. The new PS administration took up where the previous one had left off, under Rocard, Cresson and finally Berezgouvoy. Throughout the 1980s, the right wing leadership of the PS, in spite of its political bankruptcy, benefited from the growth in the economy, and was also bolstered by the collapse of the bureaucratically planned economies in the east.

In the present elections, it is significant that neither side waged a serious campaign on programme or policies. The "Union Pour la France", the alliance of right-wing parties, counted on an easy win and saw no need for an aggressive campaign. The PS had nothing to say, and the most recent measures introduced by the government only served to emphasise the counter-reformist nature of its policies.

On the eve of the elections, for example, Prime Minister Berezgouvoy announced a new round of privatisations in order to pay for the social security deficit, resulting from increased unemployment. The period over which an employee has to pay social security contributions in order to retire on a full pension was increased from 37 to 40 years, virtually abolishing retirement at 60, which was one of the key reforms of 1981-82.

Michel Rocard then made a typically meaningless speech in which he spoke of the need for a "Big Bang" on the French left. This speech was widely interpreted as a call for the effective dissolution of the PS. No mass rallies were organised. Towards the end of the campaign, the PS spoke vaguely and unconvincingly about "work-sharing" as a means of combating unemployment.

The PS leadership resigned itself to defeat and made no serious attempt to mobilise opposition to the openly pro-capitalist parties.

In effect, the right wing parties have won the present election largely by default. There is no enthusiasm for their programme. On the contrary, they are coming into power at a time of economic recession and growing social tensions.

This election result marks a fundamental turning point in the history of class relations in France. The PS will possibly go through an internal crisis similar to that which has shaken the PCF in recent years. One way or another, the growing discontent and anger of French workers will sooner or later find a political expression within one of the two major left-wing parties over the next few years. ■

From supporters of
La Riposte in Paris

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With this issue we come to the end of an eventful first twelve months of Socialist Appeal. We started with the general election and Labour's defeat and finish the year with new movements on the industrial front. During this period of sharp turns and sudden changes we have stuck to our task of providing a Marxist voice for the labour and trade union movement - a voice that should not be denied. The working class need a Marxist perspective on what is happening both here and internationally. However, we could not have survived without your help, and that help is still needed. Our journal has no big business backers or fat advertising revenues. All that keeps us going is the commitment of ordinary working class people - people exactly like yourself!

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There were those who said Socialist Appeal would not last, but here we are one year on - let's make year two even better!

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April 1992 - First issue of *Socialist Appeal* produced - General Election special

April 1992 - *Scotland: Socialism or Nationalism?* pamphlet published

October 1992 - Special newspaper produced to support the struggle of the miners and the fight for jobs.

October 1992 - Special anti-racism supplement produced

October 1992 - Two successful day schools run in Newcastle and London

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The story continues.....

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The Black Revolt, USA

The first part of *Socialist Appeal's* two-part article, *The Black Revolt, USA* has created great interest and readers have contacted us to find out what other material is available on the subject. Well Red Books have put together the following list of related titles:

Seize the Time - Bobby Seale - £10.00

On Black Nationalism and Self-Determination - Leon Trotsky - £5.95

Soledad Brother - George Jackson

Martin and Malcolm and America -

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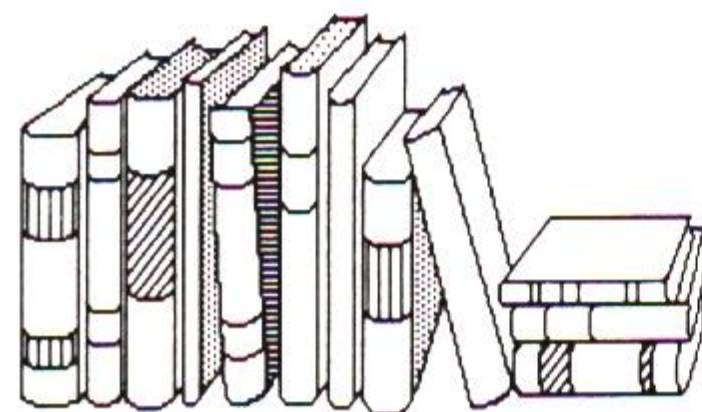
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Film Review: Hoffa

Reviewed by Julianna Grant

Struggles of the Teamster Rebels

IT IS not very often that American finance is put into a film about a trade union leader, so I went to see Hoffa, the recent film about the one time Teamster president with eager anticipation.

Jack Nicholson puts in a brilliant performance as Jimmy Hoffa, not sounding or looking like himself for the first time in years! Danny Devito, who also directed the movie stars as Hoffa's sidekick. From a cinematographic viewpoint the story was blurred on the edges, sluggishly directed and a touch sentimental. From a socialist viewpoint, I had hoped to glean something of the history of the US trade union movement and perhaps an insight into the controversial figure of Jimmy Hoffa.

This was achieved with some success. As the story of his life unfolded from the early heroic days of organising amongst truck drivers, to taking the knocks fighting with the scabs armed with clubs and guns, to taking dangerous trips into hostile territory, facing reac-

tionary employers and police violence, Jimmy Hoffa came across as a brave fighter for his members, which no doubt he was in his early days.

In later years he became heavily involved with organised crime and ended up in prison for several years. His death remains a mystery, but as was to be expected, this film also took the view of many since his disappearance, that the Mob got rid of him.

So is it worth going to see? In spite of many aspects of Hoffa's story being glossed over, no clear answers to most of the questions about his life and the fact that no real class position is offered I would recommend the film.

One of the most memorable images is the violence dished out to the Teamsters on strike and the heroic

bravery with which they fought back.

It is humbling to see the hardships our forebears went through to win the right to organise trade unions. I was also pleasantly surprised the film had no blatant allusions to imply that militant trade unionism and criminal conspiracy go hand in hand.

The bourgeois reviewers have complained the film is too easy on Hoffa, stating that many of his clearly proven crimes are omitted. For those whose first taste this is of the American labour movement, the film should whet the appetite to follow it up by reading Dobbs's *Teamster Rebellion* and the other great books on the history of the US workers' movement. Go and see it!



In the second, and final part of his look at the struggles of US blacks, Kevin Fernandes, reviews the civil rights movements of the '50s and '60s, which shook US society to its foundations. Looking at the ideas of Malcolm X, Martin Luther King and black radicals, *Socialist Appeal* draws out the lessons of the historical revolts of US black workers for the present day struggles.

The movement of the 1950s and 60s shook US society to its foundations. The powerful colonial revolution - the rising up of the brutalised and impoverished millions in Africa, Asia and Latin America, had a profound effect on the consciousness of the blacks in the US.

This is shown in the speeches of Martin Luther King: "Up until four or five years ago most of the one and one-quarter billion coloured peoples were exploited by empires of the West. Today many are free. And the rest are on the road. We are part of that movement." If the imperial powers had to give way to black-led governments around the world, then why couldn't blacks have equal rights right here in the US? In addition, the colonial revolution had its impact on the attitude of the US ruling class. The US's racist image was becoming a

Struggles for Civil Rights

hindrance in its dealings with the new black pro-capitalist governments, and affected its credibility in the ideological war with Stalinism. The growing urbanisation of blacks, the experiences of the War, and the colonial revolution, plus the whole history of black oppression in the US sparked off the civil rights struggles. The economic boom had given the US labour movement a conservative outlook. But, the "Jim Crow" laws and poverty had to go. Therefore the black movement took place.

Segregation Laws

The laws of segregation were a long-standing practice in the South. There had been almost 100% segregation in education there for nearly 100 years. The larger property owners were mechanizing, but the middle and small property owners still needed "Jim Crow" in order to keep up the super-exploitation of blacks. White Citizens Councils were formed to co-ordinate the activities of the racists; in 1957 there were 300,000 members of such Councils. The non-interference of the Government reflected the use of divide and rule, and acceptance of the bourgeois historians' idea that blacks and whites were inherently hostile to each other and had to be separated. Racism in the US is deeply imbedded, but it is a product of a political system, and not the inevitable result of faults in the human character.

The Supreme Court ruling in 1954 that school segregation was "unconstitutional" was an attack on the interests which were behind Jim Crow. At the same time it further encouraged the black revolt. Segregation in the schools was not just a question, terrible as it is, of

inhumanity and degradation, but also of resources. The conditions in the black schools were worse, and were a means of keeping blacks "in their place".

In 1955 a 14-year old black youth Emmett Till was lynched in Mississippi. Lynching was an integral part of the system; but this killing reaped a whirlwind. Emmett Till was from Chicago and was visiting his relatives. He was accused of the "crime" of whistling at a white woman. Some whites came to his uncle's house and beat and lynched him. His attackers even gave an interview to "Look" magazine about the lynching, saying that Emmett had refused to say that whites were superior. His mother sent his body back to Chicago, where it was put on display. A quarter of a million people came to see Emmett's body, and meetings, rallies and demonstrations were held in many cities in protest. A meeting of 5000 in Chicago demanded that federal troops be sent to Mississippi. And this movement spread to the South. However, the murderers of Emmett Till were arrested and a trial with an all-white jury was held which acquitted them. The FBI, instead of investigating the murder, began looking into who was organising the mass protests.

Martin Luther King

This set the scene for events in Montgomery, Alabama, in 1955. Blacks were segregated by law on public transport in 14 states. A white bus driver told a black woman to give up her seat because a white man wanted it. The woman,

Rosa Parks, refused and was arrested. A black boycott of the buses was called, which developed into a mass movement, with the 27-year old Baptist minister Martin Luther King in the leadership. The boycott, lasting 381 days, succeeded in integrating the buses, against the threats from racists, the authorities and the KKK. Public transport was boycotted in several southern states. This was a qualitatively new stage. A mass black movement was developing in the heart of the South.

In 1957, in Little Rock, Arkansas, the governor, Orville Faubus, refused to have the schools integrated, and threw down the gauntlet to the fed-



Martin Luther King marches with striking sanitation workers shortly before his assassination

eral authorities. After much hesitation, Eisenhower sent in federal troops. The US ruling class was forced into confrontation with the racists, in fear of the growing black militancy.

School Bombings

In January 1958, the Alabama Democratic Executive Committee unanimously passed a resolution which spoke of: "*the illegal action of the President of the United States in sending federal troops into the sovereign State of Arkansas, forcing white and colored children at bayonet point to go to school together.*" School bombings, arson, and beatings of black pupils became commonplace in the South. The racists appealed to "states' rights". Racists managed to keep most schools in the South segregated, and the Supreme Court's 1954 decision was not implemented. In 1960, only 0.1% of black children attended integrated schools in Arkansas; thus the 10,000 troops sent to Little Rock did not achieve integration. In Texas this figure was 0.12%, and Virginia 0.1%.

The education issue in the US achieved national and international publicity. In Memphis, in 1960, black students were arrested for using segregated libraries, and victimised for participating in the struggles. The ruling circles were worried at the support the anti-racist movement was gaining, and moreover at the conclusions that the activists could draw.

Because blacks were employed in the worst jobs, with the least prospects, getting a decent education was seen as crucial to bettering conditions. There was actually capital being invested in the South, where there was surplus labour. In the mid-1950's 25% of US industry was in the South. But despite that, there was a movement northwards - an indication of the intensifying of racism in the southern states.

Working Class

The black population was changing in composition, from being an agricultural workforce, to an industrial one. Of the active black population, in 1940 32.8% were employed in agriculture; by 1964, this figure was 6.9%. The growing influence of black workers was to play a crucial role in the civil rights struggle. In 1956 the AFL and CIO were merged, and despite strong words in favour of civil rights in its constitution, there was little action. Philip Randolph the leader of the Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters, set up in 1959 the Negro American Labour Council (NALC), to exert pressure on the AFL-CIO leaders; the NALC sought to unite black and white workers. It was the NALC which called the march on Washington of a quarter of a million people in 1963. Moreover, the increasing social weight of the black working class, meant that the fight against racism, and for equal rights for blacks, became more and more linked to the overall struggles of working people. And through struggle both blacks and whites have learnt the need for unity, despite the virulent racism in the society.



Civil Rights marchers in Detroit, June 1963

The boycotts and other protests were hitting at the profits of employers using racist practices, and so many were forced to give up segregation

In February 1960 black students engaged in the first "sit-in" campaign in Greensboro, North Carolina, against their being refused service at a lunch counter in a department store. Sit-ins spread across the Southern states in lunch counters, theatres, libraries and beaches. In 1960 50,000 people participated in sit-ins in 100 cities. Black youth would go and sit in a lunch counter and when refused service, would just stay where they were. The business would lose custom.

The Student Non-violent Co-ordinating Committee (SNCC) was formed in 1960 to co-ordinate the many protests of black and white students. The Congress of Racial Equality (CORE) was founded in 1952 and was made up mainly of black and white students.

The "Freedom Rides", originally organised by CORE, which began in 1961, aimed at the desegregation of the inter-state buses. The police and racists viciously attacked the Freedom Riders; however, the boycotts and other protests were hitting at the profits of employers using racist practices, and so many were forced to give up segregation.

From 1962-64, the SNCC together with other black organisations, began to try and draw in those blacks in the South who, through terror, had been prevented from voting. This movement threatened the political grip on the South of the racists, and was attacked with beatings, brutal arrests and tear-gassing.

In 1963 four black girls were murdered in the fire-bombing of a church in Birmingham, Alabama. Medgar Evers, a leader of the NAACP was shot dead outside his home by racists in Jackson. Mass demonstrations took place in April and May in Birmingham, and the ferocious repression meted out against them using dogs and high-powered hoses was witnessed by millions on national television. Thousands of blacks filled the streets and organised sit-ins and filled segregated areas. Massive solidarity marches were held in Detroit and Chicago. The government was forced to send in federal troops to avoid the situation slipping out of their control. The mass mobilisation won the day; the racists were forced to make concessions.

Summer of Freedom

Part of the voter registration campaign was the "summer of freedom" in Mississippi in 1964. Blacks formed 64% of the population there; however, only 5% of blacks who were eligible to vote were on the voting registers. Three civil rights workers were murdered, and from July to October over 1000 arrested. James Forman, of the SNCC, spoke of "*the necessity for armed self-defence*".

In 1964 a Civil Rights Act was passed. The ruling class in the US were fearful that a movement independent of the Democrats and Republicans was developing, and had to somehow derail it. President Johnson signed the Voting Rights Act in 1965, but not after another bloody episode in the battle over voting rights. In January 1965 the Southern Christian

Leadership Conference (SCLC), of which King was the leading representative, and the SNCC began a campaign in Selma, Alabama. In Dallas County (of which Selma was the centre) and in the four neighbouring counties, there were 87,972 blacks and 47,289 whites resident; however, there were only 904 blacks registered to vote, as opposed to 24,037 whites! A "literacy test" was used to prevent blacks registering. Despite many beatings, including the attack on demonstrators on the Edmund Pettus Bridge, and arrests, and the murders of two civil rights supporters, 8000 blacks and whites marched from Selma to Montgomery.

Montgomery Rally

The rally in Montgomery was watched by a crowd of 25,000 and millions more witnessed the events on television. In reality, civil rights and the right to vote, were not given by the Congress, they were fought for, over years of militant struggle. Blacks had been fighting through the courts against segregation for seventy years before the 1954 Supreme Court decision. The ruling class and its political representatives had resisted change for those seventy years, and the ten years since, up to '65. Their hand was forced by the threat of a movement independent of the two capitalist parties, which might look to socialist solutions.

In every period, the gains made by blacks have been achieved through building unity against the common oppressor. Black leaders of this period, such as Martin Luther King, Malcolm X, the Black Panthers, George Jackson, starting from a standpoint of a black struggle, moved to the left, towards a linking of

the struggle of blacks with that of organised labour, and the working class as a whole. It was precisely for this reason, a development of their thinking in the direction of class politics and socialist ideas (albeit only in broad outline) that the US state forces either carried out a dirty tricks campaign against them (the framing of CP member Angela Davis, for example) or in the end attacked them militarily (or both). The assassination of radical black leaders was carried out with the complicity, if not actual involvement, of the police/state agencies.

Methods of Struggle

This was a dual policy of the US ruling class to defeat the black movement; a combination of vicious repression of one section, while trying to draw in another section into the mainstream of Democratic Party politics. The growing violence faced by the civil rights movement threw up differences about the methods of struggle being adopted, and the way forward. A layer of the more radical activists, especially in the SNCC and CORE, opposed King's "pacifism". His "I have a dream" speech in 1963, while reflecting the hopes of the majority of blacks for equality in the US, still clung to the idea that this hope was part of the "American dream". This was not the case for others: "*I see America through the eyes of the victim. I don't see any American dream; I see an American nightmare!*" (Malcolm X, April 1964). While espousing non-violence, it has to be said, however, that King was firmly in favour of mass protest: "*History is the long and tragic story of the fact that privileged groups seldom give up their privileges voluntarily*" (Martin Luther King, Letter from Birmingham Jail, 1963). He in fact played a courageous role in the civil rights battles, many times facing death and injury. Bombs were thrown at his home twice, he was knifed in the chest, and in 1964 a place where he was staying was machine-gunned. During a march in Chicago he was hit by a brick and had a knife thrown at him. King in fact moved left, towards the idea of an alliance of blacks and organised labour; he opposed the Vietnam War, for which he was attacked by the conservative wing. He was visiting Memphis to lead a march of striking

garbage-collectors when he was assassinated on April 4th 1968.

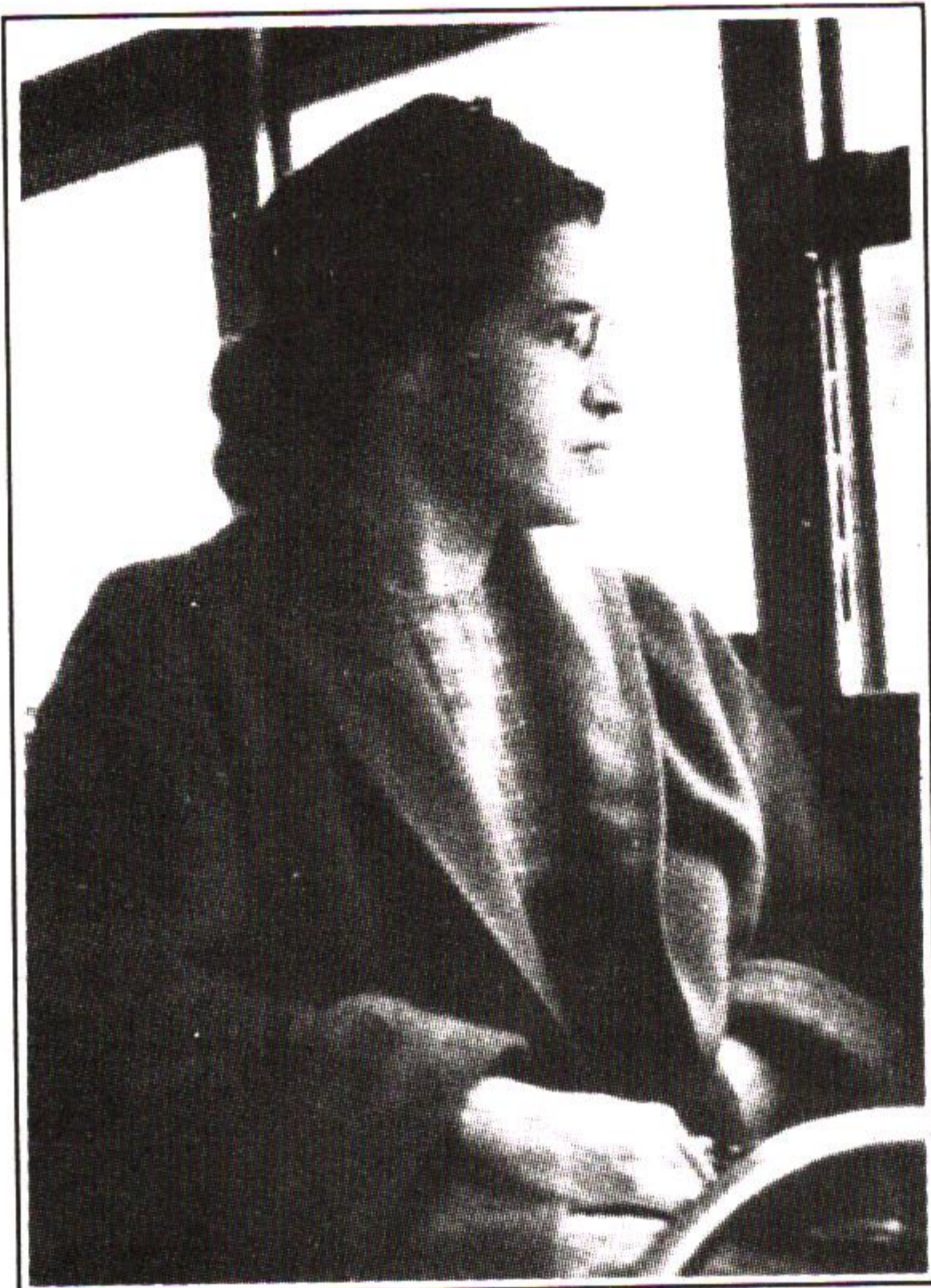
A section of the civil rights movement around the NAACP wanted to restrict the movement to pressurizing the Democratic Party into legislative change. They attempted to get King to stop the mass civil disobedience protests. To the left of King were the activists of the SNCC and CORE. Their views on the failure of non-violence were nearer to those of Malcolm X. These ideas represented a step forward in that they were moving away from pacifism and links with the pro-capitalist Democratic Party.

Malcolm X, born Malcolm Little, joined the Nation of Islam (Black Muslims) while in prison; he became a leading member of the group. He broke from them in March 1964 to form the Organisation of Afro American Unity (OAAU). The Black Muslims had stood aside from the mass civil rights protest; they were isolated not only from whites but also from militant black activists. The civil rights movement began to affect Malcolm X himself. Ostensibly he was suspended from the Black Muslims for commenting on President Kennedy's assassination, saying, "*The chickens have come home to roost.*"

Self Defence

The suspension became in effect an expulsion. In reality, fundamental differences had developed between himself and Elijah Muhammad. ("*the movement...didn't involve itself in the civil or civic or political struggles our people were confronted by...*") (Malcolm X, January, 1965) In relation to the racist violence in Alabama, Malcolm warned the Ku Klux Klan and the American Nazi Party that if they caused physical harm to King or any other black American they "*will be met with maximum physical retaliation from those of us who are not handcuffed by the disarming philosophy of non-violence.*" He urged blacks to form rifle clubs for self-defence, and warned "*let the Government know it's ballots or bullets*".

While he supported the political philosophy of black nationalism, he was moving in the direction of socialist ideas. "*I had to do a lot of thinking and reappraising of my definition of black nationalism. Can we sum up the solution to the problems confronting our people as black nationalism? And if you notice, I haven't been using the expression for several months.*"



Rosa Parks, whose arrest sparked off the Montgomery bus boycotts

"All of the countries that are emerging today from under the shackles of colonialism are turning towards socialism. I don't think it's an accident." - Malcolm X



Malcolm X addressing a rally in Harlem

But I still would be hard pressed to give a specific definition of the overall philosophy which I think is necessary for the liberation of the black people in this country." (Malcolm X, January 1965). When asked (in May 1964) what type of political system he wanted he replied, *"I don't know. But I'm flexible. As was stated earlier, all of the countries that are emerging today from under the shackles of colonialism are turning towards socialism. I don't think it's an accident."*

Assassination

The evolution of his ideas was brutally cut short. As with other black radicals he had become a potential threat to the system. On February 14th 1965 his house was firebombed. A week later, Malcolm X was assassinated while addressing a meeting in New York. Others took up his ideas, in a period marked by mass riots in the cities of the North. The shooting of a 15-year old black youth in Harlem sparked off an uprising in July 1964. There were riots also in Rochester, New Jersey, Dixmoor (Illinois), and Philadelphia that summer. The riots in the Watts area of Los Angeles in August 1965 were provoked by police arrests; a total of 34 people were killed (31 black) in what was then the worst rioting seen this century in the US. The 40th armoured division of the National Guard and the 49th infantry division were called in to stop the protests. There were protests which led to riots in Chicago, Cleveland, New York, Atlanta, and San Francisco in the summer of 1966. Forty three people were killed in riots in Detroit in 1967. According to official figures, in uprisings in the three years 1965-67, there were 130 people killed, 3,623 injured, and 28,932 arrested. The assassination of Martin Luther King on April 4th 1968, was followed by an explosion of anger; that month saw 125 large protest demonstrations and uprisings, which left 46 dead, 3,500 wounded, and 20,000 arrested. In each case the riots were set off by police harassment or provocations, or attacks by white racists. King had commented in July, 1967, that, *"Revolts come out of revolting conditions. A riot is the language of the unheard. It is a suicidal act - that last desperate*

act when the negro says 'I'm tired of living like a dog'. Every single outbreak without exception has substantially been ascribed to gross unemployment, particularly among young people." The riots had no conscious perspective; they were spontaneous and arose out of the poverty conditions. There was no worked out alternative being put forward by the US labour movement that could have provided a solution to both black and white youth. These upheavals could not have led anywhere, in the sense that they represented a thrashing out at the system, and were not linked to a political programme to draw in black and white workers, the force that could change the ghetto conditions, and the whole society.

Black Power

The slogan of "Black power" was raised; first of all by Stokely Carmichael (Kwame Ture), who was then Chair of the SNCC, in 1966. But what did it mean? Carmichael himself wrote in 1967, *"Black power is a call for black people in this country to unite, and to recognise their heritage, to build a sense of community."* Those on the right of the civil rights movement who wanted links with the Democrats attacked the slogan "Black power", as isolating blacks, a minority of 11% of the population. However, in that it was a movement away from the capitalist parties, it represented a step forward. Also the idea of having pride in one's history (a history that had been distorted and denigrated) was progressive; it undermined the bourgeois historians view of black people, which had justified a vicious exploitation. The more moderate layers of the black movement, held to the idea of involving whites in the struggle - though this was on the basis of drawing on the support of white liberals in the Democrats. The supporters of "Black power" on the other hand, while breaking out of the grip of Democrat-Republican politics, nevertheless were en route to a blind alley. The SNCC and CORE both relegated the role of whites, and formed all-black organisations.

It wasn't possible then, nor now, for blacks to transform society on their own. Unfortunately, those claiming to represent Marxism in the US

at the time (or more correctly, held themselves to be supporters of Trotskyism - the American SWP) bowed down before the "Black power" movement, and supported black nationalism. The Communist Party on the other hand espoused alliances with white liberals. James E. Jackson a leading American CP spokesperson stated that, *"More than the self-organisation and militant action of the Negro people themselves is required."* He spoke of enhancing, *"...the capability of the Negro movement to consummate more favourable alliance relations with comparable disadvantaged and objectively 'anti-establishment' classes and forces among the white population."*

United Fight

What this meant was allying with liberal elements of the Democrats. Rather, it was necessary then, and today, to argue for a united struggle of black and white workers and youth, and for the setting up of a mass workers Party, based on the tradé unions, and the putting forward of a socialist programme. This would not mean waiting for support from whites before embarking on struggle - but would mean the black movement offering the prospect of building unity with a radical section of white workers. While having a sympathetic approach to these black movements, Marxism should always offer a perspective and a way forward for the movement - no matter how difficult the conditions. Unfortunately, the forces of Marxism were weak at this time.

This mistake of the American SWP, and the CP, was evidenced by the founding of the Black Panther Party in 1966, in Oakland, California. The Black Panthers developed in response to the brutality of the police and the conditions faced by blacks, and were greatly influenced by Malcolm X's uncompromising approach to attacks from the police and racists. They aimed to defend themselves against police racism and violence, taking up the US constitutional right to carry arms. The courage and self-sacrifice of the supporters of the Panthers showed how the most down-trodden could become the best fighters for an alternative society. They in fact mainly oriented towards the unemployed layer of blacks "on the block" and had support amongst blacks in the horrific conditions of the US jail system. The Panthers' evolution towards a class-based analysis of society represented a gigantic step forward. Bobby Seale, one of its co-founders wrote in "Seize the Time" (1970), *"We fight racism with solidarity. We do not fight exploitative capitalism with black capitalism. We fight capitalism with basic socialism. And we do not fight imperialism with more imperialism. We fight imperialism with proletarian internationalism...Racism and ethnic differences allow the power structure to exploit the masses of workers in this country, because that's the key by which they maintain their control. To divide the people and conquer*

them is the objective of the power structure...Working class people of all colours must unite against the exploitative, oppressive ruling class."

The prison system radicalised blacks, by virtue of the very conditions. The Panthers revolutionised a section of these blacks. George Jackson, who was sentenced to "one year to life" for a \$70 robbery when he was 18, wrote (in *Soledad Brother*, 1970) of the reaction of a section of the most impoverished blacks to social injustice, "...some just give in completely and join the other side. They join some christian cult and cry out for integration...Some become inveterate drinkers and narcotic users in an attempt to gain some mental solace...Some hire on as a janitor, bellboy, redcap, cook, elevator boy, singer, boxer...and pretend that all is well...these are the fatalists, they serve and entertain and rationalise. Then there are those who resist and rebel but do not know what, who, why, or how exactly they should go about this. They are aware but confused. They are the least fortunate, for they end where I have ended." George Jackson was murdered by guards at San Quentin prison in 1971; he had felt sure that the authorities would not allow him to leave prison alive.

Urban Guerrillaism

The tragedy of the situation is that there was no force which could galvanise the talents of these youth. The greatest courage, tenacity and self-sacrifice, which the Panthers had, unfortunately, is not all that is required. It is necessary to have a perspective and a programme. They did not develop a rounded-out Marxist programme. Their analysis that the greatest danger was "the coming of a fascist state" led to errors. They were influenced by Mao and Castro, and in time a section moved towards charity and community service programmes, and another moved, in despair, towards urban guerrillaism, neither of which was a solution. They failed to develop deep roots amongst the working class - which was, and is, at least potentially, the most revolutionary force in society. Their rapid turnover in membership, and splits, were caused by unclear perspectives. They also, were victims of police repression and murders; their forces were decimated by a combination of police/FBI attacks, agents provocateurs, and their own adventurism, leading to splits and resignations.

The League of Revolutionary Black Workers, was an organisation based mainly on black auto workers in Detroit. They attempted to link workers' struggles with that of the black community. They were again influenced by black nationalism, however, and therefore did not organise amongst white workers in the plants.

The main blame for these organisations' failings falls on the shoulders of the US labour movement leaders, and the pseudo-Marxists who were advising black organisations at the time. An opportunity for the black struggle to proceed along socialist lines was lost.

The bloody history of the US has many lessons, not least, that without struggle not one concession was wrested from the ruling class

The black movement, as a radical force, had burnt itself out by the early 1970s. The more conservative elements within the civil rights struggle came to the fore, with a drive to get black officials elected in the various city halls. The election of black city administrations did not however stop cuts being made amongst city workers and in welfare provision. How did this benefit the blacks in the inner-cities?

The implementing of affirmative action programmes, moreover, benefitted the best-off layer of the black population, while the majority were left behind. In 1970 the percentage of blacks earning \$35,000 p.a. was 5.3%; this became 8.6% in 1982. It was a different story for the poorest blacks; in 1970 the percentage of black households with an income less than \$10,000 p.a. was 37.8%; by 1982 this had become 42.6%. With the growth of this middle strata of blacks has been an increase in the number of elected officials, which is now over 7000. Since the tailing off of the black revolt, the economic gains won (relative to the position of whites) has been eroded. Over the last period the incomes of black and white workers have fallen, with the relative gap widening.

Jesse Jackson

We have today conservative blacks in positions of power, who have no connections with the civil rights struggle, such as the governor of Virginia, Douglas Wilder; also demagogues such as the leader of a section of Black Muslims, Louis Farrakhan, and also "community" activists like Reverend Al Sharpton, who have both utilised anti-semitism; also waiting in the wings is Jesse Jackson, a former aide of Martin Luther King. Jackson, however, has attached himself to the liberal wing of the Democratic Party. If there were any chance of his gaining a position of authority in that Party, either his radicalism would disappear, or he would be removed by the big business backers of the Democrats. The future for black workers and youth, however, lies not in waiting for "leaders" to appear. It lies in building a conscious

movement for socialist change.

The real picture in the US is contrary to the media image. Thirty one million people live below the official poverty line; 40% of all blacks, 39% of native Americans, 32% of Hispanics, and 13% of whites. Thirty seven million people have no medical insurance. In this recession, the US employers will want to increase the exploitation of their workers, to compete on a world scale.

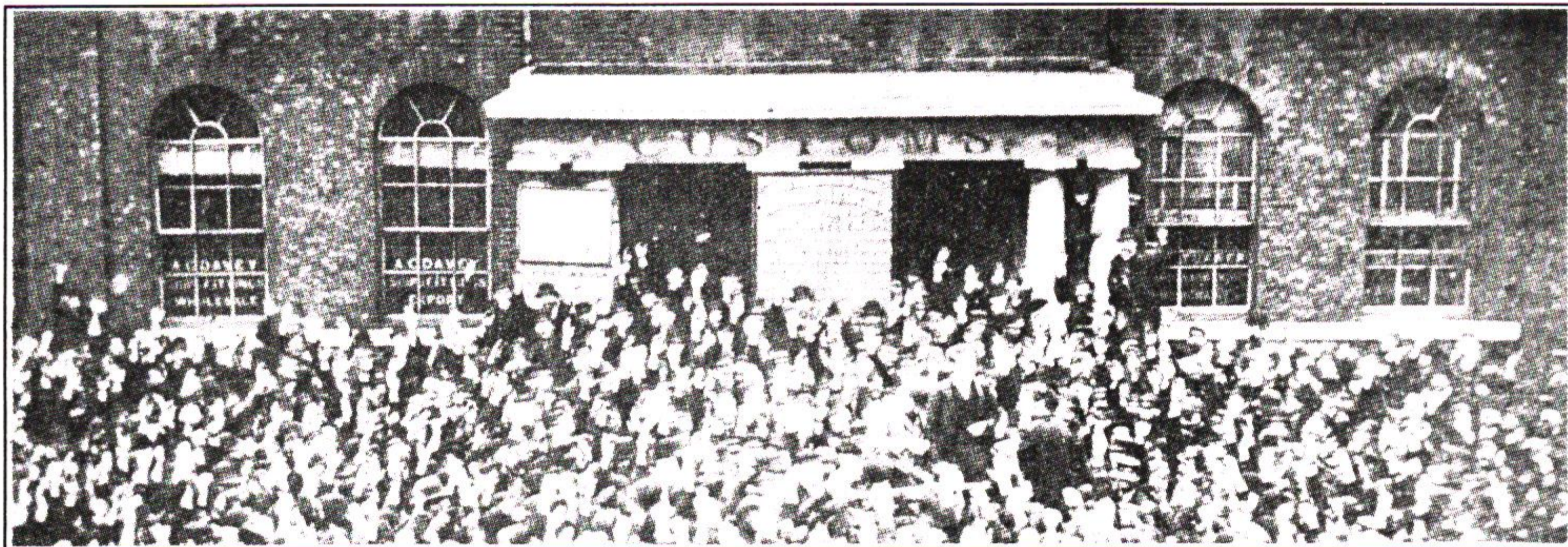
There is a crying need for the establishing of a Party of Labour, based on the trade unions. Such a Party from its inception must ensure the fullest involvement of black workers and youth. Inscribed on its banner will need to be an implacable hostility to the poisonous ideas of racism. More than a constitutional opposition to discrimination would be required. Such an organisation, if it is to gain the support of blacks will have to be in the forefront of day to day struggles against discrimination in jobs, housing and education; and for a programme of useful public works, to build homes, schools, hospitals, and facilities for the youth and the elderly. A US Labour Party will have to fight for a national minimum wage, and hiring/firing, and training programmes to be under the control of the trade unions. Any racism within the trade unions must be combatted, and the unions opened up to all workers. The labour movement must oppose harassment and victimisation by the police/state authorities, and build links between workplaces and working class neighbourhoods.

Marxist Ideas

Marxism must act as a guide to the development of such a class-based Party, and arm the movement with a socialist programme, which can unite the black and white workers on the basis of struggle. The bloody history of the United States has many lessons for us today. Not least it is that without a struggle, not one concession was wrested from the ruling class; nor without the unity of black and white workers could the struggle be taken forward. Every concession has been a temporary phenomena, which could be taken back by US capitalism, given the appropriate conditions. Marxism must stand for the unity of the working class, an implacable opposition to capitalism, and for establishing a democratic socialist system.

George Jackson wrote in 'Soledad Brother', "There will be a special page in the book of life for men who have crawled back from the grave. This page will tell of utter defeat, ruin, passivity, and subjection in one breath, and in the next, overwhelming victory and fulfilment." A fitting tribute to all the victims of a murderous US capitalism, would be a truly new, world order, a world socialist federation, ending racism, national antagonisms and want.

For further reading see *Bookshelf*, page 23



In the Cause of Labour: Conciliation and Conflict

The demise of Chartism after 1848 opened up a new period in Britain. It marked a break in the development of revolutionary class consciousness in the working class, which for a decade had broken with the liberals and forged an independent class outlook.

The following 25 years trade unionism was dominated by a different outlook: the national organisation, in the words of the Chartist leader Fergus O'Connor, of the "pompous trades and proud mechanics" of the skilled and more prosperous sections of the working class. "Defence not Defiance" became the motto of these new craft unions - the defence of vested sectional interests and an attempt to work within the confines of capitalism, as opposed to the revolutionary unionism of the 1830s. This development was no mere accident. It flowed from the colossal development and growth of British industry and its domination of the world market. By the end of the Forties, the triumph of Free Trade allowed the unlimited expansion of commerce and capital. From 1850 Britain in reality became the industrial school for Europe and America. Britain's industrial monopoly transformed her into the "workshop of the world", and allowed the ruling class to grant certain concessions to the upper layers of the proletariat. The repeal of the Corn Laws (1846), and the introduction of the Ten Hour Act (1847) greatly

benefited the skilled artisans, and served, with other gains, to develop and crystallise an "aristocracy of labour" standing above the mass of workers.

This decisive change was to reflect itself in the new character of trade unionism, termed by the Webbs in their 'History', as the "new model unions". In 1851 the proto-type of these 'model' unions was established by William Newton and William Allan: the Amalgamated Society of Engineers. This union was an amalgamation of a number of local craft societies and marked a clear break from the "schools of war" described earlier by Engels.

"We believe", stated Allan to a Royal Commission, "all strikes are a complete waste of money, not only in relation to the workers, but also to the employers."

Rejecting militancy, these new union leaders sought co-operation with the employers, asking for no more than a "fair share" from the profits. Shying away from strikes, they attempted to build up a strong centralised organisation with its own full time organisers, which would negotiate with the employers. In place

of strikes they attempted to substitute arbitration and conciliation. To protect the skilled worker membership the unions attempted to restrict the supply of labour:

"Lads unite to better your conditions: When eggs are scarce, eggs are dear; When men are scarce, men are dear."

The rise of a trade union officialdom around a number of union general secretaries was christened by the Webbs as "the Junta". These included Allan (Engineers), Robert Applegrath (Carpenters and Joiners), Daniel Guile (Ironfounders), Edwin Coulson (Bricklayers) and George Odger (Ladies' Shoemakers).

Despite the intentions of these leaders, the "new model" unions did not prevent the growth of strikes. Within a year of the founding of the AES, the union was faced by lock-outs in London and Lancashire over the implementation of shorter hours (part of the Nine Hours Movement). The employers successfully revived the notorious "document" to break the union.

New Model Unions

Although defeated, the union's membership fell only slightly from 11,000 to 9,000, and its funds sunk to \$5000. Within three years its membership grew to 12,500 and its funds to over \$35,000. During the 1850s the AES won recognition and developed a formidable organisation. Experience showed the superiority of these "new model" unions.

In 1853-4 the cotton workers of Preston were locked out in a fight for more wages. By 1859-60 the struggle for shorter hours came to a head in a lengthy London strike which forced the employers to retreat. The Nine Hours struggle spread to engineering, the cotton mills and mines.

In 1867 the government established a Royal Commission on trade unions, using some incidents of "rattening" (terrorising blacklegs) in Sheffield as a pretext for the enquiry. Desperate to force some concessions, the "Junta"

established a Conference of Amalgamated Trades to influence the Commission. Even then there was no legal protection for union funds and strikers could still (and were) imprisoned for "conspiracy" and "intimidation".

The extension of the franchise (1867 Reform Act), which gave the vote to male workers in the towns, was the result of agitation by the National Reform League, which in turn was largely inspired by the First International. Concessions which were demanded from the government emerged in 1871 with the improved juridical status of the unions. However the sting in the tail of these concessions was the legal restrictions imposed on normal strike activity. It took a further five years to force the government to retreat and amend the Act in 1876.

First International

Although Chartism disappeared in the 1850s, many of its leaders entered new movements to promote the cause of the working class. Both Marx and Engels entered into close collaboration with a number of Chartists leaders, particularly Ernest Jones and Julian Harney, who came close to the ideas of scientific socialism. In fact the first English edition of the "Manifesto of the Communist Party" was published by Harney in his paper, *Red Republican*. These revolutionary Chartists were the leading lights in establishing the international association of the Fraternal Democrats which kept the ideas of internationalism alive. These threads merged to establish the International Working Men's Association in 1864, in which the leaders of the British trade unions actively participated. Marx wrote the Rules and Address of the (First) International, and, as de facto head of the organisation, showed great ability in knitting together the various divergent strands of reformist British trade union leaders, French Proudhonists, German Lassalleans, and others. As Marx wrote to Engels: "The need of the

moment is: *bold in content, but mild in manner.*"

Marx understood that it would be on the basis of experience and events that the working class would clarify its views and move in the direction of genuine socialism. This method was established in the "Communist Manifesto": "The Communists do not form a separate party opposed to other working class parties.

"They have no interests separate and apart from those of the proletariat as a whole. They do not set up any sectarian principles of their own, by which to shape and mould the proletarian movement." (Selected Works, vol 1, p119)

Using this approach, both Marx and Engels succeeded in holding the movement together and laid the mass basis for their ideas. It clearly demonstrates a rejection of sectarianism and shows the need to 'patiently explain' the ideas of scientific socialism within the labour movement. On the basis of experience, the majority of the working class would be won to Marxism - this was to materialise in the formation of the Second International in 1889.

Paris Commune

At this stage, however, the British reformist union leaders, especially Cremer, Applegrath, and Odger, looked on the International as a body that could secure international solidarity against strike-breaking. Many played a key role in the General Council, George Odger becoming its first president. In 1869 Cremer moved a successful resolution at the Birmingham TUC: "as the International Working Men's Association endeavours to consolidate and extend the interests of the working masses, which are everywhere identical, this Congress heartily recommends that Association to the support of the working men of the United Kingdom, especially of all organised bodies, and strongly urges them to become affiliated to that body."

“ Once the International rose to defend the revolutionary Communards the reformist trade union leaders broke with it, being more concerned to protect their "respectable" image ”

Throughout its history, the International was regarded with horror by the ruling class, as it actively intervened to promote the day to day interests of the international working class. British trade unions demonstrated their support for the North in the American Civil War, despite the cotton famine resulting from the Northern blockade. The national struggles of Poland and Italy were also heartily supported. However, after the defeat of the Paris Commune in 1871, the British trade union leaders separated themselves from the International. They were prepared to collaborate on trade union issues, but once the International rose to defend the revolutionary Communards, then these leaders were more concerned to protect their respectable image.

Trades Councils

The early 1860s had seen the emergence of new trade union organisation, the trades councils. Promoted by the need for solidarity in the building workers' dispute of 1859-60, a London Trades Council was formed. Other cities followed suit. Periodically trades council conferences were called in an attempt to further unify the movement. However, in April 1868, the threat of further anti-union legislation spurred on the Manchester and Salford Trades Council to propose a regular annual congress of trade unions. While this was received with enthusiasm in the areas, the attitude of the Junta was very cool.

When the TUC met, the old leaders refused to participate in the newly elected leadership, the Parliamentary Committee. The moves of the



A strike meeting which was supported by those campaigning to extend the franchise

government twisted their arm and forced them to lend their authority to the newly established TUC.

Gladstone's Act of 1871 protected trade union funds, but made their operation impossible. The employers could do as they pleased but the peaceful attempt by a worker to persuade another to strike became a crime. In South Wales seven women were imprisoned for saying "Bah" to a black-leg! In Perthshire six shoemakers were imprisoned for watching a scab working during a dispute. In London the strike of gas-stokers led to the prosecution of 500 men at the Beckton Gas Works for breach of contract and their leaders for criminal conspiracy. The unions were forced to fight.

On Whit Monday, 1873, a mass demonstration was called. It was the opening shot of a campaign that was to force the Liberal government out of office and secure the repeal of both the Criminal Law Amendment Act and the hated Master and Servant Act. "Peaceful picketing" was made legal, and the old words of "coerce" and "molest" disappeared from the law.

Agricultural Labourers

In the countryside the agricultural labourers began to stir once again around the figure of Joseph Arch. Thousands rallied to the union cause and the Warwickshire Agricultural Labourers' Union was formed at Leamington. A strike for better wages and conditions broke out, which received huge support from the union movement. In May 1872 the National Agricultural Labourers' Union was formed with branches throughout the country. By the end of the year membership had climbed to 35,000. New unions sprung up, resulting in some 100,000 agricultural workers joining the union movement.

The landlords, backed by the Church of England and the magistrates, reacted with fury

against this development with a series of lock-outs. In Ascot 17 women were charged with the crime of mobbing, and were all condemned to Oxford prison, several with their breast-fed babies. By 1874, the full force of the employers was turned against the union. By a series of brutal lockouts, the workers were starved back to work on the employers' terms. The union had been beaten down to 4,000 members and soon disintegrated.

A break in trade in the mid 1870s resulted in a series of bitterly fought strikes, notably the South Wales miners (1875), the stonemasons (1877), the Clyde shipwrights and the Lancashire cotton workers (1878). The narrow particularism of the Amalgamated unions led to growing divisions and even splits; the pattern-makers broke from the ASE in 1872.

These weaknesses were to surface in the next period and witness a new stage in the development of the trade union movement. Frederick Engels wrote at the time, "*the British Labour*

movement is to-day and for many years has been working in a narrow circle of strikes" which "cannot lead the movement one step further," since they "are looked upon not as an expedient and not as a means of propaganda but as an ultimate aim."

The slump of 1878-9 was to give Engels' words new meaning, as it signaled the break of Britain's industrial monopoly and ushered in a new crisis for British capitalism. From this time Britain visibly began to weaken. Onto the world stage came new competitors, with Germany in the front rank. These new conditions brought about a new social realignment. The mass of unskilled workers, together with a new type of general union, was about to emerge onto the British industrial scene. ■

Next month: New Unionism and the Birth of Labour

Recommended Reading from Well Red Books

- The British Labour Movement by Morton & Tate (9.95)**
- A People's History of England by A L Morton (8.99)**
- Trotsky's Writings on Britain (3 volumes) (4.95 each)**
- Condition of the Working Class in England by Engels (4.95)**
- The Wages System by Engels (75p)**
- The First International And After by Karl Marx (7.99)**
- Articles on Britain by Marx & Engels (3.95)**

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Trotsky: The Battle for Influence



"The matter at issue is essentially the struggle for influence over the working class. Every organisation, every party, every faction which permits itself an ultimatic position in relation to the trade union, i.e. in essence turns its back upon the working class, merely because of displeasure with its organisation, every such organisation is destined to perish. And it must be said it deserves to perish." (Trade Unions in the Epoch of Imperialist Decay)

"Sectarian attempts to build or preserve small "revolutionary" unions...signify in actuality the renouncing of the struggle for the leadership of the working class." (Trade Unions in the Transitional Epoch)

"Under these conditions, the thought easily arises: is it not possible to bypass the trade unions...replace them by some sort of fresh, uncorrupted organisation of the type of revolutionary trade unions, shop committees, soviets and the like?"

The fundamental mistakes of such attempts lies in that they reduce to organisational experiments the great political problem of how to free the masses from the influence of the trade union bureaucracy.

It is not enough to offer the masses a new address. It is necessary to seek out the masses where they are and to lead them."

(The ILP and the New International: The Unions in Britain)

SOCIALIST

APPEAL

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The Marxist voice of the labour movement

Inside:
Black Revolt, USA
Bus Workers Fight
Defend Council Services

Step Up the Fightback!

Editorial Statement

The united industrial action on April 2 by miners, railworkers, busworkers and others, showed a bitter determination to halt the jobs slaughter.

The decision by the Tories to "reprieve" 12 of the 31 pits and save Heseltine's skin was no surprise to the labour movement. The October memorandum was a ploy by the Cabinet to buy time and let the movement subside.

The strike on April 2 is not the end, but the beginning of the campaign to save 100,000 jobs. There is colossal sympathy for the miners - and other sections - who are facing a lifetime on the dole.

The short-term reprieve for 12 pits is a sham. Within 12 months they will also be candidates for closure.

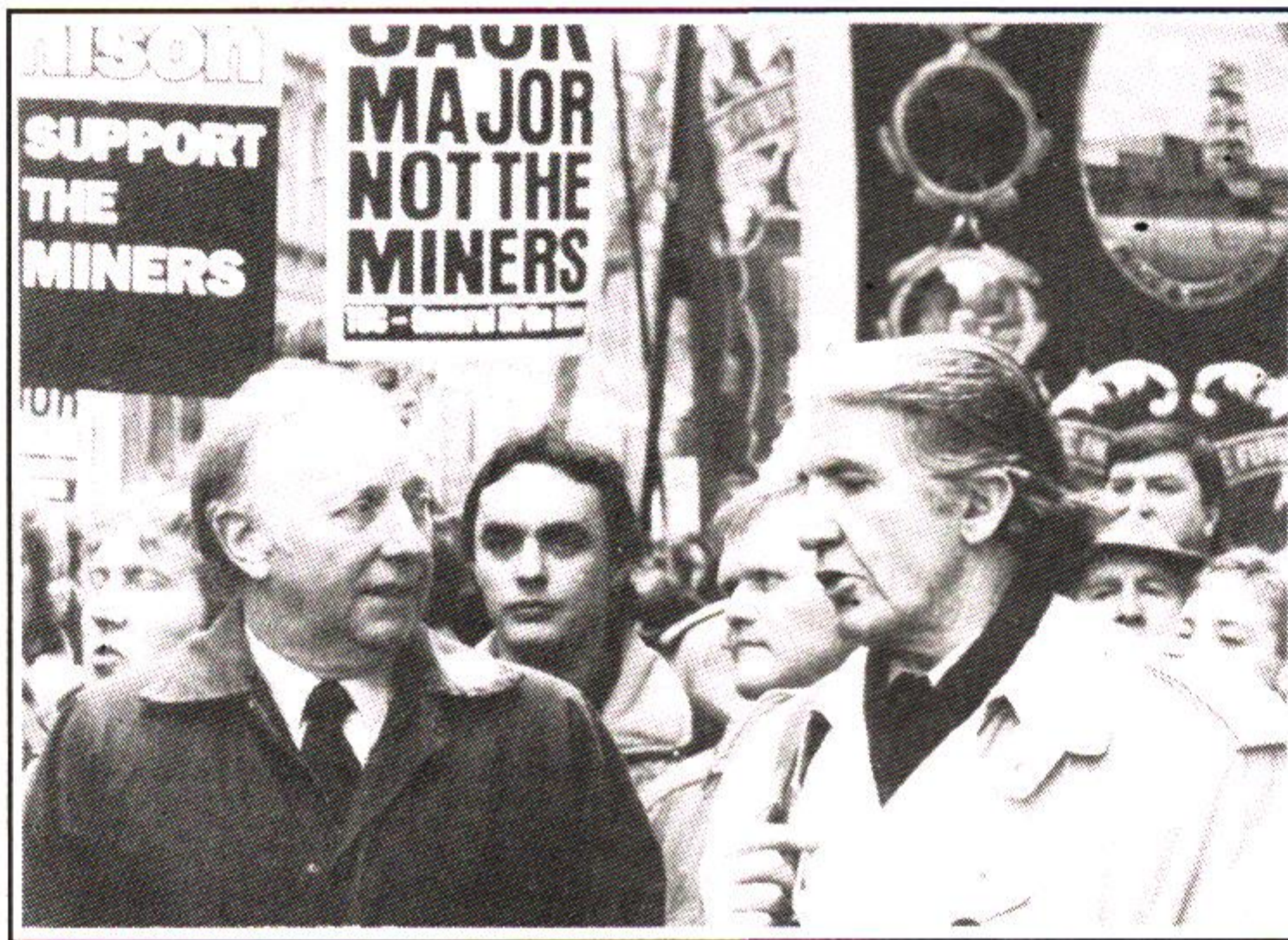
The Tories have presided over 4 million unemployed as company after company announce redundancies and cutbacks. The number of manufacturing jobs in 1979 was 7.1 million, but after 14 years of Toryism, it

has been slashed to only 4.5 million today. Before long there will be more out of work than employed in manufacturing. Recently, Rolls Royce, after cutting 12,000 jobs over the last two years, have announced a further 5,000 redundancies in the next two years. According to the Employment Policy Institute, 500,000 public sector jobs - 10% - could go next year!

The imposition of a 1.5% limit in the public sector is part of this effort to squeeze every hard-won gain out of the working class. The Tories have further strengthened the hands of the employers by new laws giving them extra power to sack workers. They are attempting to grind the workers down.

The Timex dispute in Dundee was sparked

off because the workers refused to accept degrading conditions - after an 18 months pay freeze. The bosses sacked the whole workforce and replaced them with non-union labour. In Hoover at Cambuslang, the workers accepted 'new working practices' to save their jobs. The same is true of the Sheffield council workers. The miners are being



Using the fear of unemployment, the bosses are driving down conditions and cutting wages. Rolls Royce, Pirelli and ICL are among the major companies trying to impose a wage freeze (cut) which now is estimated to effect 1 in 20 workers. Pay deals have fallen to their lowest for 13 years with one in three companies enforcing a pay freeze since August. The director general of the CBI, Howard Davies said: "This is remarkably good news. What matters now is that we keep up the progress."

The onslaught against working conditions and wages is the greatest since the 1930's.

asked to 'change working practices' and 'reform working hours', ie. accept lower safety standards and longer shifts. "In proportion as the use of machinery and division of labour increases," wrote Marx and Engels over 100 years ago, "in the same proportion the burden of toil also increases, whether by prolongation of working hours, by increase of the work exacted in a given time, or by increased speed of the machinery, etc."

This is capitalism in the raw!

Now this offensive has provoked a rearguard

(continued on page 10)

"We are not going back to poverty pay... we will take strike action if necessary and carry on until victory"
- Ken Cameron, General Secretary, FBU

For a One-Day General Strike