

**SOCIALIST**

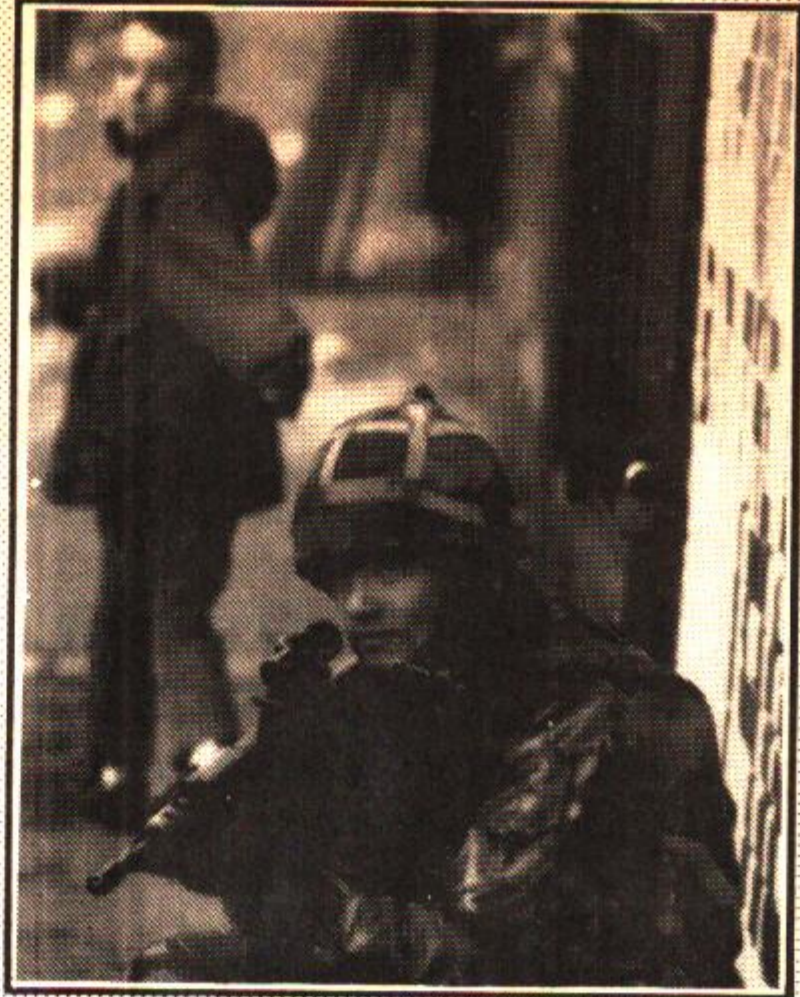
**APPEAL**

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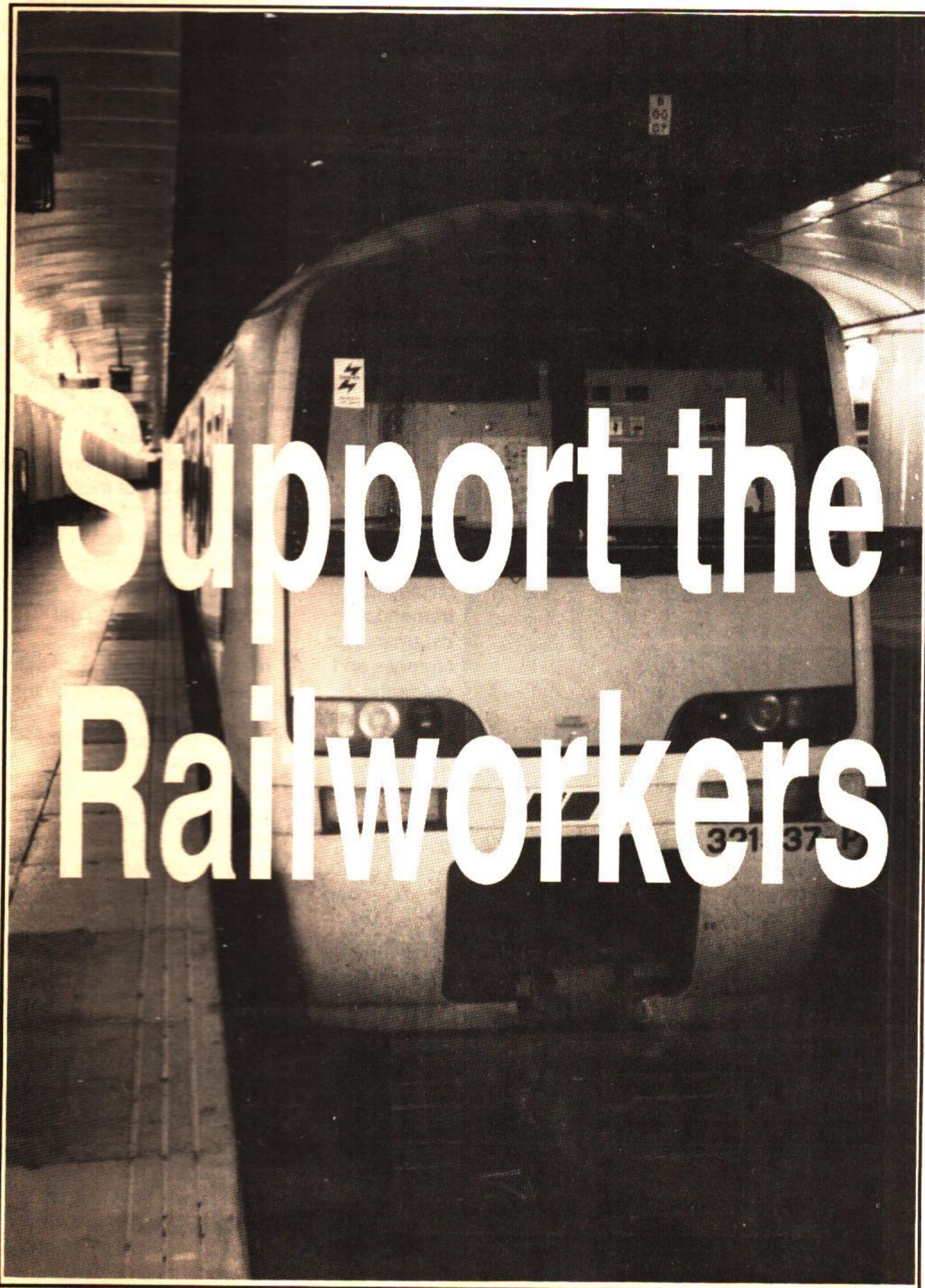
**Northern  
Ireland -  
Can There  
be Peace?**

.....

**Can  
Labour  
Deliver?**

by Ted Grant

**The  
Struggle  
for a  
Shorter  
Working  
Day**



**Support the  
Railworkers**

**Labour/TUC force a general election**

# Rail Strike: All Out

## Action Needed!

**The fight of the railway workers is coming to a head. Despite the loss of £150 million, Railtrack bosses appear to be digging in their heels. Behind the rail bosses stands the discredited Tories. They are hell-bent on crushing the signalmen, as an example to other workers who attempt to defend their wages and conditions. The strike is a vital test-case for the British Labour movement and the working class as a whole.**

It is clear that this is not an ordinary industrial dispute. It has been a political dispute from day one. No-one believes the hypocritical protestations of Major and co. that the government was not involved.

Everyone knows that the government leaned on Railtrack to renege on its offer. Despite all the demagoguery about "free market forces", the Tories do not hesitate to intervene on the side of their big business pals and against the unions whenever it suits them. They are doing their utmost to break the strike. If everything else fails they are preparing to repeat Reagan's action against the US air traffic controllers in 1981, by dismissing the workforce and introducing individual contracts.

Railtrack and the Tory government are determined to drive down wages and push through a vicious programme of cuts and redundancies in the name of alleged "efficiency". But the railway workers have been here before! In the 1960s we had the infamous Beecham programme, supposedly

intended to modernise the railways. Vast amounts of the network were destroyed, leading to huge job losses and an inferior service. Now they want to indulge in a further orgy of industrial Luddism, made even worse by the threat of privatisation. The main obstacle in the government's path to wholesale privatisation and the decimation of the railways in the name of profit are the rail unions. That is why Major and the rest of the gang are intent on breaking the back of the RMT. In picking a fight with the signal workers, they took on what they wrongly regarded as a weak section, which did not have a tradition



of going on strike. They must have had the shock of their lives at the solid vote of the signalmen for strike action!

### Determination

Since then, the strikers have displayed admirable determination. Every strike call has been massively supported. Despite the orchestrated campaign in the media intended to sow demoralisation by publishing Railtrack's wildly exaggerated claims of a return to work. However, activists need to recognise the strategy of one

and two-day strikes has its limits.

There is a real danger that the strike will lose momentum unless the action is stepped up. This is what the bosses and the government are relying upon at the present time.

### Tories

With Railtrack being certainly bankrolled by the Tories, they can continue until Christmas. Far more important to the Tories is the need to maintain the de facto wage ceiling which everyone knows to exist. It is vital the rail workers take the initiative now and spread the action. The dispute cannot be allowed to

drag on indefinitely, as this can weaken resolve.

As always, the key to success is determination and unity. The members of the RMT have displayed tremendous determination, firmness and solidarity.

However, they have ranged against them not only the bosses, but the government, with all its huge

resources. Railtrack, egged on by Major and co., are desperately attempting to organise strikebreakers, putting pressure on managers to scab, and leaning on other railway employees to "retrain" as signal workers. BR is now offering volunteer scabs to Railtrack to break the strike. They have not succeeded in breaking the strike, but, by taking on half-trained, inexperienced people, they have shown cynical disregard for the safety of the passengers. The recent derailment in Kent on a September strike day was

blamed by Railtrack on a driver. In Glasgow, a driver averted an accident after being given the wrong signal. An incident in Derbyshire was

blamed on contractors. The claims of Railtrack about safety levels cut no ice. The criminal irresponsibility of the rail bosses puts in danger the lives of workers and passengers alike. ASLEF has protested to Railtrack about the risk to safety. A stream of complaints by drivers have been dismissed by the Health and Safety Executive. But with these kinds of people, words are not enough.

### Safety

As a recent letter from ASLEF to its members stated: "we cannot just carry on warning about safety hazards, being ignored and waiting for the inevitable accident to occur." If safety is being put at risk, ASLEF members should refuse to be party to it. There is burning anger among train drivers at the way management is behaving. An immediate ballot must be organised by ASLEF to refuse to drive trains on lines controlled by inadequately trained and non-union staff. Such a ballot would get massive support. The reasons for taking such action would be understood by the big majority of rail passengers, and completely thwart the strikebreaking plans of Railtrack and the government. Likewise, the RMT should organise a strike ballot of all members over safety and the attacks of the rail bosses. If Railtrack can employ scab labour, engaging in 'secondary' action, so can the rail unions. After years of debilitating division, there is a growing realisation of the need for united action by RMT and ASLEF members. As night follows day, if the government succeeds in defeating the RMT, it will then turn on ASLEF. Disunity is a luxury railway workers simply cannot afford at this moment in time. With the move towards privatisation in full swing, the government and the private

enterprise sharks would make mincemeat of a divided union movement. The crushing of the railway unions would be the signal for wholesale deregulation, casual labour, and the destruction of all the precious gains of the past. Already we see a growing trend towards creeping casualisation. It is necessary to put a stop to this before it is too late.

### Working class

The eyes of the whole working class are on this dispute. If the railway workers win, it would give new heart to millions of low-paid workers in the public sector to fight for decent wages and conditions. It would have a big effect in the private sector too. With the threat of redundancy hanging over them, many workers have been keeping their heads down in the last period. The bosses have taken advantage of the situation to launch a savage counter-offensive. Merciless pressure has been put on the workforce, with all kinds of speed-ups, productivity (read "profitability") deals, and other measures designed to squeeze the last ounce of surplus value from the sweat and nervous energy of the worker. At the same time, conditions have worsened, past gains whittled away, hard-won trade union rights threatened. Beneath the apparently calm surface, there is an enormous accumulation of anger, frustration and bitterness. Paradoxically, the feeble recovery of the economy, which solves none of the basic problems for British capitalism, can provide a favourable context for a big upturn of industrial militancy in the coming period. Just one significant success of any important group of workers would open the floodgate. That is why the Tories are striving with might and main to defeat the signal workers. And for just the same reason, it is vital that the full strength of organised Labour must be mobilised to ensure that they win. The only language this government understands is the language of strength. And colossal strength lies in the hands of the railway workers, once they are united and organised for action.

### New Realism

The best way to combat the employers' attempt to spread non-unionism on the railways is

for the unions to show their determination to act in defence of workers' interests. The pernicious ideas of "New Realism" - that the way to respond to the employers' offensive is to lie down and play dead - is the best way of encouraging the Tories to stick the boot in, as they have been doing. Weakness invites aggression!

The leaders of the TUC wring their hands about the rail dispute, but have done almost nothing practical to mobilise the Labour Movement behind the railway workers, despite the existence of widespread public sympathy for them. Trade unionists should demand that the TUC should commence energetic action on behalf of the railway workers. Adequate funds must be raised to finance the struggle. There should be mass meetings in every area of Britain to galvanise support. The TUC

prepared to come down onto the picket lines and speak at public rallies in support of the people who always support them at elections.

If the government attempts to use the anti-trade union laws to break the strike, or Railtrack sacks the workforce, there must be all-out action across the board. The TUC must call a 24 hour general strike to defeat the Tories.

At bottom, the rail dispute is not about the wages of signal workers, but about the attempt of the Tory government to destroy all the accumulated gains won by the working class over generations. This in turn reflects the crisis of British capitalism, which is unable to guarantee even the most modest reforms, but is engaged in a ruthless programme of counter-reform. A Labour government must reverse these attacks! The Labour Party must commit itself

apart to get it - as these types have done with the coal industry and other sectors. There is nothing safe - particularly jobs - in their hands.

If we are to put an end to this butchery once and for all, the call must go up for a General Election now!

### Socialist programme

A new Labour government must be committed to a radical socialist programme that would take the 'commanding heights' of the economy out of the hands of the speculators and tycoons. It should be run not by Boards of bureaucrats, but under democratic workers' control and management. That has long been the demand of rail workers. Compensation would be paid only on the basis of proven need. This would generate the resources to end unemployment and introduce a living wage for all. It would also mean the introduction of an integrated transport system as part of a socialist planned economy, where rail, road, and air transport can be harmoniously planned. It would do away with the traffic congested cities, where London transport moves more slowly than 150 years ago with horse drawn carriages! The Tories have now thrown down the gauntlet. It is essential the signalling dispute be escalated, leading to all-out action. However, railway workers and their unions played a decisive role in building the political wing - the Labour Party. It is therefore also essential that rail workers play their part in fighting for a Labour government. But part of this must be the fight for socialist policies to end this Tory system once and for all. This means joining and playing a full role within the Labour Party, to strengthen and transform it into a weapon that will decisively change society in the interests of all working people.

**Full support to the signal workers!  
For all-out united action! ASLEF must ballot over safety!  
For a campaign to drive out the Tories!**

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**"...the rail dispute is not about the wages of signal workers, but about the attempt of the Tory government to destroy all the accumulated gains won by the working class over generations. This in turn reflects the crisis of British capitalism, which is unable to guarantee even the most modest reforms, but is engaged in a ruthless programme of counter-reform."**

must announce the date for a mass demonstration in London in solidarity with the signal workers!

### Intervened

From day one, John Major and his crew have blatantly intervened in this dispute on the side of the employers. No-one but a simpleton imagines that this is not a political dispute. Yet Tony Blair and the Labour front bench have studiously avoided coming out in support of the railway workers and have simply called for binding arbitration! This is not the kind of behaviour working people expect from the leaders of the movement. As Peter Hain MP has called for: Labour Party branches and affiliated organisations should demand that Labour's front bench should come off the fence and publicly defend the railway workers. They should be

clearly and unambiguously to the re-nationalisation of all the hived-off assets, with minimum compensation on the basis of proven need only. Let the get-rich-quick boys know that the public property they have filched at knockdown prices will be taken from them immediately Labour returns to power.

### Enormous Pride

Railway workers had enormous pride in their industry. Many had fathers and grandfathers who worked on the railways. It was considered a job for life. But this pride is being destroyed by the new generation of whiz kids who have been brought in to 'rationalise' the industry and prepare it for privatisation. These people have no links or knowledge of the railways. All they are interested in is balance sheets and a fast buck. And they are prepared to rip the industry

## East London Postal Workers Take Action...

# "Enough is Enough"!

**UCW**

A series of 24 hour strikes by postal workers are taking place in the East London MLO (Mechanised Letter Sorting Office). The action is over the breaking of nationally agreed procedures, the compulsory transfer to another office in the district of a delivery postman and his loss of seniority.

One of our postmen was disciplined by management for alleged "gross misconduct". The disciplinary, allegedly for swearing and threatening a supervisor (despite witnesses to the contrary), was all done on one manager's accusation with the full support of higher management. They ignored him and his witnesses. This action, which is a clear case of

victimisation, caused an immediate walk out and a series of meetings were held for all the units in the MLO calling for a rule 19 ballot (a secret ballot for industrial action). He was subsequently moved against his wishes.

Followed by a campaign by the branch committee and the MLO committee, the message was brought home to everyone in the building that anyone could be sacked or moved unfairly by management. Although many workers throughout the MLO did not know the individual concerned, a six to one majority was achieved to take industrial action (60 to 80 postal workers did not vote because they were on holiday and would have voted for industrial action). The result shocked management. One of the other reasons for the vote being so successful has been the conditions in the post office, particularly over the last few years. There have been job losses leading to extra work

load and increased stress, with pressure from managers to work faster and harder or face the sack. The result was hardly surprising. It was a sign of all the frustrations and anger coming to the surface. The bulk of workers in the MLO are aged under 35 and have the most to lose from an unsatisfactory agreement. The issue of seniority is important, because it gives workers the chance of signing for a duty before someone who has served less time. With privatisation on the horizon, post office management are preparing to split up offices and units. They are trying to run them as separate businesses where all the agreements of UCW and management at high level won't be worth the paper they are written on. That is why this dispute is so important. It goes far wider than the compulsory transfer of one worker and the problems of the East London MLO. All the postmen want a quick settlement but management have got plans to divert our work elsewhere in London and elsewhere. If this happens, action must be taken throughout the London MLO's and delivery units. We will no longer tolerate management's bully boy tactics.

**Lee Waker, UCW East London District Branch Committee (personal capacity)**

"Vauxhall treat their workers like dirt" is the general feeling of soft trim workers at their Luton plant. Ever since the 1970s, these workers, the bulk of whom are women, have fought for the basic principle of "equal pay for work of equal value", but the car company constantly dragged their feet over the issue. Now things have come to a head with Vauxhall, a subsidiary of General Motors, deciding to shut down the unit which makes seat covers and contracting the work out to firms employing cheap labour.

The workers at Vauxhall have fought for "equal pay" since the 1970s. First of all we went to a Tribunal which managed to get a bit more money through regrading our jobs. We then had consolidation in early 1980. Given the opposition of management to "equal pay",

## Vauxhall Soft Trim Workers Bitter...

the workers went on strike for three days in 1989. We then went to a further Tribunal, which was adjourned. We then had 2 or 3 interlocutory hearings. ACAS interviewed us, but we are still waiting for an ACAS assessment report. Then all of a sudden, General Motors, which earned nearly £200 million profit in Britain last year, announced the closure of our unit and the contracting out of our work to outside firms - which, they say, will bring in £7 million extra profit. As from August 1995, the company has "dispensed with our services". This is part of the company's plans to hive off anything not

attached to the track, that is, anything not considered "core" business. As expected, feelings were running high. At first, the management proposed the workers accept wage cuts to keep the unit open. This blackmail was decisively rejected. A "consensus" ballot was held at the Luton plant asking the soft trim members whether they wanted to hold a strike ballot. In the meantime, the company offered the workers alternative work on the track or early retirement. At this stage, our members turned down strike action in favour of a better negotiated deal (the AEEU vote was 51 - 94 against action). But the

workers are very disgruntled indeed. The attacks of management are part of their "lean" manufacturing policy. Our members are seen as so much small change. The "alternative" of working on the track will not be a viable option for older women, given the increased speed of the line. The contempt of the multinational General Motors for its workers is clear to everyone. Their only interest is the maximisation of profit - at our expense.

**Virginia Huddart, Vauxhall AEEU deputy convenor, Luton spoke to Socialist Appeal.**

**Labour Party  
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Blackpool 1994**

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Public Meeting**

**Monday 3 October  
7.30pm**

**Trades Club,  
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**Hear: Ted Grant**

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# Pay tops NHS workers' agenda

## Unison Health Conference

The UNISON Health workers conference taking place on 29th and 30th of September in Bournemouth marks an important step forward in the fight against the Tories' attacks on the National Health Service and its workforce.

The main motions concentrate on the question of pay with a number of resolutions including number 12 to 15 (which are likely to be composited) calling for an end to Performance Related Pay and a campaign for a serious pay rise backed

by action up to and including strike action. The mood is one of no retreat.

There are clear calls also for an end to the NHS trusts and their replacement with accountable health authorities. It is clear that more and more branches which were once considered to be 'moderate' are now being forced to see the importance of taking action.

This reflects the impact of year upon year of attacks by the Tories and their stooges in the various unelected quangos—that infest the once proud NHS—on the health workers pay and conditions. What is also clear is that now the question is being posed of what the next Labour government will

do.

UNISON activists see the importance of working and fighting for a Labour victory but in return they want some input into that government.

Increasingly the question of a socialist programme is being seen as essential for Labour. UNISON members in recognising the need for a fighting union in the health service will clearly be to the forefront in the next period in the struggle to defeat the Tories.

**Steve Holmes  
UNISON Delegate  
(In Personal  
Capacity)**

# Remploy workers rock the boat

"Remploy employs 7,500 people at 95 sites nationwide. They have never had a national strike. In the past management has successfully cultivated a 'lucky to have a job—don't rock the boat' attitude. Our pay talks (which would normally drag on for months until the unions, offering no lead, accept the management offer) began in February."

"The company offered us 2.2% plus some improvements in our life assurance but on the basis of accepting some terrible strings! They wanted an agreement on sending people home, a regrading of the bonus system, an increase from a 28 min hour to a 40 minute hour which some 1,500 employees would be physically unable to attain. In addition they wanted talks on introducing flexible working hours."

"We managed to get the offer increased to 2.5% and some of the strings removed with a commitment to talk about bonus arrangements, flexible working and sick time. The management wanted a target of 4% sick time. Now obviously disabled people tend to need more sick time although we are opposed to milking the system. At the same time we are opposed to using our sick time as some kind of unofficial disciplinary procedure."

"The deal was put to a ballot. The union adopted a neutral view. It was overwhelmingly rejected and the unions concerned (GMB, TGWU, GPMU, UCATT and the AEEU) bal-

loted on and voted for industrial action. We worked very hard for those ballots, holding meetings around the country; 150 attended in Cardiff for example. You could see how people were being brought out of themselves—even full time officials who usually need to be pressurising otherwise they end up doing nothing."

"Now the whole deal is at ACAS where we hope we can get all the strings removed. But this vote has already overturned 50 years of Remploy history whether we end up on strike or not. It means that never again will we

meekly sit back and take what ever is dished out to us. Management didn't believe there would ever be a strike here. But disabled people are getting very angry about the way they are treated both at work and in society, with first the Nicholas Scott affair and now the business with

Portillo and the European regulations which will affect between 20 and 26 of our factories."

"We have offered to re-ballot on the pay offer without the strings but the management will only accept this if we recommend acceptance. Meanwhile Remploy's Chief Executive, who earns more than the Prime minister, is trying to get more and more work out of us for less pay."

**A Remploy worker**

## Manchester Socialist Appeal Marxist Education Day School

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# RMT Strike: Step Up the Action!

There is a mood amongst signal workers, expressed at their recent national conference to get Railtrack back to the negotiating table to discuss both restructuring and the interim pay award. They wanted to see the strike going somewhere. This puts the pressure directly on Railtrack to respond, but if there is no result, then the mood of the activists is that action must be stepped up.

## Green light

RMT members must be on their guard now against any tendency on behalf of our negotiators to interpret the signal workers' demand for negotiations as a green light to cave in. We will not accept the crumbs from Railtrack's table, the full claim still stands, while at the same time we are willing to negotiate the re-structuring. Meanwhile, there must be no scaling down of action for so-called peaceful talks, negotiations must proceed from a position of strength. At the same time, preparations must continue to step up the action, organising on the ground on the

question of health and safety on strike days. We need a strike bulletin for all RMT members to keep us up to date with developments, and also to inform members of their health and safety rights. The Railway Safety Regulations of 1994, for example, state that "a train operating company can demand documentary evidence that the signalling staff being used are competent". We are writing to local management to demand such evidence, judging by recent events, they will be in many cases to provide it.

## Ballots

Branch ballots must be organised on the fact that staff safety can be no more ensured on strike days than can the safety of our passengers. In this way momentum can be built up for an all RMT strike. We cannot stand still. Action must be stepped up to take the strike forward.

## A Bristol RMT Official



## RMT and Safety

The RMT Signal workers Grades Conference came forward with an initiative to break the dead-lock in the situation and take the dispute forward. Our members want the talks to restart with Railtrack and have proposed opening up discussions on restructuring. This, we hope, will give new impetus to the position. The press have attempted to blow this up as some kind of capitulation or weakness. This is absolutely false from start to finish. There is no weakening in the signal workers resolve.

## Original offer

As far as we are concerned, the starting point for negotiations is the original offer of 5.7% that was retracted at the behest of the Tory government. If Railtrack thinks that we will accept anything less as

a basis for discussion, then they are sadly mistaken. The suggestion that we start from scratch is laughable. There will be no point in talking. The press have focused all the attention on the first half of our proposal. They are attempting to twist our initiative to the bosses advantage by taking the decision of the Grades conference out of context.

## Demands

The next part of the report quite clearly states that if Railtrack cannot satisfy our modest demands, then the conference called for a further escalation of the strike. So the ball is firmly in the court of the employers. The actions of Railtrack in attempting to break the strike by using scab labour has given rise to other key issues, partic-

ularly safety of our members and the public. There is growing concern and frustration over Railtrack's lack of concern over this issue. For them, nothing must be put in their way in breaking the signal workers' strike. If it means endangering lives, then so be it. This cannot be allowed to happen. As a result, consultations are taking place with the Executive Committee of the Train Crew Grades, representing largely guards. There have been many complaints from individual members concerned about taking trains out with ill-experienced scab managers in control of signal boxes on their line. As far as many are concerned Railtrack is forcing workers to operate under unacceptable and dangerous conditions. As a union we

must do something about this state of affairs.

## Railtrack

For Railtrack, their sole responsibility is to open up the lines to allow trains to run. It is down to other companies, like Network South East, to actually run the trains. But running the trains has now placed our members in a life threatening situation. Pressure is mounting from ASLEF members on the ASLEF leadership to take action over safety. We will urge our members to refuse to man trains where safety cannot be guaranteed. We are already seeing accidents and derailments on strike days due to this situation. The unions must call a halt.

**Alan Pottage, EC member  
RMT (personal capacity)**

# Anger at ASLEF leadership

The acceptance by the ASLEF leadership of London Underground's pay offer - an additional 0.5% - without consulting the membership, has been met with a wave of disgust and anger. The ASLEF leaders called off the ballot for strike action, which was coordinated with RMT, in the most cynical fashion. The prospect of united action on the Underground would have not been confined to wages but would have bolstered the fight against the other attacks of management.

## Opportunity

The ASLEF leadership has thrown this opportunity away. This is the second time they have done this. They have attempted to split the solidarity

of Underground workers by leaving RMT members to fight on alone. This must not be allowed to happen! Rank and file members of ASLEF must demand special branch meetings to fight to overturn this capitulation and pass motions of no confidence in the EC. The pay ballot must be run immediately.

## Bitterness

There is tremendous bitterness on the London Underground over the imposition of the 2% by management and especially over working conditions. The pay fight should have been linked to the deterioration in our conditions since the Company Plan. Instead our leaders have run for cover. They appear afraid of their own shadows. What ever happened to our congress decision to go for a rise of 4.6%?

ASLEF members want to show that they won't accept the attacks of management lying down. That was the reason for the 72% in favour of a ballot on action. We must not allow this mood to be frittered away. In future, if the Tories bring in further anti-union legislation, the union will either have to break the law to defend our members or turn itself into a glorified 'friendly society'. It is about time the leadership got back to the ABCs of trade unionism and the past militant traditions of the union.

## Strikes

With the one-day strikes of RMT workers, the ASLEF leaders must not put its members in an impossible position. In the past, the union scandalously instructed the members to cross RMT picket lines. Now it must issue a

circular calling on all members to respect picket lines with the full backing of the union. That is a basic trade union position. A refusal to do this will simply play into the hands of management and embolden them to attack our members further. Weakness invites aggression.

## Protest

The actions of our leadership have posed the question of some sections leaving the union in protest. This would be a big mistake. It would simply reinforce the present leaders. The task of ASLEF members is to participate in the union to change it. To begin with, joint rank and file meetings between ASLEF and RMT must be organised to build solidarity and prepare picket lines. The actions of the ASLEF leaders must not be used to put a wedge between Underground workers! It is essential the workers on London Underground are victorious.

Steve Tree, ASLEF,  
Central Line

# Fight Bus privatisation!

The count-down towards privatising London Buses has begun. The announcement of an operating profit of 5 million was widely publicised. This achievement has been made at the expense of drivers wages and conditions, lower investment and fare increases well above the inflation rate. Not satisfied with this, management intend to reduce our pensions. It is time to say enough is enough. The Leadership of the London Bus Section should begin to organise a fight back. A 24 hour strike should be called in protest at the attack on our pension rights.

At my garage, the consequences of job cuts in engineering have led to a sharp deterioration in the standards of maintenance of the Bus Fleet. Following complaints from our members the Branch decided to hold a vehicle defect check at the exits of the garage. This action has been treated as heresy by the management and has resulted in myself and three Branch committee members

being placed on a disciplinary charge of "working against the interests of the Company".

## Resolve

At the following Branch meeting, the membership undertook a resolve to take industrial action should any serious disciplinary measures be taken against the 'Plumpstead Four'. Management have decided to take heed of our members advice and no formal disciplinary measures have been taken. At the present time Management do not seek confrontation because they wish to buy the company from London buses. However, it should serve as a warning to every trade unionist to the intent of management when the privatisation process is complete.

M. Langabeer, Plumpstead  
Garage Rep.  
TGWU 1/366

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# Review of the 1994 Trades Union Congress

Despite the rail workers' dispute, the mood of anger and frustration on the shopfloor was totally absent from this year's TUC congress. Even compared to last year, when congress took place during a rash of small strikes, the mood was flat. There were no card votes, which was indicative of this. The votes of union delegations were sown up even before the congress began; those who set the tone were union general secretaries.

The composite resolutions that were cobbled together represented "all things to all men". Each composite was completely contradictory. The main motion that was passed on the anti-union laws, for instance, was in favour of "the repeal of all anti-union legislation passed by the Tories", and at the

same time said they should keep some! The TUC always tends to lag behind the real mood. When I attended the 1992 congress after the Tory victory in the general election, the mood was defeatist and demoralised. But within a month, 250,000 demonstrated in London against pit closures.

## Labour government

The broad mood was to wait for a Labour government. We were told repeatedly by Bill Jordan and others: "You have to live in the real world". But what is this real world? It certainly is not the world of posh cars and houses lived in by the trade union leaders, who are isolated from the grinding pressures of everyday working class life. The congress is dominated by the full time officials and the union hierarchy. Lay dele-

gates cannot speak unless they get permission from the leadership. Ironically, congress comes to life when Arthur Scargill takes the floor. To the annoyance of the right wing, he gets the best applause of the whole congress. The ordinary rank and file warm to his militant message. They identify with the power of his argument.

## Arthur Scargill

In moving motions on the anti-union laws and economic policy, which included defence of Clause Four, 32 hour week and retirement on full pay at 55, he caught the imagination of the rank and file. Despite the vote, he won the argument. Probably the most exciting thing about the congress were the fringe meetings where ordinary members can express their views. The high point was the support of congress for the rail workers. It is now vital those promises of support are translated into action.

by Pat Kenny, AEEU delegate, London (personal capacity)

Economics correspondent, *Michael Roberts*, looks at the recent rise in interest rates.

# Interest Rates... Up: the fear of *Inflation*

When Tory Chancellor Clarke allowed the Bank of England Governor Eddie George to raise the bank's base interest rate from 5.25% to 5.75% in mid-September, it was the first rate rise in Britain since 1989 (if you exclude the rate increase that lasted for just one terrible day when the Tory government desperately tried to avoid devaluing the pound and was forced out of the European Exchange Rate Mechanism in September 1992.)

In 1989 the Bank of England base rate reached a huge 15%, but after the summer of 1990, when the lengthy world and British economic recession began, the rate of interest was steadily cut until it reached 5.25% earlier this year. But the period of falling interest rates is now over. Why?

For two reasons. First, over the last year interest rates have been rising in the US, and more recently, interest rates have begun to rise in some European countries like Italy, France and Sweden. Even Germany's Bundesbank, where the economy still only just coming out of recession, is no longer thinking of lowering rates and is talking about raising them. If interest rates rise elsewhere in a world capitalist economy where there are no barriers to the instant electronic movement of money across borders, then there is an incentive for the international banks and corporations that control this money to switch out of sterling into other currencies.

## Sterling

Thus the value of sterling against other currencies begins to fall (and that has been happening in recent months). That

makes buying goods from abroad (and we import 25-30% of our goods, with even higher percentages in key sectors) more expensive, thus driving up inflation and reducing investment.

Second, there is a general fear that inflation might return to the world capitalist economy as it recovers from the longest recession since the 1930s. If inflation returns, interest rates will be forced up. Why?

## Money

The interest rate is the price of money, and under capitalism and the market economy, the demand and supply of money determines the price. By money, we mean money that is lent and borrowed, i.e. credit. The borrowers of money for credit are: first, the government. The government pays for its services (education, health, bene-

fits, pensions) and activities (making war, locking people up) by raising taxes. But often it is forced to spend more than it raises in any one year, partly because many of things it may do (building roads or railways) take longer than one year, and partly because it does not want to raise too much tax in case it gets voted out of office. The result is that it runs up a budget deficit. It makes up the gap between taxes and spending by borrowing. It borrows the money by selling Treasury bills or bonds that offer a fixed rate of interest to lenders.

## Money market

The other borrowers in the money market are companies who need credit to make investments and individuals who need to borrow to buy houses, cars and the necessities of life that we cannot afford to pay cash for.



As Treasury bonds are guaranteed to be paid back by the government, they are more attractive than others, and so the government can offer a lower rate of interest than corporations must sell their bonds for, or we are charged for our loans.

The lenders (or buyers of bonds) are the banks and financial institutions, like pension funds and insurance companies who have huge stocks of money to invest from premiums and money deducted from wages for pensions.

As the demand for loans rises, then the price or the interest rate, rises. The Bank of England sets the bottom rate in the market, because if the big banks who lend the government, businesses and individuals money also need to borrow, they can get it from the Bank of England for short periods (from one day to three months). As 'lender of last resort', the Bank of England charges a base rate, and everybody else adds a bit more to make a profit. So when the Bank raises its base rate, all other rates go up accordingly. When the government or corporations want to borrow money for longer periods than three months, they issue bonds that have a fixed rate of interest. And the longer they want to borrow the money for, the higher rate of interest on the bond that must be offered. So ten-year bonds have a higher rate of interest than one-year bonds. Now these bonds are bought and sold by banks and corporations in a bond market.

### Rate of interest

If a bond costs £100 and pays a rate of interest of 5% a year for one year, then if you buy it, you will get back £105 in one year's time when it 'matures'.

However, if interest rates in the market rise above 5% during this time, then this bond is no longer attractive, and those who hold the bond and now want to sell it will be forced to sell it below its original price, say £95. At the fixed rate of interest of 5% or £5, the real yield on the bond is now £5/95, or 5.3%. So the rate of interest has risen in the bond market along with other rates. But why does it matter whether interest rates rise or fall in the capitalist economy? Rising rates of interest make it more expensive to buy goods on credit and so demand for goods from workers is reduced and thus prices may fall or price rises

(inflation) may slow.. Rising rates also make it more expensive to borrow for businesses, and so that restricts investment and so keeps down the prices of machinery and raw materials etc. And rising rates also make it more expensive for the government to pay for its budget deficit. That makes it more difficult for the government to balance the budget, and it may have to borrow more in order to pay for the extra cost of borrowing - a vicious circle. The total amount borrowed over decades (and even centuries) by the British government is called the national debt.

### State debt

The size of the state debt is one reason why it matters if interest rates start rising, and partly explains why the value of bonds and shares have fallen sharply in recent months. In Europe, many countries have huge 'national' debts, sometimes more than the value of total production in one year, e.g. Italy, Sweden, Greece. These debts have got so large because of the recession which has raised unemployment and thus the cost of social security, and because the cost of pensions and healthcare has risen as populations have got older. Unless an economy and total tax revenues grow faster than the cost of welfare, the national debt starts to rise. That means that interest rates will go up, and so in turn make the debt worse and threaten the economic recovery itself. The capitalist answer is to cut welfare spending.

Rising interest rates caused by rising budget deficits are dangerous for capitalism because most state spending does not boost the profits of capitalists, but merely helps the poor, the unemployed, the sick, disabled, the homeless and the uneducated. For capitalists this spending is 'unproductive', even if we might think it is very necessary. Such is the contradiction of the profit-based economy.

### Increased demand

However, rising interest rates caused by increased demand for credit to invest 'productively' for profit is not necessarily bad for capitalism. A rise in interest rates may merely reflect the economic upswing as demand for credit rises, investment gains strength and profits rise. The key question then is whether the

profit rate on the investment is higher than the interest rate on the money borrowed to invest. If it is not, then a rise in the interest rate could make further investment unprofitable and bring everything to a halt, because what profit the investing manufacturing capitalist has made must be paid to the finance capitalist in interest. It also depends on inflation. If you borrow £100 at 10% for a year, then at end of a year you must pay back £110. But if inflation has risen 20%, your £110 will only buy in real commodities 80% of what it would have bought at the beginning of the year. So the £100 has cost the borrower in real terms only £88 and is worth only to the £88 to the lender at the end. The lender has lost out.

For the real rate of profit to be matched by the real rate of interest, the profit rate would have to fall, the rate of interest would have to rise, and inflation would have to rise. All those things will happen over the next few years, but not yet.

### Inflation

UK inflation will pick up as raw material costs rise, and above all because British industry will not be able to meet demand as it has been weakened by Thatcherite cutbacks in investment in the last few decades. Thus, imports will flood in and prices will rise. Inflation could reach 8-10% again, but probably not before 1996. Interest rates could well rise to 8-10% by end of 1995, and even higher by 1996. But then that would mean



So what matters is the real rate of profit and the real rate of interest (i.e. after inflation is accounted for.). In 1989 the base rate of interest was 15% and inflation was about 8%, so the real rate of interest was 7%. The rate of profit was about 13%, making its real rate only 5%, or below the real rate of interest. No wonder a recession began.

Now, after the Bank of England's latest move, the rate of interest is 5.75%, and inflation is 2.5%, so the real rate is 3.25%. But the rate of profit is now about 15%, and so its real rate is about 12.5%. That is why the economic recovery is under way in the UK.

little change in real rates of interest.. The profit rate will probably fall to 10-12% by 1996. All this would make the real rate of profit about 2-4% in 1996 and the real rate of interest only just a little lower.

The Bank of England has acted to try and stop any possibility of inflation by dampening the demand for money through raising its price. But that also adds to inflation in raising mortgages, and the cost of investment. Eventually inflation will pick up, threatening an end to this boom, but not for two or three years yet. Perhaps just after the next election?

# Can Labour Deliver?

by Ted Grant

The ideas of Keynesianism have had an influence on the thinking of Labour leaders since before the Second World War. Economists, even as late as the Seventies, praised Keynes as having solved the crisis of capitalism for ever. Roy Jenkins, the former Labour extreme right-winger refers to Keynes as being his hero during his formative years. Many other Labour leaders have referred to the importance of his ideas over the years. Yet in the harsh light of reality they have been proved wanting. Today, however, we are seeing—particularly from the Left of the Labour Party a certain revival of his methods. Alan Simpson in *Tribune* (21/1/94) refers to the pamphlet produced by Peter Hain and Roger Berry 'What's Left? The Future Of Labour' as a 'helpful restatement of Keynesian economics. Public sector borrowing is not a sin, and it does not make you grow broke.' Berry and Hain were removed from the leadership of the *Tribune* Group for producing this document which many MPs considered too left wing! This is a reflection of the right wing mood of the current batch of Labour MPs but to a certain extent both the right and the left of the Party are drawing on Keynesian ideas, in particular in relation to the question of Full Employment. The question for Socialists is one of whether state intervention can resolve the question of the failure of capitalism to provide jobs and a decent standard of living for all.

All sections of the Labour Party have now come out in favour of full employment - from Tony Blair, through the *Tribune* Group to the Campaign Group. But none explain how it can be achieved under capitalism. Production under capitalism is intended not to meet the 'needs' of the peoples of the world but the needs of profit. Unless they can make ample profits then they will not invest however much the product is needed. Where the bulk of the means of production is privately owned then the laws of capitalist production will operate. These laws are not new but were explained more than a century ago by Karl Marx. Now we are in an epoch of capitalist crisis. Every industrialised country, even during a period of 'boom' or increase in production, now has massive, organic unemployment—far more than the 'normal' reserve army of labour necessary to capitalism, as explained by Marx.

The profits of capitalism are the unpaid labour of the working class. If the share for the workers increases then the share for the capitalists, given all things being equal, will fall and vice versa. But the dilemma is that the workers do not receive, and under capitalism cannot receive, enough in wages to cover the full value of their production. The system

works when the capitalists take the surplus produced by the labour of the working class and plough it back into investment. But when they have surplus capacity they will not invest. Hence the crisis of empty and closed factories and unemployment at the same time. Presently every industrialised country has massive unemployment of the level of 10% or more and every such country is to a lesser or greater degree also engaged in attacking the 'welfare state'. This is not an accident. Governments, both conservative and 'socialist', are competing with each other to see who can make the deepest cuts and thereby demonstrate their financial orthodoxy. Spain and Australia are continuing this process under labour governments as did France when it had a Socialist Party majority.

## Sweden

Sweden used to be a model welfare state for both right and left reformists. Now it has 14% unemployment, according to official figures alone, which is higher than most of Europe including Britain. Sweden, like all the industrialised countries, has a massive public debt which is still rising. Public spending amounts to close to 100% of the GNP. The Social

Democrats lost power in the last election but thanks to a reaction against the right wing government which replaced them have been returned to office. During the election campaign they were pressurised by big business and financial capital into including 'orthodox' financial measures of spending cuts and tax increases in their election programme. They have declared that they 'intend' to stabilise the state debt and reduce the budget deficit without having 'increased inflation'. They propose to raise income by increasing the Swedish equivalent of National Insurance contributions which will mainly hit ordinary



workers, only softening the blow by proposing new increases in taxes on expense accounts and a tax on dividends.

Thus the 'Swedish model' can no longer be held up with admiration by social democrats as a model. It demonstrates the failure of reformism, even in such a 'progressive' country as Sweden, to solve the fundamental problems of the working class.

## Full employment

Why are the Capitalists and, following them, the Reformists behaving in this way? The money for 'full employment' must come from somewhere. Under capitalism it must either come from the pockets of the capitalists or the workers. If it comes from the capitalists they will have less money to invest and if it comes from the workers then it will cut the market. If it comes from the state then it will raise budget deficits and inevitably at a certain point lead to increases in inflation which will cancel out any gains—it is not possible to spend money you do not in reality possess. The Swedish model shows the result of what can happen when governments use the printing press to 'create' money which is not backed by real goods. Keynesianism has been shown not only in theory but in practice not to work. The Keynesian policy of increased expenditure—as a 'priming pump'—by the state failed under Roosevelt and then in the post-war period and the Sixties and Seventies. By the end of the 1970's these policies had resulted in massive inflation levels. Consequently it was jettisoned by capitalist governments who turned to 'orthodox' monetarism instead. Despite their repulsive extravagance in squandering wealth the capitalists consume only a small part of production. The main massive market is made up of the consumers—the middle and working classes. But this market is limited by the surplus value that the workers must surrender to the capitalists. This dilemma of the market being limited means that the productive forces have

become too developed for the limits of the nation state and private ownership. This has already resulted in two world wars and the great depression of 1929-33.

### World Trade

After the Second World War, the ruling class sought and succeeded in temporarily and partially overcoming this crisis of competing markets by the development of world trade and the integration of the economies of the world into a titanic world market. In the Sixties and Seventies there was a massive increase in the development of science and technique in industry. The post war boom had enabled the capitalists to have low unemployment and the development of the welfare state. However, this post-war period of unprecedented growth has ended and at present, even where capitalism is experiencing 'growth' they can no longer afford the welfare state, hence the attacks against it which have been launched by every capitalist state as they seek to claw back the 'concessions' that were granted to the workers. This process will serve merely to deepen the contradictions in society—both economic and political.

The main capitalist countries of the world are groping around for new markets. With home markets no longer growing, this has meant, for example, a rush to invest in and export to China and South-East Asia. But any gains made here will be marginal. It cannot replace the massive markets of Western Europe, Japan and North America.

Britain, because of her lack of investment, has fallen behind. They rely now on low wages, bad conditions and cuts in state expenditure to keep themselves competitive. This strategy is bound to fail—machinery will always overcome cheap labour. They look to the service industries such as banking, insurance, and retail distribution for profits but this is a parasitic sector dependent on the rest of industry with only communications, transport and shipping actually a part of industrial production.

The ideas of Tony Blair and the other reformists reflects the past period. These ideas cannot solve any of the problems of the working class and will only prepare a crisis for the next Labour government. The exceptional period of development of world trade during the post war period has passed into history and can no longer underwrite reformism.

The CBI have stated that a profit level of between 17% and 20% is

calculated as being required before industry will consider investment. Britain has a budget deficit of £36 billion and a trade deficit of over £14 billion. Increasing the expenditure of the state would increase the budget and trade deficit and mean higher interest rates. The call of big business and the City of London is for 'sound finances' and a 'balanced budget' i.e. cuts in state expenditure. The lust for new sources of profit is the driving force behind the privatisation programme of the Tories.

The push to cut living standards have been shown by acts such as the abolition of Wages Councils

and continue to invest in the way and at the level they intended to in the first place.

It is no accident that, under pressure from big business and the representatives of organisations such as the IMF, every 'socialist' government in the world today has been forced to abandon their programme of reforms when they have come to power. The abandonment of promised reforms from the programme of the Swedish Social Democrats is just the logical continuation of this. Capitalism is afraid of the threat of inflation and the resulting undermining of the economy, particularly monopoly capital (which

when budget deficits and inflation threaten to get out of hand. The capitalists would prefer to maintain the welfare state if their system could afford it. But they cannot do so and therefore exert pressure for cuts and attacks on living standards on both conservative and socialist governments. The fact that this involves them in another contradiction of cutting the market is one of the complexities of the crisis of capitalism as a system. The fact that these cuts are universal in all countries is an indication that the capitalists see no other way out despite the further contradictions which will develop as a consequence.

## **“The vague programme of Tony Blair with his, in effect, abandonment of the goal of a socialist society and the acceptance of a ‘market economy’, shows that the next Labour government will be no different from those other left governments that have abandoned reforms.”**

(introduced in 1910) and the move towards so-called deregulation i.e. removal of workers' protection and health and safety protection. The rate of profit for the bosses is determined by the amount spent on machinery, buildings and raw materials — what Marx called constant capital—on the one hand and wages—variable capital—on the other. To increase this capitalism is forcing the intensification of labour through things such as speed ups and so on to force the maximum work out of the minimum number of workers. The increase in stress related illness is just one by-product of this.

### Process

That this process is universal through out all the capitalist countries of the world is an indication of the fundamental crisis of capitalism. The struggle between the workers and the bosses for surplus value has become bitter. Investment levels are subject to the amount of profit that can be made. No government can force them to invest under such a crisis. If the cash is supplied by the state in the form of subsidies then there will be either cuts in social expenditure or an increase in budget deficits without any real growth in investment to show for it. Experience shows that capitalism will simply take the money

is at it's highest levels in countries such as Sweden and Britain) which dictates the policies of governments.

### Abandonment

The vague programme of Tony Blair with his, in effect, abandonment of the goal of a socialist society and the acceptance of a 'market economy', shows that the next Labour government will be no different from those other left governments that have abandoned reforms.

The question must be asked of the left in the Labour Party, both Tribune and Campaign group, why the capitalists in all the developed countries are opposed to deficit financing? If they could gain they would obviously support this. But painful experience has taught them that under capitalism there 'is no free lunch'. Other things being equal inflation would cancel out all the nominal gains. The capitalists are not interested in production as such but only profit. The lefts as well as the rights in the Labour Party have the delusion that they can run capitalism better than the capitalists. This is fanciful. The capitalists while not understanding their system have a hard headed realisation what is to their benefit and what is damaging to them and their system. That is why there is always a run on the currency

### Marxists

Marxists in the Labour Party support a programme of mass public works, the building of houses, schools, hospitals and so on. We support full employment, a decent minimum wage and all the other demands of the left in the labour and trade union movement. These are necessary for the basics of a civilised society. But the cost will be massive and even renationalisation of the privatised utilities will not be enough to achieve this.

Aims such as full employment require the transformation of society—the taking over of the commanding heights; the 200 or so monopolies, banks and finance houses which overwhelmingly dominate the economy. What is required is not old style nationalisation where the industries were run for the interests of the bosses but nationalisation with workers control and management. Compensation to the old 'owners' should be paid on the basis of need only. These industries should be democratically run, with the workers getting proper wages and conditions, under a socialist plan of production. The working class should calculate the required resources and allocate them on the basis of need. Investment levels would therefore be decided by what is actually required not what can be spared after all the profits have been shared out as is the rule under capitalism. The yolk of capital would be decisively broken by the socialist plan of production. There can be no other way. If production remains in the hands of big business with control by the monopolies then the laws of capitalism will apply. Given that, aims such as full employment would remain a utopia with no chance of actually been realised. Those who believe that these reforms can be won under capitalism are the real utopians.

# Sell Socialist Appeal

27 copies of our last edition were sold at this year's TUC. Many delegates commented on the quality of our union coverage and analysis that went with it. Some also drew our sellers attention to the political articles and said how pleased they were to see material on Marxist ideas and theory. They recognised the need for such ideas to give a focus to their struggles in the movement. We have had similar reports from sellers at other union conferences this year which shows the need for a serious Marxist journal that takes up the important issues facing activists today. This equally applies to Labour

Party activists and we hope that readers at this year's Labour Party conference who are seeing our journal for, perhaps, the first time will be encouraged to get it on a regular basis. Why not fill out the subscription form straight away and send it off to us with a cheque for £15. This represents the best way to ensure that you see every issue with our full review of all the important political questions facing the working class both nationally and internationally. Better still why not take out a bulk order to sell at your local branch or GC? Write to me for details—you can have a bulk order of as little as 5 issues. Even if you just encourage a colleague to take out a subscription then you can be helping to spread socialist ideas where they are most needed. There has never been a time when, given the attacks of the Tories and big business, Marxist have not been so essential for the movement. You can help by building the sales of Socialist Appeal and helping to make it the number one publication in the Labour and trade union today.

**Steve Jones**  
Journal Manager

## ● Press Fund

# Special drive needed...

19 people attended our first ever readers meeting at TUC conference (with several delegates giving apologies for absence) to hear Socialist Appeal Editor Alan Woods and delegate Mary Hanson speaking on the need for socialist policies in the unions. A very good discussion was held and this resulted in a splendid collection of over £300 for our press fund. By adding this to our other donations from readers and supporters, we are now over half way towards our £15,000 Press Fund target. We have moved into our new premises and virtually completed the decorating and building work on it. Now we are looking at the precise requirements we need to print our own journal. As soon as we have achieved these purchases then we will be able to produce material such as leaflets, pamphlets, special broadsheets and other stuff, as well as the journal, both quickly and to a high standard. The need to have regular material out on events such as the Signal Workers dispute underlines this.

Every supporter needs to make a special push now on the press fund. Every reader should ask themselves how much can I donate to help Socialist Appeal get its own press? Sellers should be drawing up lists of supporters to ask for donations. Why not organise fund raising events or socials to raise money? I have had reports of supporters having stalls at car boot sales, of organising 'video nights' and visits to a local restaurant and so on in order to raise money. Let us know what other ideas you might have. Collection sheets and appeal letters are available from our office—ring on 071-251-1094 or write to PO Box 2626, London N1 6DU. Equally if you would like to make a regular donation (as some of our readers have done) then this can be simply done by standing order. Again this can be arranged by writing to us. With a big push we can achieve our objective by the start of 1995 and that will be a big victory for the ideas of socialism in the Labour and trade union movement.

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Socialist Appeals new pamphlet, written by *Ian Aylett, Mick Brooks and Michael Roberts*, argues that only a fighting, socialist programme can really achieve full employment...

# Mass unemployment or a socialist plan

This month sees the launch of Socialist Appeal's new pamphlet on the question of Full Employment and how it can be achieved. It outlines the real causes of unemployment and the various solutions that have been raised to deal with it. Finally it deals with the need for a fighting socialist programme as the only way to achieve this objective. In this extract reproduced below, the pamphlet takes up the position of the Labour leadership.....

All the candidates in the recent Labour leadership campaign recognised that unemployment is the burning issue among Labour voters, and the electorate as a whole. They all claimed to stand for Labour's old policy objective of full employment, as defined in the Churchill-led coalition government's Employment White Paper of 1944 which set the consensus view of all parties in the post-war period up to the mid-1970s. That government paper stated that "it was the government's primary aim and responsibility for the maintenance of a high and stable level of employment". At the 1993 Labour conference, the then leader John Smith, said that "the goal of full employment remains at the heart of Labour's vision for Britain".

But this commitment in 1944 was based on a belief in all parties that governments could stimulate the overall demand for jobs by

government spending and credit policies and thus maintain high employment by careful manipulation of the market economy.

## Growth

As we have argued ... the high levels of employment achieved between 1948-73 in Britain and in the rest of the rich capitalist world were not the result of Keynesian economic management policies, but were due to the underlying growth of investment and profits in that long boom. Similarly, the rise of unemployment since 1973 was the result of the downturn of investment and profitability in capitalism's new epoch of economic crisis, and not due to the failure of Keynesian measures.

However, along with the Tories and the Liberals, the Labour leaders of the late 1970s did not reach the conclusion that rising unemployment was due to the failure of capitalism but due to the failure of Keynesianism. James Callaghan told the 1976 Labour Party conference "We used to think you could just spend your way out of recession by cutting taxes and boosting government spending. I tell you in all candour that option no longer exists."

The main architect of Labour's policy on employment in the 1980s was Gordon Brown, Shadow Chancellor. In early 1990, his pamphlet 'How we can conquer unemployment' presents the economic argument

underlying the Labour leadership's current programme. There were three main planks to his analysis. First, unemployment in Britain is due to Tory policies, not the capitalist system itself. The Tories have produced persistent under-investment—in machinery, ideas and research, and "most important of all" in people, which has caused serious structural damage to the economy.

## Keynesian

Second, Brown continues with Callaghan's theme that the old Labour policy of Keynesian government borrowing cannot put people to work. He correctly says that because the lack of competitiveness and loss of industrial capacity in Britain, there is a propensity to import

foreign goods, which leads to increasing balance of payments deficits when demand is expanded in the current condition of the economy. But instead of looking for socialist solutions which would break out from the grip of a failed capitalist system, Brown instead emphasises 'supply side' measures to improve productivity, competitiveness and productive capacity "so that rising wages do not cause inflation and increased demand does not cause a rise in imports," a programme similar to the Tories and Liberals. He argues that employment will come from increased private investment, and the private sector needs an environment of financial security and enterprise, giving rise to expectations of secure profits. This requires steady growth of aggregate demand, low inflation, low and stable real interest rates and a stable competitive exchange rate — in other words a very orthodox monetary policy that the Tories already lay claim to and which has fostered the current high unemployment. Brown aims at "keeping inflation low and...to strict inflation targets" and that "Labour's short-term plans will be placed within a tough medium term plan for fiscal consolidation" to deal with the budget deficit. This means that any use of interest rates and public expenditure to cut unemployment will be limited by the aim of keeping inflation low and cutting the budget deficit. In effect, Brown and the rest of the Shadow Cabinet aim only at "changing the way a market economy works, in the public interest, making it work better". But the Labour leaders seem to half realise that their policies cannot achieve any meaningful

New pamphlet out now...

## A Job for All Mass Unemployment or a Socialist Plan

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level of full employment in a 'market economy'. That is why most of them see Labour's pledge to full employment as no more than an objective. As John Smith put it last February: "I don't think a government can guarantee every person in the country a job. I don't think people would believe it if you said it. But one of the objectives of economic policy must be to get the highest number of jobs possible, it ought to be the objective of a decent and civilised society." (Interview with Guardian and Daily Mirror).

The new Labour leader Tony Blair echoes Smith's view that full employment is only an 'aim or objective or goal' that cannot be achieved in reality. In his leadership manifesto interviews, he opposed setting any target for full employment: "It's not a numbers game. I don't think anyone would suggest that this is something you can achieve overnight or that won't still have some frictional unemployment. But the important thing to do is to make a start with a commitment that it is the responsibility of government to ensure the conditions in which people get a chance to work".

### Conditions

But what are these conditions which would ensure job for all? How many jobs will be needed? How quickly can they be created? How will they be paid for? None of these questions are answered by Tony Blair or the other Labour leaders. On the

contrary when pressed on TV by David Frost, Blair made all the usual statements about "not having a shopping list" of demands and of "not making promises we can't keep". But as Frost said, there is not much point in having a goal in football, if we do not know how large the goal is and where it is. Only John Prescott of the Labour leadership candidates has hinted at a target of 2.5% unemployment (700,000)

**"How do the Labour leaders imagine that jobs will be created for all those coming out of their proposed education and training schemes? By "sustained economic growth", they say - but sustained economic growth under capitalism is not on the agenda for the 1990s and is certainly no guarantee of more jobs...."**

as being "full employment", but he considered that this could not be achieved in the life of one parliament. Thus Prescott expects that under Labour millions will remain out of work throughout this decade at least. For those in their 40s and 50s that means they will probably never work again. Such is the commitment to full employment from the Labour leaders. How do the Labour leaders imagine that jobs will be created for all those coming out of their

proposed education and training schemes? By "sustained economic growth", they say - but sustained economic growth under capitalism is not on the agenda for the 1990s and is certainly no guarantee of more jobs....

### Full employment

For the Labour leaders, the achievement of full employment ultimately depends on European

framework": John Prescott). So for the Labour leaders there is no hope of full employment unless all the capitalist governments of Europe agree to reflate their economies together for economic growth. But what hope is there of that? In 1992, Gordon Brown backed through thick and thin the idea of keeping sterling within the European Exchange Rate Mechanism right up to the moment that Major and Lamont were forced to come out on 'Black September 1992'. The ERM meant higher than necessary rates of interest, a longer recession in Europe and Britain and longer dole queues. Now Brown calls for the G7 governments coordinate a growth strategy to "lower interest rates in the UK, the rest of Europe and Japan, and a Keynesian-style fiscal expansion in Europe". It appears that Keynesianism will work if it is internationally coordinated.

### Four million

Thus the Labour leaders place the hopes of four million unemployed Britons and 20 million other jobless Europeans on initiatives from the conservative governments of Germany, France, Italy, Switzerland, Holland etc., and on the goodwill of the arch monetarist German Bundesbank (which is outside even government control) to reverse its policies of tight money to boost employment!

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by Robert Taylor. 238 pages; £9.99

Reviewed by Rob Sewell

**"The new trade unionism will not be the same as that of the 1960s or 1970s. Trade unions are often portrayed by our critics as unchanging, resistant to new ideas. But we can demonstrate - and Robert Taylor does this eloquently - that throughout our history we have adapted to meet the challenge of new circumstances and have done so as effectively as any organisation in public life." This was the comment made by John Monks, TUC General Secretary, in his introduction to Taylor's book. It sums up the whole attitude of the trade union bureaucracy in their attempt to "modernise" the TUC.**

Taylor, who is the labour correspondent of the *Financial Times*, that well-known Bolshevik news sheet, was commissioned by the TUC to write the book "as part of the TUC's renewal programme." As expected, he outlines the future for 'new realism' and strong trade unions in partnership with the capitalists: "In short, they must establish a broad market appeal (!) not just to workers as potential members but perhaps more importantly to employers as well". Trade unions "must try to persuade companies that they ought to have an organised workplace because it will actually provide them with a strategic advantage in their efforts to achieve greater competitiveness on both domestic and global markets". For him, trade unions are not class organisations to established to represent the interests of the workers, but friendly societies that have to go cap in hand to the employers.

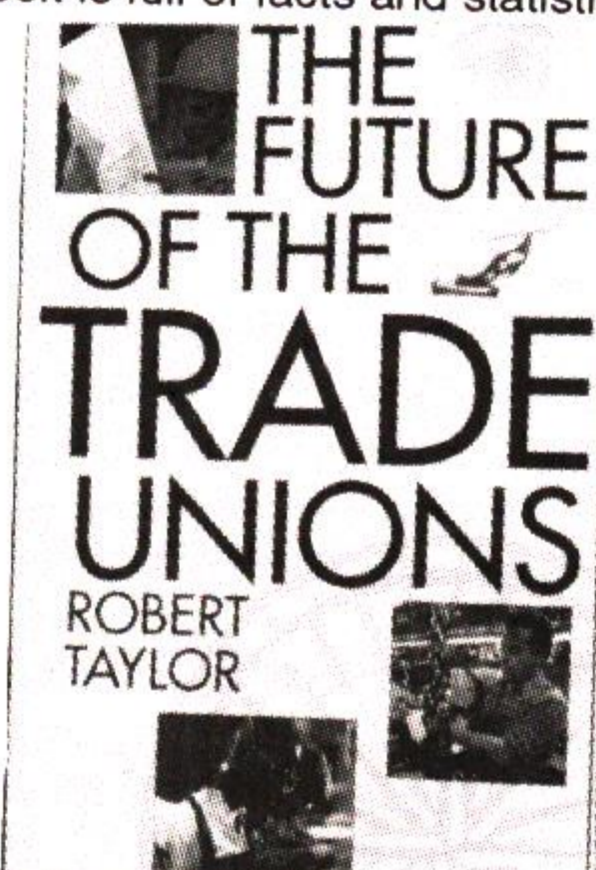
## Hallowed Customs

Taylor notes that "this represents a dramatic shift away from the traditions of the past, from the essentially adversarial system where trust between employers and employees was so often lacking and conflict resolution lay at the heart of so much joint consultation and collective bargaining. Defence of hallowed customs and practices through the policing of demarcation lines, maintenance of both pre- and post-entry closed shops and restricted entry for young workers into skilled trades were once widespread, but not any longer". He describes these setbacks as a "revolution" on the shopfloor, rather than an employers' counter-revolution.

Ironically, the "bad old days" referred to of the 1970s were a period of strong trade

unions. He points out that in 1979 there were 13.3 million in trade unions, or 55% of the workforce. Today, after more than a decade of moderation and 'new realism', trade union membership has contracted every year to 9 million or 31% of workers. The employers, together with their political representatives, the Tories, have gone on the offensive, introducing draconian anti-union legislation and creating a 'flexible' low wage economy. The bosses have driven up profits by cutting the workforce and squeezing every ounce of labour power out of the workers. Productivity increases have been due, not to increased investment, but at the expense of the health of workers. British workers account for more than half those in Europe who work more than 48 hours a week! The bottom tenth of manual workers earned only 64% of average income in 1991, compared with 68% in 1886!

The book is full of facts and statistics of this



nature. Consequently, it is well worth reading. Unfortunately, the author draws all the opposite conclusions that follow from this situation. Taylor, echoing the trade union bureaucracy, urges the unions to 'adjust' and accept the attacks of the employers. So-called team-working, flexibility, multi-skilling, Human Resource Management and Total Quality Management, apart from others, are all methods of intensifying the exploitation of the working class in the interests of rent, interest and profit. Nothing more and nothing less. They are a means to increase work rates, increase stress, and the squeezing out of labour.

The author points to the deal at Rover as an example of "the positive workplace approach: "Ten years ago many of its plants were riven with bitter unofficial disruption. Now many of them are showplaces for enterprise unionism"! The bosses and union leaders agreed to introduce total flexibility of labour. The Deal states: "Every employee

will have unrestricted access to use of company tools and equipment necessary for them to make their contribution". Taylor describes such deals as "progressive" and goes on, "it would be wrong to suggest the Rover deal is an exception". This 'new unionism' is backed up by numerous quotes from right-wing trade union leaders eager to cooperate with the bosses. In a review of the book by Howard Davies of the CBI, he says ironically that "we hear a lot of John Monks and Bill Jordan but, strangely, there is no mention of Arthur Scargill (or Jimmy Knapp) though John Edmonds is allowed a few observations"!

## Class Organisations

Howard says the bosses are distrustful of the unions as "bad memories die hard and have been reawakened by the behaviour of RMT". Despite the grovelling of the trade union tops, the employers still see the unions as class organisations. This temporary conjuncture that allowed the right-wing to hold sway in the unions and Labour Party, but as events unfold this position can change radically. The tremendous anger and frustration in the workplaces at the attacks of the employers is preparing a massive backlash. Even the Policy Studies Institute was forced to comment: "Many would welcome this as a sign that Britain is moving towards the type of unregulated labour market that economic success requires. Others would see it as a reversion towards the type of economy that gave rise to the birth of trade unionism in the last century". (our emphasis)

## Exploitation

Objective conditions are preparing an explosion. The 'Friendly Society' mentality that permeates the trade union officialdom will be swept away by events. Once again, the trade unions will become organisations that will challenge the exploitation of the capitalist system and become a vehicle, together with the Labour Party, for the socialist reconstruction of society. That is the real future of trade unionism.

When all is said and done, this book is well worth reading for its wealth of information and its crass approach to trade unionism.

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# Northern Ireland:

# Can There be Peace?



**T**he IRA have declared a ceasefire. There is a flurry of diplomatic activity by Reynolds, Major, Adams and Clinton. The press are trumpeting a breakthrough. Following the collapse of the Soviet Union and the negotiated 'settlements' in South Africa and the Middle East, can there be a negotiated settlement in Ireland?

Much talk is now centred on what 'deals' can be presented by the various parties involved and what role the IRA will play in these discussions. Dublin seems set to amend their constitution which lays claim to the North, while Britain has already intimated that if a majority in the North want a united Ireland, then they can have it. How long will the ceasefire last and, more to the point, what will be the final outcome of that ceasefire? Has the basis of a solution to the problems of Northern Ireland been found?

To begin with, the cease fire is

not a sudden development. It reflects on the one hand the failure of the methods of the IRA campaign of individual terrorism, and on the other the desire of many workers, both Catholic and Protestant, to see an end to the violence. As was stated in the editorial of Socialist Appeal last November: "The talk of an IRA cease fire comes as no surprise. As Marxists predicted, after twenty years of so-called 'armed struggle' the IRA are further away from their goal of a united Ireland than they were at the start of their campaign".

### Capitulation

The ceasefire is an admission of failure. Adams' statement announcing the cease fire did not even mention the border, British withdrawal, or a united Ireland. In reality, it was total capitulation. The leaders of Sinn Fein and the IRA have been forced to recognise the blind alley they have been travelling down. The Provo's recruitment levels of the early seventies have declined sharply along with

their level of support in the Catholic areas. The strategy of 'Armalite and Ballot Box', with the hopes of overtaking the SDLP, has failed. The Adams leadership has been busily 'moderating' their programme and talking increasingly about a 'political solution'. They were prepared to undertake secret talks with the Tory government. Once the Hume-Adams talks were underway the only concrete thing they could really raise was the prospect of the cease fire on the basis of new talks. Now the sight of Adams shaking hands with Reynolds, the representative of Green Toryism, and the same, shortly, with Clinton, the representative of US imperialism, is an indication of the political degeneration of the republican leadership. Marxism has always opposed the methods of individual terrorism. It is a blind alley. The campaign of individual terrorism is even more insane in industrial countries, as especially in the North where the provos lacked

even the total support of the Catholics. The attempt to bomb the Protestants into a united Ireland was entirely reactionary. Such a campaign could never defeat the British army, even if it lasted another 25 or 50 years. It is counter productive as it is used as an excuse by the state to strengthen its repressive apparatus and laws. The state can use the resulting revulsion from such methods to attack and divide workers. The legislation introduced against terrorism has also been used to a great degree within Britain, in particular the Prevention of Terrorism Act which was first used against Labour activists. The actions of the IRA has provided the excuse for a level of surveillance by the state that would have been unimaginable a decade ago. City centres, streets, railway stations, car parks are being increasingly watched by cameras who watch and video your every action. The so-called 'ring of steel' around the City of London, introduced after the bombing of April 1993, with its video camera's and road-blocks is an indication of what they can get away with. When the Civil Rights movement developed in the late Sixties (inspired by the movements of France '68) it was progressive in character and involved both Catholic and Protestant workers. The attacks of the B-Specials resulted, in areas like the Ardoyne, in the establishment of community defence groups made up of Catholics and Protestants. The provos deliberately set out to smash these groups through the assassination of Protestant members.

### British Troops

The sending in of British Troops in 1969 was originally welcomed by the Catholic Community as a measure of protection. At the time, Marxists, in contrast to the rest of the Left and the sects, opposed the sending in of troops, recognising that they were dispatched not to defend the Catholics (as was evident later), but to represent the interests of British imperialism, by containing the situation. The IRA's actions were a form of 'ethnic cleansing', where Protestants were driven from Catholic areas, and Unionist bigots drove out Catholics. It was clear that the IRA wanted



all-Catholic communities since it would reduce the risk of informers.

The basis of the sectarian violence arose as a direct result of the policies of British Imperialism over 400 years. Imperialism, in its conquest of Ireland, must accept the responsibility for laying the basis for the division of the two communities. It's roots lie in the 'plantation' of Ulster in the 17th Century. The existing tenants were removed (mainly to poor quality land) and replaced by new tenants from Scotland and England. The creation of this new Protestant base was intended to create an artificial enclave which would be hostile to the surrounding, worse off, Catholic tenants and therefore loyal to the crown. The whole strategy of British Imperialism was based upon the policy of 'divide and rule'.

### United Irishmen

However, the United Irishmen rebellion of 1798, led by Wolfe Tone, which involved both Protestants and Catholics, showed that the sectarian divide could be breached. Over the next century the ruling class whipped up sectarianism with the establishment of the Orange Order. By doing this they were, as Randolph Churchill put in in 1886, "playing the Orange card". Although space prevents any real review of Irish history, it is clear that this was the consistent method of British Imperialism from day one. Their aim was to avoid, at all costs, a united Ireland which they could not subject to their control. The partition of Ireland in 1921 was intended to break the back of the big social movements that were taking place and also to ensure a secure base in Ireland to protect British interests in the event of war.

Today, these reasons of national security and direct economic domination are obsolete given advance in weapon technology and the fact that Southern Ireland, despite 70 years of so-called independence, is tied hand and foot to British interests and economy. The British ruling class would be quite prepared to see a united capitalist Ireland, as it would be economically and politically subordinate to British Imperialism. It would mean an end to the £4 billion subvention paid out to maintain the North.

Unfortunately for them, they have created a Frankenstein monster in the form of Protestant sectarianism. The playing of the Orange card and the resulting 'divide and rule' policy of British imperialism has left a legacy which cannot be easily removed. The Protestants will fight tooth and nail to prevent a united Ireland where they will be regarded and treated as second class citizens. Capitalism has shown itself to be totally incapable of dealing with the material problems facing the working class, North and South. It is the system that is responsible for the bad housing, unemployment and poverty, that is the lot of the mass of workers in the North, both Protestant and Catholic. The recession has bitten hard into the Protestant community with some workers now believing that the Catholics in the North are better off than they are! The difference across the sectarian divide is one of degree only.

There are 100,000 armed Protestants. The Protestant paramilitaries are armed and ready to fight. Those on the left who glibly talk of the removal of the Protestant veto, fail to understand it is this armed force that is the real veto. A serious move towards a capitalist united Ireland would inevitably lead to civil war. The 'official' forces of the Protestants (RUC/Ulster Defence Regiment.) could also be sucked in as well as the Irish army. What we would see is a conflict to match the horrors of Yugoslavia. It would inevitably lead to the repartition of Ireland, with the creation of a Protestant statelet in the North.

### Phased Withdrawal

Even the IRA recognise this danger and talk not of outright withdrawal of British troops but of 'phased withdrawal'. At present the loyalist paramilitaries like the UVF are playing a game of 'wait and see'. They have already started to talk about 'pan nationalist fronts' (meaning all those who they perceive as wanting a united Ireland) as the enemy rather than just reacting to the IRA. The bombing of Connolly Station in Dublin and the attack outside the Sinn Fein HQ in the Falls Road are clear examples of them wishing to "lay down markers". The Combined

Loyalist Military Command, however, have stated that they are holding back to see what will be in the joint framework document to be presented in October by the Irish and British governments. Paisley and the DUP are demagogically denouncing the initiative. On the other hand, the larger Official Unionist Party may reluctantly go along with the Tory's plans. Even a section of Catholic

demands of the leaders. Everyone is waiting to see what the governments come up with. The likelihood is that some sort of power sharing arrangement will be proposed with a referendum being used to push it through. Certainly the Loyalist groups such as the UVF will take some convincing and the more serious capitalist commentators believe that it will not happen. If such an



workers in the North are wary of a united Ireland given the lower standard of social services in the South and the grip of the Church on much of social policy. On official figures, in order to maintain the current levels of expenditure in the North, the cost of a united Ireland would push up taxes by 20-30%. Any money from Clinton (estimated at \$150 million) and the EU as part of any settlement is peanuts. Indeed given the costs of unification, we now have the irony of Britain prepared to see a united Ireland and the Republic not wanting such an event. At present, the Catholics have tremendous illusions in the 'peace process' as was seen by the spontaneous demonstrations that followed the announcement of the ceasefire. The question is—how long will that last? The truth of it is that the main parties now believe that the best that can be achieved is not a united Ireland, but some sort of semi-autonomous state with links to both Britain and the Republic. This, it is hoped, will satisfy the demands of all those involved—or at least the

agreement is pushed through, the question is then raised of the British army having to patrol the loyalist areas in Belfast and 'deal' with the paramilitaries. This was always the hope of the IRA when they talked about a 'phased withdrawal'. Also there is the question of whether the IRA ceasefire will hold or whether there will be splits with a new force coming to the fore. The situation is very volatile.

### Paramilitary

Nevertheless, any 'agreement', far from ending the 'troubles' (with its death toll of 3000 plus over 30,000 injuries to date) the basis will have been laid for new and more serious levels of crisis. Certainly none of the paramilitary groups will have gone away - both are still running their protection rackets and many of it's leaders will have got a taste for the job. As one paramilitary leader was quoted as saying in National Geographic (Sept. 1994): "When you have been elevated into the leadership of a paramilitary organisation, it has an aura

within society". In the short term, given the war weariness, the 'peace' seems likely to hold. Any 'agreement' they can cobble together will, what ever grants they get from the US or Europe, in the long run not solve any of the underlying problems facing the working class. If the workers' organisations do not act, then frustrations can again bring new acts of terrorism to the fore. Only one factor can resolve this prospect—the force of the Labour movement

### Permanent Revolution

Leon Trotsky explained in his theory of permanent revolution that in the colonial world the weak capitalist class, tied to the apron strings of imperialism, is

incapable of carrying through the tasks of the bourgeois democratic revolution. That task falls to the working class which carries through the bourgeois tasks and proceeds to the socialist ones. The national question in Ireland can only be solved on a socialist basis. The Irish working class has a proud tradition of struggle in both North and South. Class movements in the South or in Britain may act as a trigger for new movements in the North. A concerted campaign by the Labour and trade union movement (remembering that the trade unions are one of the few organisations which unite both Protestant and Catholic workers in their ranks) could break the back of sectarianism. This must

go hand in hand with a conference of labour organised by the trade unions, to establish a Labour Party in the North.

### Socialist Ireland

Armed with a socialist programme, a Labour Party would challenge the grip of the Unionist parties and act as a beacon to Catholic and Protestant workers. It would mean that class issues would come to the fore, which would push sectarianism into the background.

It is completely wrong to believe, as some in the movement have stated, that first you must solve the national question before you can tackle the social question. Rather it is the other way

round—only by solving the social issues will the national question be resolved. The IRA ceasefire allows the social issues to come to the fore. A mass socialist Labour Party in the North, based on the unions and armed with a socialist programme, would bridge the sectarian divide and move towards the establishment of a Socialist United Ireland. This would be linked to the struggle for Socialism in Britain and a Socialist Europe. This is the only realistic way forward for the working class and the only alternative to sectarianism and violence.

**Steve Jones**

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cuts, squalid working conditions, and so on.

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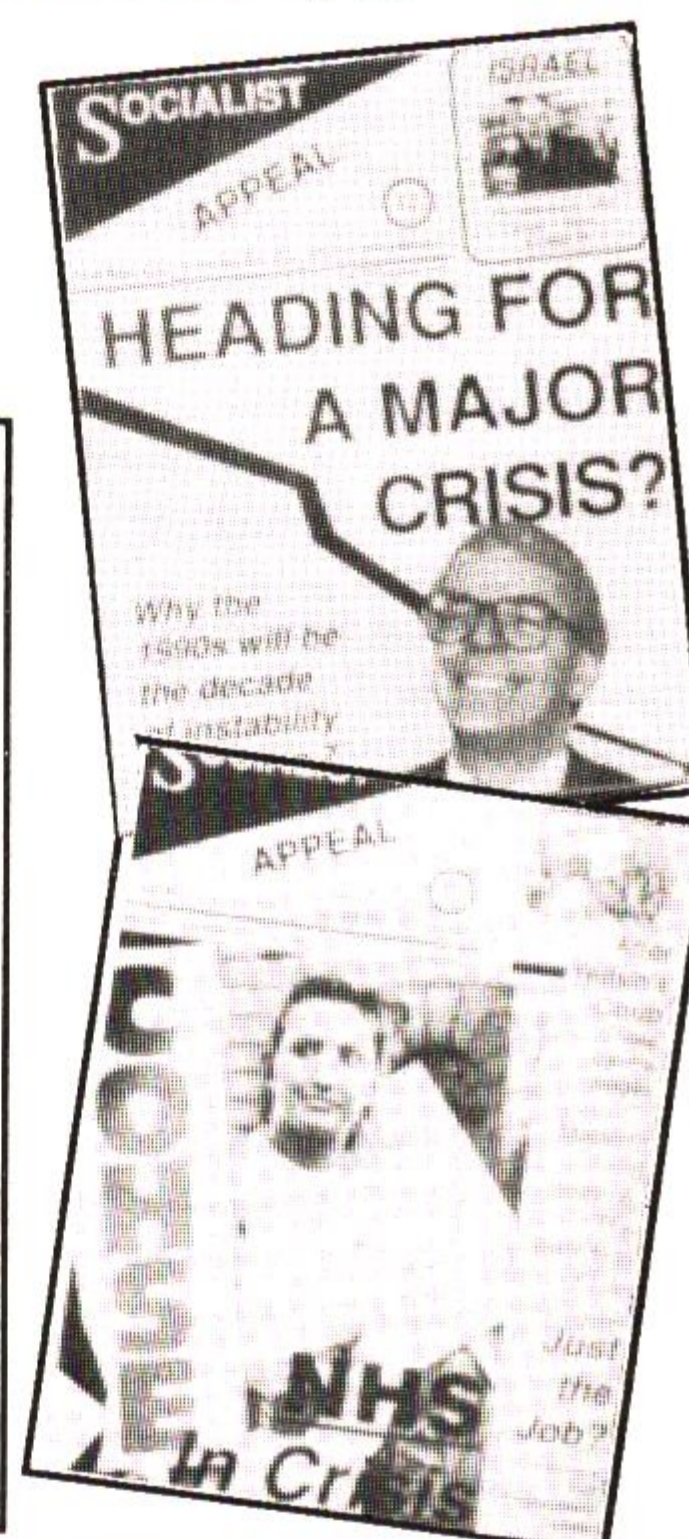
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The elections of the 21st of August constitute a blatant fraud. This was exposed by Alianza Civica, an independent organisation of electoral observers. 74.33% of voters who correctly turned up at polling stations did not appear on the polling booth lists, a fact which is confirmed by the electoral census. 36.75% did not vote in secret. 10.25% noticed that the supposedly indelible ink could be rubbed out. 23.67% were allowed to vote although they were not on the electoral census. 9.19% of voters were allowed to vote despite the fact that their fingers were already stained with ink (a marking effect designed to prevent people voting more than once). In the special polling booths set up for use by people in transit (soldiers, policemen and firemen) all the voting slips of the ruling party, the PRI, were used up. The last straw was when Indians were told "show your opposition to the PRI by crossing out its symbol on your ballot"—they were not told that this would result in their voting slips being spoilt. On the frontier with Guatamala 35 Non-Mexicans got to vote. There were many other irregularities. The 'victory' of the PRI candidate Zedillo, supposedly with a 48% vote according to the Federal Electoral Institute, is frankly incredible, as is the 26% allegedly obtained by the right wing PAN party, which was supposed to have beaten the main opposition party, the PRD, into third place with an 'official' 16% vote.

This is like something out of Alice In Wonderland! The PAN does not have a strong national base, and yet was supposed to have got practically the same result (around 20%) in every state, even in areas where it is practically nonexistent, like Veracruz.

All this is in open contradiction to what we saw during the election campaign, where people were losing their fear even in PRI meetings where Zedillo spoke where those present

shouted that they were fed up of broken promises and lies. The meetings of the PRD were massive. More than 50,000 in the national university; between 35-40,000 at Tapachula; 25,000 at Toreo de Cuato Caminos (where the PAN got less than 15,000 to their meeting). In three separate meetings the PRD filled the central square of Mexico City. 80% of television time was taken up by the PRI yet massive opposition activities like the demonstration of 100,000 against the army intervention in Chiapas, and the national day of action of the peasants on the 10th of April with a march of 200,000 in the capital, were passed over in silence by the media.

#### Massive turnout

It is clear that the majority did not vote for the PRI. Why was there such a massive turn-out at the polls (77%)? Because people saw an opportunity at last to get rid of the PRI government. The revolt in Chiapas aroused enormous national

sympathy (67% according to polls). The PRI government was in a weak position and could only save itself by once again resorting to electoral fraud.

In addition to fraud and manipulation of the media, the government also used the weapon of fear—fear of losing their jobs, fear of intimidation by PRI bureaucrats, of having your street traders license taken away etc. We cannot blame people who have a knife put to their throat and are told "vote for PRI or lose your job". On the other hand, the government tried to panic the middle class by publishing scare stories about shipments of arms destined for the Zapatista guerrillas allegedly discovered in Guatemala and Costa Rica. On the eve of the elections, the evening paper 'Cuestion' published a banner headline "There will be no state of siege in Mexico City" Through the chemist shops a rumour was put in circulation that operating theatres and intensive care units be kept free on

Saturdays, Sundays and Mondays in case of emergencies!

Unfortunately the PRD leadership made the mistake of trying to ignore this campaign calling on people to 'vote for peace' in the abstract, and using the symbol of the dove of peace in its final meetings. The PRD leaders imagined that by putting forward a 'moderate' image that they could win over the middle class. They not only failed to do this but also failed to put forward a programme capable of attracting workers and youth. Despite this, many people defied the blackmail and voted against the PRI. The result was clearly very close. Without massive vote rigging, the PRI would not have got more than 35%.

#### Exit Poll

The main Mexican polling institute (IMOP) in its exit poll gave the PRD candidate Cárdenas 38%, as against 32% for Zedillo (PRI) and 22% for Cevallos (PAN). A rapid count of 2896 polling booths gave 36% for Cárdenas, 29% for Zedillo and 24% for Cevallos. Other estimates gave the parties similar proportions.

The PRI has hung on to power by rigging the elections, but its problems are not over. On the contrary, there is a mood of anger, indignation and frustration, reflected in the beginning of a mass mobilisation. As early as the 21st of August there were demonstrations all over the country to protest against the fraud, from Lower California to Chiapas, and from Guerrero to Yucatán. Hundreds of thousands demonstrated, set up road blocks and occupied gov-

# Mexico

## Election fraud hides social explosion



ernment offices. The mood was explosive. The Mexican Marxists, supporters of the paper 'El Militante', have constantly explained that the only way to defeat electoral fraud was for the PRD leaders to mobilise the masses in a bold programme of action. The 'milk and water' programme and ambiguous declarations by the PRD leadership, appealing to the 'good will' of Salinas and asking the PRD for clean elections was completely unreal. This latest electoral fraud will accelerate the process of social polarisation.

### Change everything

We agree with the words of Marcos Rascón, a PRD leader, in an article entitled "The day after" (La Jornada 23/8/94); "What happened on the 21st of August shows that the Mexican political system does not need reforms but a fundamental revolution to change everything that it is and what sustains it... Mexican society is beginning to be polarised between revolution and the status quo." We will see an increasing process of splits and decomposition within the PRI. Those sections which have been marginalised will move into opposition. We will see a haemorrhaging of PRI supporters towards the PRD and the PAN. The decomposition of the PRI will be speeded up by growing social protests. If there is an attempt to smash the Zapatistas in Chiapas, this will

probably lead to the extension of peasant insurrection to other states, reflecting the desperation of the peasant masses. Already in the Sierra Madre of Chiapas we see the emergence of the South East Revolutionary Insurgent Army, and there is talk of 3 or 4 other groups. It seems likely that the PAN is also heading for a split, as also happened 2 years ago. After participating in a few theatrical denunciations, Cevallos has now come out in his true colours, accepting Zedillo's electoral 'victory' and arriving at a secret agreement to back the government in exchange for ministerial positions. On the other hand local PAN leaders like Vicente Fox in Guanajuato threatens to lead a struggle against the "electoral carve up". The perspective of a social explosion remains implicit in the situation. The bourgeoisie is preparing to use repression, as we saw in Tuxtla Gutierrez, where the police attacked anti fraud demonstrators with tear gas, or in Juchitán where the army attacked a rally, firing machine guns in the air, and soldiers in armoured cars patrolled the streets. The creation of defence squads of the PRD, trade unions and student and peasant organisations must be discussed seriously.

### Campaign

At the same time there must be a campaign to win new members to the party and extend the campaign of mobilisations

as the best way of combating repression. The only way in which we can put an end to repression for good is by overthrowing a PRI government and setting up a workers democracy.

If Cardenas and the PRD leaders do not act as a break, as they did in 1988, Zedillo's days would be numbered. In the first anti fraud rally in Mexico City on 22 August, the majority of the 50,000 present shouted slogans in favour of mobilisations— "not one step back!" "If there is no solution there will be revolution!" "Mobilisation!

4th in Michoacán, the PRD will hold rallies and marches heading by Cárdenas. This is the result of pressure from below. The National Democrat Convention has convened a national day of mobilisations for the 4th of September. It is necessary to extend and coordinate this movement, to avoid dispersing forces with isolated mobilisations in different provinces. One single national plan of action, culminating in a national rally in the centre of Mexico City. We must strike together on the same day and the same time throughout the



Mobilisation!"— these were the most popular slogans. Despite this, Cárdenas went no further than a vague declaration that the struggle would continue. This is not enough. In Chiapas more than a 180 peasant, student and popular organisations, together with the state leadership of the PRD and Amado Avendaño called for a plan of mobilisations from the 4th to the 14th of September.

### Civil resistance

The Zapatistas have called for "civil resistance", even Bishop Samuel Ruiz has 'blessed' it. In Veracruz, Guerrero, Michoacán, Oaxaco, Mexico State and Hidalgo, things are already moving in that direction. This is the way! On Saturday 3rd September, in Veracruz and on Sunday the

whole of the country. For a 24 hour general strike convened by the leaders of the PRD together with trade unions and democratic organisations of poor peasants, students and tenants associations! This is the only way to overthrow the PRI government, as a step forward in the struggle for the installation of a workers democracy, based upon the expropriation of the banks, big estates, multinationals and monopolies under the democratic control of the workers.

**"The perspective of a social explosion remains implicit in the situation. The bourgeoisie is preparing to use repression, as we saw in Tuxtla Gutierrez, where the police attacked anti fraud demonstrators with tear gas, or in Juchitán where the army attacked a rally, firing machine guns in the air, and soldiers in armoured cars patrolled the streets. The creation of defence squads of the PRD, trade unions, student and peasant organisations must be discussed seriously."**

**Daniel Andrade  
Mexico City  
1st September 1994**

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# Sixty years on... the *Asturian* Commune

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**On the 14th April 1931, the fall of the Monarchy and the proclamation of the Republic marked the beginning of the Spanish revolution, with the massive entry of the working class into the scene of the history. For a period of seven years, from 1931 to 1937, the masses attempted time and time again to take their destiny into their own hands. In the course of the revolution, which also saw periods of defeat and even reaction, there were many opportunities to carry out the socialist transformation of Spanish society.**

This year is the 60th anniversary of the one of the most celebrated of these episodes—the general strike of 1934, which led to the Asturian Commune.

The overthrow of the monarchy, accompanied by a mass movement of strikes and demonstrations, created favourable conditions for the socialist transformation of society. But the right wing leaders of the Socialist Party (PSOE) entered a coalition with the liberal bourgeois party, the Republicans, who ensured that they carried out a policy in the interests of the capitalists and landlords.

As a result of the disappointment of the workers, the pendulum began to swing to the right. The Socialists were forced to leave the government after the elections of 1933, and the right wing “radical” Lerroux took over. But the largest party in the new Cortes (parliament) was the

CEDA, a clerico-fascist party financed by rich businessmen and landlords and led by Gil Robles, an ultra-right demagogue whose models were Hitler and Mussolini.

At the time, Europe was faced with the brown tide of fascism. In 1933, Hitler boasted that he had come to power in Germany “without breaking a window.” The powerful organisations of the German labour movement, paralysed by their leadership, failed to resist the Nazis, although they were one million workers under arms in the defence organisations of the Social Democrats and Communists.

After the German defeat, the threat of fascist reaction in Austria roused the Austrian working class. In 1934, the Austrian Social Democracy attempted to put up an armed resistance against the clerico fascists of Dolfuss. The workers of Vienna put up a fierce resistance. Unfortunately, the Social

example of Austria and Germany. Gil Robles visited Nazi Germany and attended the Nuremburg rally. He tried to imitate the same style in his own rallies, where he was referred to as “Jefe” (“Fuehrer” in Spanish). Looking to the German experience, he was hoping to take power, like Hitler, by parliamentary means. Had he succeeded in this, there would have been fascism in Spain in 1934. Fortunately, the Spanish workers reacted in time to prevent this. The German and Austrian events provoked a ferment in the ranks of the PSOE (Spanish Socialist Party), the main party of the working class. The rank-and-file understood what would happen if the clerico fascists entered the government. The left wing of the party was determined to launch a revolutionary offensive to prevent this from happening. Largo Caballero, the general secretary of the socialist trade union, the UGT, had rejected the politics of class col-

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**Largo Caballero, the general secretary of the socialist trade union, the UGT, had rejected the politics of class collaboration after the experience of the coalition government. Under the pressure of the Socialist rank and file he moved sharply to the left. In one speech he warned: “If legality is no use to us, if it hinders our advance, then we shall bypass bourgeois democracy and proceed to the revolutionary conquest of power.”**

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Democratic leaders acted too late to prevent defeat. These events caused a wave of alarm in the Spanish working class. The reactionary Spanish bourgeoisie, terrified of the movement of the Spanish workers, were looking towards the

laboration after the experience of the coalition government. Under the pressure of the Socialist rank and file he moved sharply to the left. In one speech he warned: “If legality is no use to us, if it hinders our advance, then we shall bypass

bourgeois democracy and proceed to the revolutionary conquest of power.” Even some of the right wing Socialist leaders began to realise that it would be necessary to put up a fight to save their organisations.

Gil Robles was not impressed by the threats hurled at him from the Socialist benches in the Parliament: “You socialists,” he sneered, “will always be incapable of unleashing a revolution, because you are afraid of it. We know that with you it is all a question of words.” However, the workers took their leaders at their word and enthusiastically awaited instructions to act.

The policy of Lerroux was to move towards reaction inch by inch, starting on the parliamentary plane, like Hindenberg in Germany, who made Hitler chancellor by “legal” means. The first step was to include the CEDA in the government (after the elections, it supported Lerroux but was not formally part of the administration. In the factories, and still more on the land, the bosses, encouraged by the move to the right, launched a savage offensive against wages and conditions. They were thirsting to take revenge on the labour movement. The rise to power of the CEDA would be the final act in this drama, they thought.

### **Decisive Struggle**

At this critical point, the anarchist leaders played a criminal role. They declared that, since this was just a struggle between “politicians”, they would take no part in it. With the imminence of a decisive struggle between the classes, the anarchist CNT (the union with the biggest base among the most militant and conscious workers at that time) wrote in its newspaper in Madrid: “If today it is a struggle between fascists and Marxists for the conquest of power, nobody should be surprised if we maintain our independence, since we have never been attracted by power, nor does an electoral struggle feature in our principles and tactics.” It is a disgraceful fact that throughout the events of 1934 the anarchist CNT in most areas of the Spanish state stayed aloof from this so-called conflict between “Marxists and fascists.” This, and the vacillations of the Socialist leaders, sealed the fate of the movement.

On the 4th October 1934 the composition of the Spanish new government was made public. The clerico-fascists were given three ministers. All over Spain, the working class came out onto the streets, awaiting directives, orientation, and above all, arms from the Socialist leaders. The latter, however, confined themselves to appeals for calm and calls for a peaceful general strike. A general strike began in Madrid and other areas, but was not complete because of the strike breaking role of the CNT. Moreover, the Socialist leaders had no perspective of a serious struggle for power.

In the beginning, the forces of repression adopted a cautious attitude. But when they saw that the workers lacked leadership and resources, they went over to the offensive, using all their force to disperse the workers. Within a few days, the government had gained control of the situation in all of Spain, with the exception of Asturias, where the action of the workers acquired an insurrectionary character. There were various reasons for this.

### Proletarian

Asturian socialism traditionally had a very proletarian and militant character. This fact meant that the CNT workers tended to have a less sectarian attitude towards the POSE and the UGT (socialist trade union) in Asturias. The Asturian CNT joined a united front with the other workers' organisations under the initials UHP (Unios, Hermanos Proletarios—Unite! Proletarian Brothers). This became a symbol of the unity of the working class in the face of bourgeois aggression. Although the slogan of the Asturian Socialist leaders was the same as in the rest of the country—"peaceful general strike", the miners from the coal fields, who possessed large quantities of dynamite and knew how to use it immediately transformed the peaceful general strike into an insurrection, seizing control of the mining areas. Displaying colossal courage and audacity, the miners marched on Oviedo and Gijón, the regional capitals, uniting with the workers of these cities to defeat the government forces. With amazing speed, the insurgents took over the whole province in three days.

The capitalist state was overthrown in Asturias. In every town and village, the workers set up a revolutionary committee. In just ten days, thirty thousand workers were mobilised on

were permitted to murder and loot at will. Franco played a prominent role in this. The true number of victims will never be known, but in Gijon alone there were some 1,500 - 2,000 killed

revenge in a sweeping electoral victory of the Popular Front. Once again, Spain stood on the threshold of revolution. The ruling class responded by the fascist uprising of the 18th July.



La Revolución de Asturias

a war footing. Real power was in the hands of the revolutionary committees and the armed proletariat. The property of the capitalists was everywhere expropriated with a minimum of formalities. There was almost no bloodshed. The workers' discipline and restraint was in stark contrast to the butchery perpetrated later by the government forces.

The isolation of the Asturian Commune allowed the capitalist state to concentrate all its forces against it, and to exact a terrible revenge. The Asturian workers put up a heroic resistance. Particularly impressive was the workers capacity for improvisation—"home-made" artillery and armed cars. But finally, after fifteen days of fighting, the Communards were beaten by the government troops, who were infinitely better armed and much more numerous.

### "Two Black Years"

The repression which followed was ferocious. Entire families were wiped out. Whole villages were sacked by troops sent from Spanish Morocco who

and nearly 3,000 wounded. There were an estimated 30,000 in gaol.

Despite all this, the Spanish working class saw the Asturian Commune as practical proof that the insurrection would have triumphed if it had taken place throughout Spain. While the working class suffered a defeat in October 1934, it was a pyrrhic victory for the ruling class. Its objective had been to install a fascist regime in Spain, and in this they failed.

Nothing is worse or more demoralising than to lose without a fight. That is the reason for the demoralisation of the German working class after 1933. Although the Asturian workers were defeated they left behind a tradition of struggle. For two years, the notorious "Bienio Negro" (two black years) the workers of Spain suffered a reactionary regime, ruling with repressive methods. But the period of reaction did not last long. The wounds of the October defeat were rapidly healed.

In February 1936 the working people of Spain took their

The following day, the working class rose in Catalonia and elsewhere to sweep away the capitalist state. This was the decisive showdown between the classes, which had been prepared by the glorious example of the Asturian Commune. Leon Trotsky once wrote that the Spanish proletariat in this period was capable on making not one, but ten revolutions. The workers of Spain did everything in their power to transform society. If they did not succeed, that was not their fault, but because they lacked the necessary instrument to guarantee the success of their struggles—a revolutionary party and leadership. 60 years after the Asturian Commune, the best way to pay tribute to the thousands of workers who gave their lives in the struggle for socialism is to carry on the fight in Spain and throughout the world for the building of a revolutionary tendency capable of guaranteeing the victory of the workers class.

**Carlos Ramírez  
(Madrid)**

**Steve Davison, President of Keighley Trades Union Council, examines the lessons of the early struggle to reduce....**

# The Working Day

The efforts to shorten working hours and regulate work has been an unrelenting struggle between the working masses and the capitalist class since the dawn of capitalism in late eighteenth century Britain. The earliest years of capitalism were one of the most brutal, degrading and de-humanising periods in the whole of world history. Britain witnessed the rampant exploitation of the labourers that had been thrown off the land to work the emerging industries, particularly textiles, and of the dragooning of orphan children into the mills from the age of six. In their desire for maximum profits the emerging capitalists showed scant regard for human life as they used any source of labour and discarded it when it was tired or worn out in the same way that they used their machines.

## Marx

Marx diagnosed that the motions of capitalism involved both the lengthening of the working day and the intensification of work within the available hours. That the labourer "earns" their wage in the earliest hours of production and thereafter works for the capitalist for nothing and that profit is the unpaid work of the labourer. The capitalist understood that the greater the hours of work the greater the profit and in its infancy capital demanded all the available hours to produce its surplus. Each hour wasted was profit lost. In the period of British capitalist domination with their virtual monopoly of machinery exceptional profits were to be made and to extract the maximum the capitalists pushed everything they controlled to the limit. In a graphic passage in Capital Vol.1

Marx explained this process : "The capitalist mode of production ( essentially the production of surplus-value, the absorption of surplus-labour ), produces thus, with the extension of the working day, not only the deterioration of human labour-power by robbing it of its normal, moral and physical, conditions of development and function. It produces also the premature exhaustion and death of labour-power itself. It extends the labourers time of production during a given period by shortening this actual lifetime".(p252)

## Profits

All restrictions in the way of realising these profits were pushed aside by the capitalists. All the statutes of feudalism that regulated wages and limited the working day ( which were introduced to hold down the wages of the agricultural workers and peasants whose bargaining power was occasionally enhanced by its shortage as a result of the black

death, plagues and protracted wars ) were removed. The revolution in agricultural production and the consequent impoverishment of the rural poor created the labour surplus that capital required for its successful development.

But the capitalists first had to break the spirit of the labourers and impose their will upon them. They launched their ideological offensive against the "lazy and indolent worker". Right from the inception of capitalism the capitalist class developed a world view that they were the saviours of "fallen man" and wrapped their brutal exploitation up in the cloth of religion and moral philosophy. Official Methodism, with its deeper roots in the emerging working class communities, became the apologist for child labour. With capitalism was born the peculiar British form of hypocrisy that in later decades Parliament was to develop into an art form.

Why, Marx posed the question,

that given that labour is the source of all wealth does the capitalist treat it so badly and work it to death?

In establishing the answer the irreconcilable class differences of the worker and the capitalist are laid bare for all to see.

Marx first viewed the problem from the point of view of the capitalist.

"The time during which the labourer works, is the time during which the capitalist consumes the labour power he has purchased of him. If the labourer consumes his disposable time for himself, he robs the capitalist." (Capital Vol 1 p253)

## Commodity

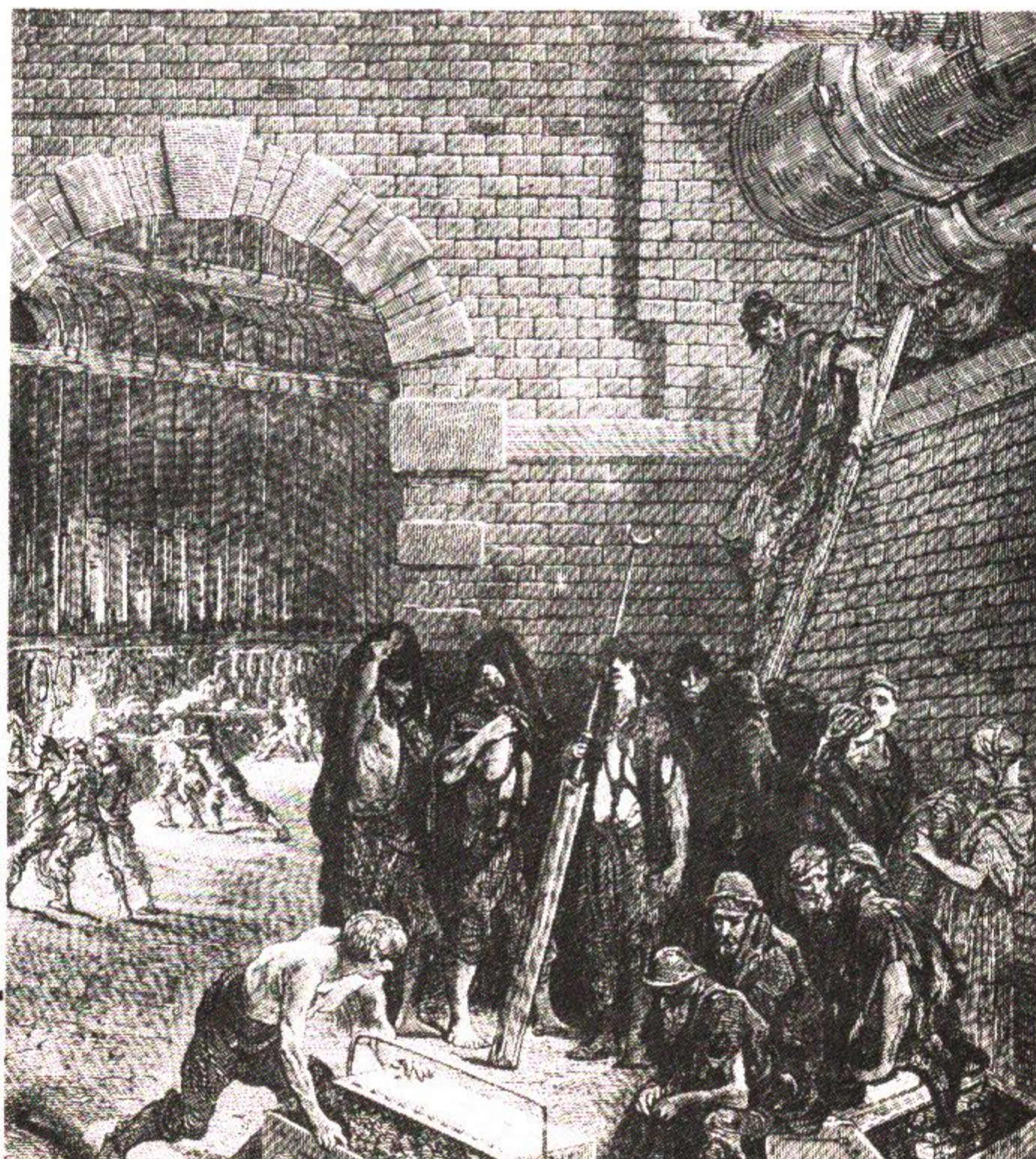
The capitalist wants to derive the most benefit from his commodity ie. labour. But the labourer views life differently. He/she doesn't want to do three days work in one day to only receive one days pay. They understand that in order to live and reproduce their own labour the following day they want one days pay for one days work. If three days work is done in one day then thirty years work is done in ten. The labourer is not only exploited but their working life expectancy is reduced dramatically. He/she is worn out quicker and therefore discarded quicker. Their life is only of use until the next generation of fitter labour has been weaned.

The logic of the capitalist's position is that all restrictions to 24 hour working have to be removed and the division between day and night in the head of the labourer must be destroyed. The capitalist demands the right to run his workplace without restriction and demands an economic, political and moral system to allow its existence and justify its brutality. The labourer on the other hand wants his working hours regulated either through statute or contract. He/she knows he/she is powerless as an individual and therefore forced to combine with others like him/her to end their competition between each other and to form a trade union to collectively negotiate terms with their employer. Just as night follows day so do trade unions develop with capitalism.

This irreconcilable view of economic relations means, says Marx,

"The creation of a normal working day is, therefore, the product of a protracted civil war, more or less dissembled, between the capitalist class and the working class".(Capital Vol 1 p283)

By the 1830's Parliament passed



legislation to restrict the hours of work of young people. They remained a dead letter as not one penny was spent on enforcing the new laws restricting the employment of children under nine, a maximum 12 hour day for young people, and preventing those aged between nine and thirteen years working nights. However the significance of the legislation was that it reversed the efforts of the merchants and capitalists over the last few centuries to deregulate working hours and to extend the working day. It reflected the changing class nature of Britain and the need of the political parties to secure the newly enfranchised middle class that raised moral objections to the employment of young people and to female labour in certain trades.

### Anticipation

More than anything it was an anticipation of the new force in society that had been moulded in the crucible of capitalist development. The working class, stunned at first by the birth of modern industry, had recovered its sense of resistance and began the period of mass trade unionism, of Chartism, and the development of an independent working class political agenda. Not yet strong enough to defeat their employers, thankful for the support given by the middle class reformers and beginning to learn about the capitalist trade cycle of boom and slump and its impact upon bargaining relationships with their employers, the workers lobbied for political change through Parliament.

"The factory hands, especially since 1838, had made the Ten Hours Bill their economic, as they had made the Charter their political election-cry". (Marx, Capital Vol.1.)

The workers also linked their demand for a minimum wage to the reduction of working hours and the MP John Fielden presented a Minimum Wage Bill before Parliament in 1834. This had massive support especially from those sections of the working class that were impoverished by the changes wrought by the factory system, though it was overwhelmingly defeated in the newly "reformed" Parliament. Richard Oastler, Tory mill-owner and self styled "King of the factory children" opposed the free-market political economists of the day with his demands for the regulation of work. In a Parliamentary select committee on this question Oastler chal-

lenged the concept of "the freedom of labour" saying ; "I would put an end to the freedom to murder, and to the freedom of employing labourers beyond their strength; I would put an end to any thing which prevents the poor man getting a good living with fair and reasonable work"....."I am sure that the present effect of free labour is poverty, distress and death...." Out of the ranks of the Weavers, at the sharp end of capitalist exploitation and at the fore-front

**"it was an anticipation of the new force in society that had been moulded in the crucible of capitalist development. The working class, stunned at first by the birth of modern industry, had recovered its sense of resistance and began the period of mass trade unionism, of Chartism, and the development of an independent working"**

of political agitation came a much clearer analysis of "free labour". A Manchester silk-weaver at the Parliamentary select committee on the plight of the Handloom weavers in 1834 stated that capital and labour could not be equally treated under the same laws :

"Capital, I can make out to be nothing else but an accumulation of the products of labour.....labour is always carried to market by those who have nothing else to keep or to sell, and who, therefore must part with it immediately.....The labour which I.....might perform this week, if I, in imitation of the capitalist, refuse to part with it....because an inadequate price is offered me for it, can I bottle it? can I lay it in salt?.....These two distinctions between the nature of labour and capital,(viz.that labour is always sold by the poor, and always bought by the rich, and that labour cannot by any possibility be stored, but must be every instant sold or every instant lost,) are sufficient to convince me that labour and capital can never with justice be subjected to the same laws...."

(Quoted from E.P.Thompson, The Making of the English Working Class p328) Further legislation was passed in 1844 and again in 1847 where the 12 hour day became fairly

uniform in the workplaces. The employers launched a vicious counter attack upon these restrictions, the Silk manufacturers claiming that "if the liberty of working children of any age for 10 hours a day were taken away, it would stop their works." Complaints to the Magistrates who heard cases of infringements of the new laws were a complete waste of time as they were the very same manufacturers that the complaint was taken out against. However the political agenda

changed when the capitalist class prepared their assault against the "Com Laws" and for Free-trade and needed the workers to help them to victory.

### Bread

"They promised therefore, not only a double sized loaf of bread, but the enactment of the Ten Hours Bill in the free-trade millennium" ( Marx Capital Vol.1.) for their support. As an act of defiance the Tory Government, the representatives of landed capital and rents, passed their own Factories Act against the "brutal" factory owners. The victory for the "Free-traders" brought into being the 10 Hours Bill with its additional protection for women and young persons though they compensated themselves with the lowering of the exploitable age of young workers to eight. The employers "rewarded" the support from the workers with a wholesale attack upon their wages, initially by a general reduction of 10%, a further reduction of 8% with the reduction of the working day to 11 hours and a further cut on the implementation of 10 hours making a total wage cut of in the region of 25%. The employers tactics were clear.....prepare a reaction amongst the workers for the repeal of the 10 Hours Act. But two years of deep recession had failed to break the spirit of the

working class and they clung on to the gain of the reduction in working hours despite the economic hardships that they endured.

After the revolutionary tide of 1848 to 1850 subsided British capitalism consolidated its position and dominated a world of ever expanding markets and ever-increasing profits.

### Natural order

Capitalism became to be seen as the natural order of things. Mass trade unionism and popular agitation collapsed and only the craft unions survived. They adopted the policies of respectability and of an accommodation with capitalism and enhanced their bargaining position by the restriction of entry into their trades and the provision of friendly benefits for their unemployed and sick members. This had an effect on the consciousness of the workers and particularly the leaders of the craft unions, the "Junta", as the Webbs termed them. Having gained from the reduction of working hours the craft workers sought further reductions to enhance their lives, like the middle-class that they tried to emulate they required additional leisure time to advance themselves and participate in the parts of civil society that they were allowed. With the development of technique and science came the popularisation of these ideas and a proliferation of magazines and books were aimed at the skilled sections of the working class like the Workingman's Friend (1850) and Cassell's Popular Educator (1852). This period also saw the big development of the Mechanics Institutes. The thirst for knowledge was met by a veritable supply of propaganda aimed at preventing a return to the ideas of Chartism, socialism and mass struggle. Individual enhancement was the way forward through hard work, abstinence and acceptance of the new order. As the century progressed the divisions between the skilled workers and the labouring masses increased. Through their trade unions the skilled workers were able to make steady advances in wages and conditions for the next three decades. Yet it was these very workers that took up the challenge to further reduce the working week and sustained this challenge throughout the rest of the nineteenth century. An expanding economy allowed the employers to make concessions to the unions should they



prove determined enough to push and fight for their demands but any challenges that threatened their system and particularly their control of the workshop they fought ruthlessly. Any reduction in working time presented such a challenge. Within a year of its formation the Amalgamated Society of Engineers, the A. S.E., was locked out by the employers in 1852 for demanding job protection including the abolition of systematic overtime. The employers lock-out defeated the union after three months of bitter struggle and the infamous "document" was imposed to take away trade union membership as a condition of employment. The members signed and continued paying their subs and the A.S.E. recovered in a couple of years. A similar fate befell the London building trades workers who in 1859 launched their strike for a four and a half-hour reduction in the working week. The employers responded with the lock-out and the document. However this time the whole weight of the trade union movement was thrown behind the London workers and the dispute ended in a compromise with the union giving up its demand for shorter hours and the employers withdrawing the document. A marker had been laid and other unions were to take up the challenge later.

The workers had also learned both from their experiences and their studies that the widespread introduction of new techniques and machinery meant that their jobs were threatened. Speaking at the Glasgow Trades Council in support of the London Building workers, John Kenny, a founder member of the Blacksmiths Society said: "that the enormous increase of scientific power, said to be equal the labour of one thousand millions of men, in Great Britain, should as a means of progressive civilisation, under proper direction, enable the working classes to obtain a share of its advantages, by a reduction of their hours of work" (Quoted in *The Blacksmiths History*, Angela Tuckett.)

### Struggle

In 1866 The Blacksmiths launched their own struggle for the nine hour day in conjunction with the Iron founders and the Engineers in Scotland. Within weeks the employers declared "a Lock-out of the Iron Trades from Glasgow to Greenock." After thirteen weeks the dispute ended with the workers securing a reduction of hours from 57 to 54 but with the

loss of the three hours pay. The manner in which the request for shorter hours was presented reflects faithfully the thinking of the craft unions in this period and their friends in the Nine Hours League: "We make this request solely on the grounds that modern science and art has so facilitated the productive powers of labour that the proposed reduction of hours seem to follow as a natural result; and secondly, on the impetus it is calculated to give to social and moral improvement." (Ibid)

### Craft unions

The price that the craft unions demanded for the acceptance of capitalism was a share in the benefits. Two years later in 1867 the Second Reform Act was passed enfranchising the majority of workers in the towns. In 1871 the Sunderland engineers struck for the nine hour day without informing their union executive (the A.S.E.) of their intentions and in three weeks forced the employers to concede their demands. The Newcastle engineers followed suit and struck for five months before securing victory as the employers put up a rearguard action to stop the spread of this movement. By the end of the year the 54 hour week was the norm in engineering across all sections of the workforce, skilled and unskilled alike. This breakthrough paved the way for similar working hours in other trades.

As the trade cycle went into recession in the last years of the 1870's the engineering employers posted notices in the workplace stating their intention of increasing the working hours. Failure to reach any agreement at national level from the leaders of the A.S.E., who declared "We believe that we echo the sentiments of the engineers of Britain when we say that we value the Nine Hour System so highly that we will venture any sacrifice to maintain it.....In the history of unions and industries as in the lives of individuals and nations, there are times when struggle is sacred and resistance a duty". (Quoted in Jeffreys, *The Story of the Engineers*.) Nine Hours Maintenance Leagues were formed throughout the country. A.S.E. members levied themselves seven shillings each during 1879 to sustain their striking members as the battle to maintain the shorter hours took place at district level. Unemployment was the worst ever experienced by the A.S.E.

and they maintained their members on 10 shillings a week during the bitter winter of 1879. Yet despite this and the serious drain on the society's funds, almost as much had been spent on strikes as the whole of the previous 26 years, the members held firm and one by one the employers took down their notices. The shorter working week had been successfully defended.

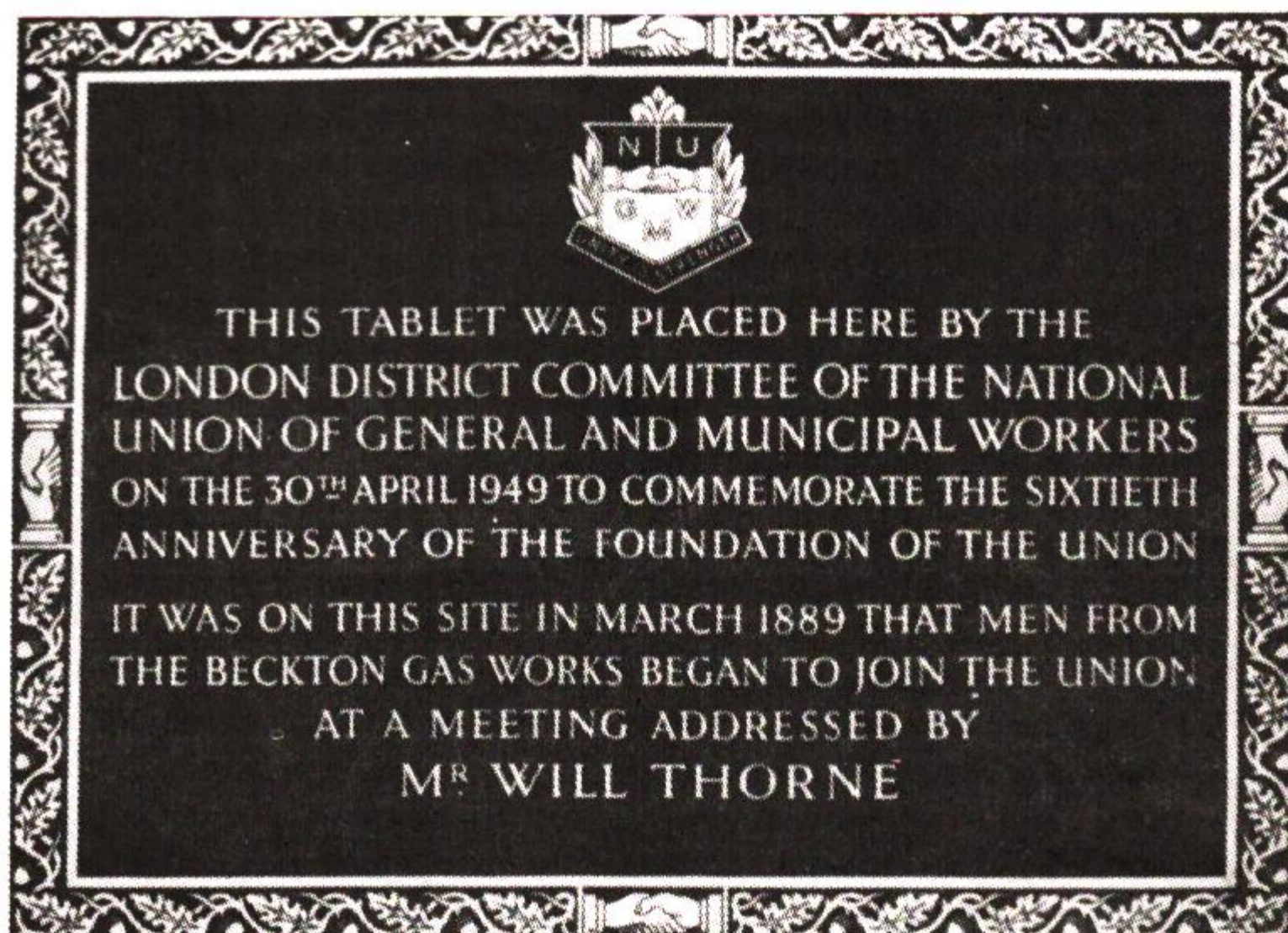
Almost one hundred years of struggle had seen the achievement of the nine-hour day for the majority of skilled and organised workers. However for the unorganised, unskilled labourers there had been very little advance from the worst excesses of early capitalism. Their time was still to come in the explosive class struggles of the late 1880's with the birth of the Second International and the struggle for the eight hour day. By this stage capitalism had entered a new phase, that of Imperialism and the struggle for world markets with other capitalist nations, notably France, Germany and the U.S.A. The seeds were already been sown for the carnage of the first Imperialist war of 1914-18. Marx had observed that capitalism not only sought to lengthen the working day but also to increase the intensification of the available working hours. The introduction of machinery had initially increased the length of the working day but had provoked the reaction of the working class to put limits on this through the struggle for the shorter working day. This had the effect of making the capitalist look to utilise the available working hours better. Whilst writing *Capital*, Marx observed that the the economic

development of the period 1848 to the mid 1860's had far surpassed even the rapid advance made between 1833 and 1847 despite operating under the restriction of the 10 hour day whilst the latter period operating at least a 12 hour day, and that period had far outstripped the previous half century of unrestricted hours. Clearly it wasn't just the number of hours worked that produced profit and that there was a cause and effect of the class struggle.

"There cannot be the slightest doubt that the tendency that urges capital, so soon as a prolongation of the hours of labour is once for all forbidden, to compensate itself, by a systematic heightening of the intensity of labour, and to convert every improvement in machinery into a more perfect means of exhausting the workman, must soon lead to a state of things in which a reduction of the hours of labour will again be inevitable." (*Capital Vol 1 p393*)

### Factories

Though industrialisation and the factory system went on advancing nevertheless for the mass of the workers without trade union protection, their sweated labour was the principal method of maximising profits for the employers. Casualisation was rife particularly in the transport industry and agriculture. Increased industrialisation brought new methods of production and with it de-skilling. The trade cycle brought booms of intensification of work followed by slumps of desperate poverty. The sons and daughters of the revolutionary Chartists lay prostrate before capitalism unable to



effectively fight back, virtually abandoned by the trade unions and the Liberal -Radical politicians. This cleared the ground for Socialist activity amongst the masses. But for years socialist agitation seemed to lead to nothing. The very conditions of life, the casualisation of work for millions, hire and fire by the season or the tide, coupled with massive hours when in work, meant that the struggle to survive was paramount. There was no time for political activity when working because of the excessive hours and no money to participate in society when out of work. The free-market ruled and the workers without organisation were helpless. Many attempts were made to organise but they were generally short-lived. Emigration seemed a better bet! The breakthrough came at the Beckton Gasworks in London. The gasworkers normal shift was twelve hours, and work was hard. Will Thorne, a member of the 'Marxist' Social Democratic Federation, called a meeting of London Gasworkers to form a union and to demand the Eight Hour Day. 3,000 workers joined immediately and within a month the Gasworkers and General Labourers Union (the fore-runner of the modern GMB) had 20,000 members.

### Eight Hour day

More importantly they had secured the Eight Hour Day, without a strike. Completely unprepared, used to the workers grumbling, making representations, but not ready for the militant solidarity that would have shut down all the gas works in London, the employers caved-in. One victory lit a path to the mass explosion of unskilled trade unionism that is now known as "New Unionism".

The gasworkers victory spread to the Docks, to transport in general, to the Railways and to the unskilled workers in manufacturing. The banners of the "new" unions were emblazed with slogans for an end to the exploitation of labour.

The 1880's saw the birth throughout Europe of Socialist Parties, generally modelled on the German party that was avowedly Marxist. Across the Atlantic ocean huge capitalist development was forming a mighty working class in America. As in Britain the trade unions catered for only the highly skilled and were exclusive in membership and conservative in outlook. The struggle to organise the unskilled was just as

difficult especially as wave after wave of immigration brought new sources of labour for the employers and new sources of strike-breakers.

### Strikes

Several successful strikes, mainly amongst the railway workers, led by the Knights of Labour, led to a growth of confidence amongst the workers and saw an expansion of union membership. On the 1st May 1886 the American workers launched an all American General strike for the Eight Hour Day in which 350,000 participated. Chicago was the storm centre of the strike and the mass demonstrations panicked the bourgeois who resorted to provocation. An unexplained bomb exploded at a demonstration in the Haymarket in Chicago and the authorities used this as a

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pretext to arrest the strike leaders who they later executed.

The universal celebration of May Day commemorates the brutal crime against organised labour carried out by "free-enterprise", martyrs in the struggle against the exploitation of labour.

In 1889 at its first congress the Second (Socialist) International launched its call for the legal eight hour day and for mass demonstrations to support this to be held on May 1st 1890. Millions of workers answered the call of the International. Half a million workers marched through London to Hyde Park. In reality this was two rallies back to back as there was disagreement as to the demand for a legal restriction of eight hours or for a reduction in the working week.

This same debate has taken place throughout the years in the British Labour movement as to whether there should be legislation or whether each group of workers should negotiate the best agreement for their industry, ie. the sovereignty of collective bargaining over political change. Eleanor Marx was a leading organiser of the event and her

speech that day has been widely quoted since. It was in the tradition of her father and Engels that she drew the lessons of the struggle for the 10 hour bill, of the Chartists, of the need for independent working class organisation and representation and above all of the supremacy of political over trade union demands.

The "legal" eight hour day gathered the most supporters that day and its exponents went to to win their position at the TUC Congress that year in the teeth of opposition from the old guard, where they also secured the resignation of Henry Broadhurst (who epitomised the old guard) from the position of secretary of the Parliamentary Committee.

The demand for the "legal eight hour day" was a central demand of the socialists and the newly

organised workers and it met with the bitterest opposition from the old guard and their craft unions. In 1887 the TUC was pushed into calling a referendum of affiliates as to whether they favoured the demand for an eight hour day and as to whether it should be by legal enactment.

### Ironfounders

The Parliamentary committee made its opposition very clear and this was echoed by the affiliated unions executives. The statement of the Friendly Society of Ironfounders (the forerunner of the Foundry workers union) was fairly typical of the time :

"Your Executive Committee are of the opinion that further to reduce the working hours in this country, without a similar reduction being made by other countries, would be offering a premium to our greatest rivals to take away our foreign trade.....Your Executive Committee does not approve of any Parliamentary interference in the regulation of working hours."  
(Quoted in *The Foundry Workers*, Fryth & Collins)

The foundry workers and the other craft workers took the advice of their executives and voted against. But two years later they had reversed their decision after the new unionists had won the day at the TUC. Trade union membership had increased from 860,000 to 2million in 1889/90 and this spread to the craft unions whose membership rose and whose activists came under the influence of the new (socialist) ideas. Whilst many of the gains of the new unionism were lost in the next period it had nevertheless marked a turning point in the affairs of the working class. socialism was back on the agenda with the eight hour day emblazoned on their banners.

### Consciousness

Revolutionary Socialists were very clear that in order to develop the political consciousness and activity of an independent working class movement that the workers had to be freed from the long hours of tedious and back-breaking work. Otherwise they would be dependant upon other sections of society to lead their struggles and campaign on their behalf. The act of social liberation had to be a conscious one and that at the very least demanded a significant involvement of the workers in political activity. As such the struggle for shorter working hours was a step in the direction of the socialist revolution. Eleanor Marx's speech summed up the energy of the occasion and the tasks ahead : "I am speaking this afternoon not only as a Trade Unionist, but as a Socialist. Socialists believe that the eight hour's day is the first and most immediate step to be taken, and we aim at a time when there will no longer be one class supporting two others, but the unemployed both at the top and at the bottom of society will be got rid of. This is not the end but only the beginning of the struggle: it is not enough to come here to demonstrate in favour of an eight hour's day. We must not be like some Christians who sin for six days and go to church on the seventh, but we must speak for the cause daily, and make men, and especially the women that we meet, come into the ranks to help us.

"Rise like lions after slumber  
In unvanquishable number,  
Shake your chains to earth like dew  
Which in sleep had fallen on you -  
Ye are many - they are few."



## the *intelligent* **MACHINE?**

Remember the days when the "experts" promised us a glorious vista of the future when, on the basis of applied science and technology, the burden of work would be done away with, hours reduced and the central problem of society would be what to do with our leisure time: the "white heat of technological development", the stuff of science fiction! And that's precisely where these promises have stayed for most people in the world - fiction. Millions unemployed in the advanced capitalist countries and two thirds of the world's population, in the "under-developed" world, barely surviving. That is reality.

Every day now we hear more and more grand talk of the technological revolution and how it will dramatically change all our lives. And while capitalism has 'revolutionised' science and technique in the past few decades, for most people this does not mean liberation from toil and drudgery, but the very opposite. Computers, new communication technologies and robotics do represent a genuine technological revolution, but in the hands of the capitalists they are used to increase the level of exploitation of the workforce and lengthen the working day.

### Technology

The increase in the productivity of labour made possible by the introduction of new technology is achieved by a heavy initial outlay on costly machinery. The only way to ensure a greater return on this outlay, is to make the machinery work non-stop, day and night, with no interruptions, while simultaneously squeezing every drop of surplus value from the worker, both by the lengthening of the working day

through overtime, the abolition of tea-breaks etc. and by enormously increasing the intensity of labour by "speed ups", productivity "deals" and all kinds of pressure.

The introduction of "robots" could potentially revolutionise industry and dramatically alter the way we live. In the hands of the capitalists, however, their application has been slow and uneven. There are around 500,000 "industrial robots" in the world - but 300,000 of them are in Japan. Rather than reducing unemployment, it has reduced employment.

### Car plants

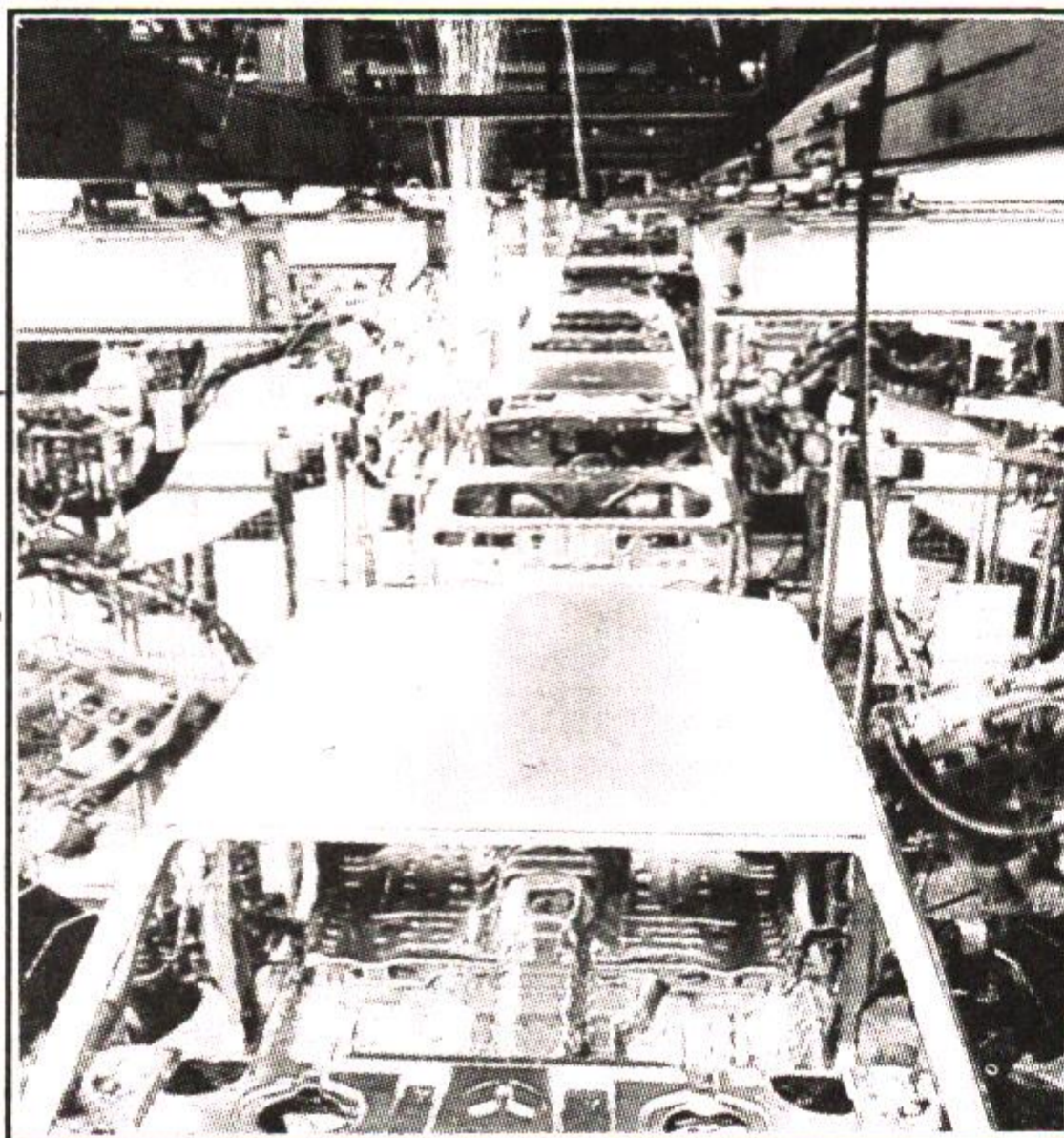
The introduction of robots into a factory means that the number of workers in that factory will be drastically reduced, while the

productivity of those who remain, vastly enhanced. In France, for example, the introduction of robots and other new technology into Peugeot and Citroen car plants has led to a reduction of 200,000 in the workforce over the last 12 years, while productivity has increased by 12% in the same time.

In the hands of the capitalists new technology has turned into a means of attacking the working class. Under a socialist plan of production, on the other hand, with the democratic involvement of workers at all levels, we could have a genuine transformation of the life of society - the working

week could immediately be reduced to a four day week, of 32 hours, while at the same time output could be dramatically increased both in quantity and quality. This is precisely the material basis for socialism - a new and qualitatively higher form of society.

Recent research in America and Japan into robotics show more than ever before their enormous potential for society. Up until now researchers into robotics and artificial intelligence have concentrated on developing machines that are preprogrammed to perform tasks - whether that be a task on the production line or some massive computational task in scientific research. This approach was partly a result of technological constraints, up until now the only



type of computation available has been high speed serial processing, and partly due to the success researchers have had in this field already.

But now some researchers are trying to develop an "intelligent" robot. The development of a new and powerful computing mode, known as "massive parallel

processing", has set research off in a new direction. Interestingly for Marxists, all the researchers agree that such "intelligent" robots must be "embodied", that is a machine which will walk, see and, most importantly, touch and manipulate with a set of hands. In other words "intelligence" will not be programmed into a machine but gained through working, problem solving and interacting with humans and other "intelligent" robots.

A research team at the Artificial Intelligence Laboratory at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology are developing an "intelligent" robot called "Cog." No one else has attempted to produce a robot with high level cognition and fine manipulative skills. If successful, a new generation of robots could be built that would be able to do even enormously complex tasks which up till now have been the preserve of humans and potentially provide the basis for an enormous liberation of mankind from the drudgery of work.

### Basic jobs

At Tokyo's Waseda University, researchers have built a robot WABOT-2 which can recognise music both seen and heard, and play the piano to concert standard. But the long term aim of the project is to build "intelligent" machines that can function in the human world, doing "basic" jobs and interacting with people. At present however the robot's 80 microprocessors can solve only the specific "problem" of learning and playing music. More complex parallel processing is needed for the robot to learn and act at a more general level.

The research is still at the embryonic stage, but it shows the massive potential of applying robot technology to virtually every field of industry and in society generally. These new technologies promise a great deal - but they can only be utilised for the benefit of the whole of society under a socialist planned economy. Throughout history the mass of humanity has been deprived of access to free time, education and culture. With production, science and technique planned and organised democratically by the working class this would no longer be the case.

**Alaistair Wilson**

# 1974-79..... Trade Unions *Under* Labour Government

1974 marked a decisive turning point. The post war economic upswing, which had begun in 1947, had ended with a simultaneous world crisis. It ushered in a new period of political, social and industrial upheaval in the capitalist countries. In Britain, after a wave of unprecedented industrial struggle, the miners' strike of February 1974 brought down the Heath government. Portugal was rocked by a revolutionary movement of workers, soldiers, sailors

and peasants which swept away the dictatorship of Caetano. In Southern Africa, the events in Portugal resulted in the overthrow of capitalism and landlordism in Angola and Mozambique. Capitalism and landlordism was also overthrown in Ethiopia beginning with the removal of Haile Selassie. In Spain, the tottering Franco regime was met with growing opposition and strikes. The Greek Junta was also overthrown producing a prolonged pre-revolutionary

situation. It was the most disturbed period faced by capitalism since the inter-war period.

The strategists of capital, terrified by these events, made preparations for civil war. The Gladio Conspiracy revealed secret military plans for the instalment of military police dictatorships throughout Europe. In Britain, the question of a military 'solution' was not only discussed in the smoke-filled clubs and boardrooms of big business, but debated openly in the quality press. *The Times* carried a series of articles on contingencies in face of a general strike situation, drawing on the experiences such as the Kapp putsch in Germany in 1920. This was not a pleasant analogy. General Kapp had marched into Berlin but was met with a general strike. Unable to find a stenographer to take down his decrees he marched out of the capital with his tail between his legs. The power of the unions was demonstrated in practise a few months later. In May 1974 there was a general strike in Northern Ireland, called by the Ulster Workers' Council against the 'power-sharing' Executive. Although a reactionary strike, it nevertheless showed the power of organised Labour. The gov-

ernment mobilised troops on a large scale to break the strike, but after a fortnight it was forced to back down, demonstrating how ineffective military intervention was in any large-scale stoppage.

Nevertheless, in 1972, following the miners' strike, the Tories established the secret Civil Contingencies Unit, the government's anti-strike system. This had links with the military tops who had been drawn increasingly into strike-breaking activities. At this time, the military brass, together with high ranking civil servants, businessmen and politicians in their exclusive clubs were in heated discussions about the dangers of revolution at home. To their dismay, left-wingers had come to power in the unions and Labour Party. General Sir Frank Kitson became the focal point for the military 'option'. In his book, *Low Intensity Operations* he argued that the main role of the British army was at home to deal with increasing social disorder. According to him, "If a genuine and serious grievance arose, such as might result from a significant drop in the standard of living, all those who now dissipate their protest over a wide variety of causes might concentrate their efforts and produce a situation which was beyond the power of the police to handle. Should this happen the army would be required to restore the position rapidly." The Tory Minister of State for Defence, Lord Balniel, stated in the Commons that the book "is regarded as being of valuable assistance to troops."

## Paramilitary

With the collapse of the Heath government, it emerged that 'fairly senior' army officers had been discussing some form of military intervention. Lord Carver, Chief of the Defence Staff in 1974, recalled six years later that he personally intervened "to make certain nobody was so stupid as to go around saying those things." Carver is also reported to have used his influence to prevent army officers establishing right-wing paramilitary organisations. (See Steve Peak, *Troops in Strikes*, p122).



The industrial battles of the early 1970s resulted in a number of important victories for the working class. Real take-home pay rose by 3.5% a year between 1970 and 1973, four times the rate achieved under the 1964-70 Labour government. The struggle against the anti-union laws and the miners' strikes in particular, had given rise to increased self-confidence. This bred a semi-syndicalist mood amongst sections of militant trade unionists - that trade union struggle was sufficient in dealing with the attacks of the Tories. The fall of the Heath government at the hands of the miners reinforced this mood. However, a decisive section of workers looked to the Labour Party to replace the Tories and answer its problems. In these years, reflected the mood on the industrial front, the

by the combined opposition. But this campaign of sabotage temporarily fell into the sand. The February 1974 election Labour manifesto, although watered down compared to Conference policy, indicated its intention to "bring about a fundamental and irreversible shift in the balance of power and wealth in favour of working people and their families." Dennis Healey, the new Chancellor, threatened to "squeeze the rich till the pips squeaked". Under the circumstances, despite being a minority Labour government, there were high expectations from the working class. The new intake of Labour MPs was to the left - a majority joining the Tribune Group. In fact, Tribune had doubled in size compared to 1964-70. Despite a majority of right wingers in the new Wilson

bide their time. Given Labour's minority position, Wilson was forced to go for a second election in October in an attempt to bolster his position. This gave Labour a small overall majority.

### World Recession

Throughout 1974, however, industrial production declined in face of world recession. Unemployment began to soar towards the million mark. Inflation also rose to nearly 20%. To maintain living standards, wage rises by the end of 1974 reached 25.4%. Pre-tax profits fell from 7.2% in 1973 to 4% a year later and falling. Big business acted to force the Labour government to change course and introduce cuts. According to the Financial Times, "the CBI told Mr. Wilson that there was absolutely no room for compromise or negotiation about further state intervention in industry and further nationalisation". (16th October). Two days before the November Budget, the Director General of the CBI sent Wilson an open letter, arguing that "price control, profit limitations and socialist threats would ensure that the economic crisis ... could bring the country down within a year". A few days after the October election, big business began a 'strike of capital', with the announcement by Pilkingtons that their £150m investment would be shelved "until such time as essential changes are made in taxation and price control". As in October 1964, Wilson was again faced with the blackmail of Britain's rul-

However, the 'left' on the TUC General Council, according to their own words, looked over the abyss, did not like what they saw, and retreated. These 'left' trade union leaders had built up a great deal of good will and support because of the role they played between 1968-74. They used this authority to give full backing to the Labour government, which had now surrendered to the blackmail of the monopolies. In September the TUC, with the full backing of the 'lefts' Scanlon and Jones, accepted a Social Contract with the government, which meant wage restraint. The Labour government, in turn, leaned upon the trade union leadership to deliver the support of the rank and file for its policies. The November 1974 Budget proved a watershed. Measures were announced to increase profitability: reduction of corporation tax, slacker price controls, and loans for industry. The Chancellor, Dennis Healey, announced restrictions on public expenditure to 2% growth per year for the next four years.

### Wage Restraint

At first the TUC recommendations on wages were vague. In fact real wages between April and December 1974 grew by 8%. However, by the Spring of 1975, with the acceleration of inflation, real take-home pay began to fall. By June 1975 it was 9% lower than December 1974. It was now that a sterling crisis was used to turn policy sharply to the right. Healey announced that inflation, which was around 30%, would be reduced to 10% by the next wage round and down to single figures by the end of 1976. Wage restraint was announced, with increases being held to 10%. This policy would be on a voluntary basis with the TUC, or a statutory limit imposed if not. The TUC immediately readily acquiesced, and published guidelines for 'voluntary income restraint' with a £6 limit on all settlements prior to August 1976. Despite being a cut in real wages, the £6 limit was agreed at the TUC and Labour party Conferences. The Labour movement has an enormous loyalty to its leaders. The programme of Wilson and Callaghan was taken on trust. When these 'leaders' demanded sacrifices in order to overcome 'the legacy left by the Tories' this was accepted by the



Labour Party had moved to the left. Workers campaigned in the trade unions and constituency parties for real socialist policies. In October 1973, the Party Conference endorsed a programme which included the nationalisation of the top 25 monopolies.

### Coalition

Despite the defeat of the Tories in the general election, discussions took place between Heath and the leader of the Liberals, Jeremy Thorpe, in an attempt to cobble some kind of coalition and keep Labour out. This conspiracy fell to dust when the Liberal HQ was inundated with 3,000 telegrams of opposition. So Labour came to power as a minority government. The capitalists had to accept this as they were in complete disarray. But, within a short space of time a campaign was launched for a coalition government, in the likelihood of Labour being defeated

government, both Foot and Benn were included in the Cabinet, at the Department of Employment and Industry respectively. The first job of the Labour government was to settle with the miners, who were awarded increases ranging from 22 - 32%. Within a week of the election industry was back to five-day working.

Within a short period, the Labour government introduced a series of reforms: it raised pensions, increased food and rent subsidies, cut VAT, and encouraged council house building. It repealed the Industrial Relations Act, abolished the Pay Board and scrapped Heath's statutory incomes policy. The Housing Finance Act was repealed and a rent freeze introduced. Gift and wealth taxes were brought in. This produced a honeymoon period for the government. But for the capitalists it was a source of irritation. They were forced to

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**As in October 1964, Wilson was again faced with the blackmail of Britain's ruling class. The Labour Government had a choice: either capitulate to this pressure or take measures against capitalism.**

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ing class. The Labour government had a choice: either capitulate to this pressure or take measures against capitalism. There was no middle road. The same choice faced the trade union leaders.

workers. The grass roots of the Labour movement, without any alternative being offered by the 'left', accepted these sacrifices as the price to be paid for a Labour government.

### Phase Two

However, Phase 1 was followed by Phase 2. Healey announced in his April 1976 Budget a reduction in income tax liabilities if the TUC agreed to limit wage rises to 3%. The TUC offered its own voluntary 5% norm with a lower limit of £2.50 and upper limit of £4. This policy was adopted by 17:1 majority at a special TUC



conference. Between 1974 and 1977 the Labour government had presided over a larger fall in real wages than during any comparable period in British history! The sterling crisis of early 1976 saw the nose dive of the pound in relation to the dollar. By the summer, the government was looking for loans to prop up the pound. By the Autumn an IMF standby loan was exhausted, and a further loan would only be granted if the government accepted a £3 billion cut in public expenditure over two years. This was accepted by the Cabinet. Yet it proved to be the thin edge of the wedge with further cuts in public expenditure and the introduction of cash limits and 'under-spending'. Tony Crosland told Labour's Conference that "the party was over". In all, public expenditure was reduced by an estimated £8 billion.

### State Department

There were clear political motives behind the IMF loans, as were later revealed by William Rogers from the US State Department who was involved in the negotiations: "As I saw it, it was a choice between Britain remaining in the liberal

*financial system of the West as opposed to a radical change of course because we were concerned about Tony Benn precipitating a policy decision by Britain to turn its back on the IMF. I think if that had happened the whole system would have begun to come apart... it would have had great political consequences. So we tended to see it in cosmic terms.*" (Quoted in 'The British Economic Disaster' by Glyn and Harrison). The imperialist powers looked with dread at the Labour government, given its links with the unions and the presence of a left wing inside the party. They feared that under pressure the Labour government could take measures against their interests.

The cuts in public expenditure was followed by the introduction of Phase Three of the wages policy. This stipulated a 10% ceiling on pay. It proved to be the last straw. The organised working class had moved into opposition to further wage restraint. This was reflected at the September TUC, which voted to reject the pay policy and demanded an immediate return to free collective bargaining. In November, 80,000 trade unionists lobbied Parliament against the government's anti-working class policies. The attempt to impose a wage limit in the public sector tended to push sections who were not regarded as militant into action. Although strikes were limited in the first period of the Labour government, things begun to come to a head towards the end of 1977 with the Fire Brigades strike.

In early November 1977 a special conference of the FBU voted to take action (against the wishes of the executive council) in pursuit of a 30% rise and a reduction in hours from 48 to 42. It was to begin the first ever national fire brigades strike. The action remained solid for over two months, despite the use of troops to break the strike. Merlyn Rees, the Home Secretary, ordered in over 20,000 ill-

equipped troops, using Green Goddesses - ex-civil defence machines built in the 1950s. Despite Rees's own admission that "there remains serious risk of loss of life and damage to property", the over-riding principle was to maintain the pay policy. There was wide-spread sympathy for the strikers, but the TUC refused to back the dispute. At a special conference in January 1978, 70% of delegates voted to accept an immediate 10% offer, with further increases over the following two years, and an eventual reduction in hours to 42. The strike served to open up the dam.

### Winter of Discontent

The dispute marked the end for the government's wage restraint, and opened up a period known as the 'Winter of Discontent'. It had been preceded by the announcement of Callaghan that the government was set to embark upon Phase Five with a 5% pay ceiling beginning in August 1978. This was rejected by the TUC, and between October 1978 and March 1979 some 10 million working days were lost through industrial action. The most decisive strike was at Fords, where after seven weeks, workers won a 17% increase. During the dispute, the Labour Party Conference voted against the 5% pay policy - a decisive defeat for the government, which signalled an important shift to the left within the

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**The strike wave of 1978-79 was a product of the wage restraint of 1974-77. Workers were no longer prepared to see their living standards fall further.**

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unions and Labour Party. It was out of these experiences of a Labour government attempting to operate within the confines of capitalism, that laid the basis for the growth of the left in the next period. Local authority manual

workers also took widespread industrial action in support of their wage claim, beginning with a major one-day strike on 22 January 1979. Talks finally broke down at the end of January and 500,000 workers took action in the first week of February. The workers were subjected to a smear campaign

in the press, but held out until a revised offer of 9% was made at the end of the month. Again, 185,000 TGWU lorry drivers won their first national strike for 50 years through effective picketing. Thatcher, horrified at the power of the strikers' organisation, declared in the Commons: "Now we find that the place is practically being run by strikers' committees... They are 'allowing' access to food. They are 'allowing' certain lorries to go through... They have no right to prevent them from going through."

Other sections, like the ambulance workers also took action for a two-thirds increase. Troops were brought in and the government made an improved offer of 9% plus the promise of pay comparability, on which basis the strike was called off. The struggle of these low paid workers has brought them into the unions in droves. Membership of NUPE, for instance, grew from 256,000 in 1968 to 693,000 ten years later! Total union membership in 1979 reached the unprecedented level of 13.3 million or 55% of the workforce. The strike wave of 1978-79 was a product of the wage restraint of 1974-77. Workers were no longer prepared to see their living standards fall further. In May 1979, the general election saw the defeat of Labour and the coming to power of the Thatcher government. The pundits and their shadows in the Labour movement blamed the 'Winter of Discontent' for the defeat. But it was not the struggle of millions of working people for decent pay that caused the defeat, but the growing disillusionment of workers with the counter-reforms of the Callaghan government. It was the same process that took place in 1970. The coming to power of Thatcher was to see a new challenge to organised Labour. The strategy of the Tories was to break the power of the unions and to seek revenge for the humiliations of the past. It proved to be the greatest test for the trade union movement.

## Rob Sewell

**NEXT ISSUE: TRADE UNIONS UNDER THE TORIES**  
*This will be the concluding part in the series.*

# The Great British Tradition

By Beatrice Windsor

## Workers join the Sects

Periods of revolutionary struggle are preceded by an explosion of new ideas, thoughts and philosophies. The ideas of the Great Philosophers laid the foundation for the French Revolution and the American War of Independence. The work of the Young Hegelians spurred on the revolutionaries of 1848. And the momentous writings of Marx and Engels, and later Lenin and Trotsky were the ideological bedrock of the workers' revolutions of the 20th Century.

So too before the English Civil War, 17th century England was gripped by revolutionary new thoughts. This took a religious form, which was the only ideological forum open to society at the time.

But the arguments over God's intentions thinly disguised the class struggle that was about to ensue.

The Monarchy clung onto Catholicism, which gave a mystical justification for their absolutist role, and helped with alliances with fellow European despots.

Many Lords and wealthy merchants who had accommodated the monarchy were Anglicans, the 'official' Church set up by Henry VIII which was merely a national version of the Roman Catholic Church, but one which did not have to bow to Rome, a foreign power.

The Christianity of the new merchants and embryonic capitalists however, reflected their revolutionary aspirations. They were Puritans, in the main being Presbyterians. They illustrated their opposition to the theoretical straight jacket imposed by the Church Establishment - of the divine right of the Monarchy and Lords to rule - by their abstention from the opulence and wealth of the Catholic and Anglican churches.

The hidden agenda to their obsession in denouncing 'Popish' practices and their austere way of life, was to clear the way for a new type of society; one based on property, trade, commodities and the money system. The King, his followers, not to mention the Whore of Babylon himself, stood in their way to achieve this. As Engels put it in *Socialism: Utopian and Scientific*, "...where the kingdom of God was Republicanised, could the kingdoms of this world remain subject to monarchs, bishops and lords?"

Alongside the Presbyterians were many smaller religious groups, known as Independents, Sects or Sectaries. They drew their support from the Yeomanry, Guild craftsmen and the new breed that sold their labour for money. They were much more forthright in their ideas.

The Presbyterians, while denouncing inherited privilege, said 'acquired wealth' was a sign of divine favour. The Sects on the other hand said God took no heed of class or social position, and that *all* were equal.

Although the Presbyterian merchant class rested on the Independents for support, class antagonisms were beginning to break out even at this early stage, between the fledgling bourgeoisie and the embryonic 'working class'.

Two Sects particularly feared were the Freethinkers and the Unitarians. Their speculations, as historian A L Morton puts it, "...threatened the ideological foundations of the new no less than the old order." Even at this very early stage, where 'workers' came together, they were groping towards communistic ideas.

Next month: the Levellers



## JACK LONDON'S DEFINITION OF A SCAB

"After God had finished the rattlesnake, the toad and the vampire, he had some awful substance left with which he made a Scab."

"A Scab is a two-legged animal with a cork-screw soul, a water-logged brain, a combination backbone of jelly and glue. Where others have a heart, he carries a tumour of rotten principles."

"When a scab comes down the street, men turn their backs, the angels weep in heaven, and the devil shuts the gates of Hell to keep him out."

"No man has a right to scab so long as there is a pool of water to drown his carcass in, or a rope long enough to hang his body with. Judas Iscariot was a gentleman compared with a Scab, for after betraying his master he had character enough to hang himself. A Scab has not."

"Esau sold his birthright for a mess of pottage. Judas Iscariot sold his saviour for 30 pieces of silver. Benedict Arnold sold his country for the promise of a commission in the British Army. The modern strike-breaker sells his birthright, his country, his wife, his children and his fellow-men for an unfilled promise from his employer."

"Esau was a traitor to himself; Judas Iscariot was a traitor to his God; Benedict Arnold was a traitor to his country. A STRIKE-BREAKER IS A TRAITOR to his God, his country, his wife, his family and his class. A REAL MAN NEVER BECOMES A STRIKE-BREAKER...."

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## APPEAL

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*The Marxist voice of the labour movement*

### Spread the action!

# Tubeworkers open second front

## Strikes on London Underground: Maximum Support Needed!

The positive result of more than 2 to 1 in the ballot of RMT members on London Underground (LUL) for strike action represents an important step forward in the fight against the attacks of the management. The union leadership should now mobilise for the maximum strike action. A series of one day strikes have been called starting on 30th September.

London Underground have consistently sought over the last year to ignore standard negotiating procedures and act by implementation without consultation. We said 'no' to penalty fares—they implemented it. We said 'no' to part time staff taking over full time jobs—management implemented it on certain stations and have plans to spread part time working over the whole underground. They have shown a complete disregard for the basic rights of the staff and have treated the worker's elected representatives with contempt. The workers of the Underground have reached the point where they feel that enough is enough.

The management have offered just 0.5% increase on top of the original 2% which represents just £4 extra per month before tax. This has already been swallowed up by the rise in interest rates and the resulting increase in mortgage payments. When you consider the increases in staff productivity on the one

hand and the increases in LUL's operating profits (up 46% in 1993/94) on the other, then it is clear that this offer is nothing short of a disgrace. It is worth comparing LUL's treatment of its employees with the pay increases the directors awarded themselves—in one case 22.7%!



It is important to make the point that this is not just a fight about wages—that is simply the straw that broke the camel's back. Either we make a stand now or we will face 1000 job cuts on the back of the Tory government's cut of £48 million pounds worth of expenditure by LUL next April. There has already been a loss

of over 5000 jobs. We will also be open to attack from the threat of contracting out which is already being raised on the Northern line. The government's aim is to sell off London Underground piecemeal with lucrative contracts to run stations, depots and trains using cheap non-union staff. They see London Underground as a source of cheap profits not as a service to the people of London. We have seen what has happened to the bus workers and are determined not to let it happen to us.

The bravery of the signal workers in taking on Railtrack has given confidence to a lot of other railway workers to take action. The mood is there on the Underground for a fight in order to strengthen our hand for the struggles to come. Given the capitulation of the ASLEF leadership, we must make a direct appeal to ASLEF members for support. Joint meetings should be organised to build solidarity. As part of this, RMT must establish picket lines and appeal to all workers to respect them. We can give the LUL management the bloody nose that they have deserved for so long and restore the pride of the workforce on the Underground and the confidence of workers throughout the whole trade union movement. The call is for maximum support from all trade unionists for the strike action.

**Dick Crossey, RMT, London  
Transport Divisional Council (in  
personal capacity)**

# Fight for Socialist Policies