

workers power

THE MONTHLY PAPER OF THE WORKERS POWER GROUP

STOP THATCHER GLOATING

HALT THE

RETREAT NOW!

The working class movement is not simply on the defensive. It is in retreat. This harsh fact must be faced however hard it may be to do so. Thatcher has achieved more against the working class than any Tory politician since Baldwin. A recognition of the exact scale and the causes of these defeats are a prerequisite of mounting a fightback, and of turning the tide against Thatcher. *Illusions never did anybody any good.*

The crucial turning point in the first phase of resistance to the Tory onslaught was the sabotage of the South Wales general strike by the regional TUC, the obstruction of solidarity action with the steelworkers by Murray and the sell out of the strike itself by the ISTC leaders. At the level of the rank and file in the unions this was magnified by the unwillingness and inability of the Communist Party, and other left group influenced, shop-floor leaders to challenge the bureaucrats betrayal. No focus of rank and file revolt was provided, there was no rallying point to stop the sell outs. The Stalinists, too old and too decayed to provide militant leadership, still had the power—or more correctly the positions, from senior steward and convenor level,

through the ranks of local officials to the union executives, to prevent others doing so. The SWP centrists intent on a block with the CP (misnamed a united front), did not dare give an independent call to action when the CP spurned their offers of unity. Short sightedly both thought they had all the time in the world and that the tide would soon turn their way. Meanwhile the worst slump since the 1930s was gathering momentum—magnified by the deliberate deflationary policies of the Tories.

TORY PLOT?

It is important to be exactly clear as to what are and what are not the effects of Tory policy. Firstly the economic crisis itself is not a Tory plot. By 1979 the recovery from the 1974/5 recession was faltering. In Britain the slide into recession began in 1979. (See Workers Power January 1979). This was early on a world scale. The recovery (boom would be far too

strong a word) of the US, Germany, and other European economies did not peak until Spring 1980. Recession itself did not gather full momentum until Spring of 1980.

By September manufacturing production had dropped some 11% below the average for 1979 (a return to the 1968 level). Unemployment began to rocket upwards—by 150,000 in June 1980, 240,000 in July, 100,000 in August. After a brief two month pause it resumed its catastrophic rise—150,000 in November, 80,000 in December and 180,000 in January 1981. The unemployment rate stands at 10.6% in the West Midlands, 11.2% in the North West and 12.3% in Wales. In cities like Liverpool it stood at 15.2% in November. The effects of this offensive have been severe. They can be seen in the pattern of strike figures in the last period. In the period from July to November the number of stoppages recorded by the Employment Gazette was lower than for any comparable period since the war. The number of working days lost was the lowest since 1966 (Department of Employment Gazette December 1980).

DROP IN STRIKES

There was a dramatic drop in the number of, and rate of, stoppages in the third quarter of 1980. Moreover during that quarter a diminishing proportion of strikes were over wage issues compared with battles over discipline, manning and work allocation. Wages, which had kept roughly in line with official inflation rate in the previous year, dipped below the inflation rate, meaning that most workers experienced a cut in real wages in 1980/81. The miners settled for 9.8% (13.8% including bonuses), the engineers 8.2%, Leyland workers 6.8%, local authority manual workers 7.5%, Vauxhall workers 8.0%, clothing workers 9.5%, and the previously strong Ford workers 9.5%. With official consumer price inflation steady at 15% it is clear that the bosses are succeeding in cutting real wages by 5 or 6% for most workers.

This onslaught has, in its turn had a serious weakening effect on the unions. The Transport and

General reports an annual loss of 140,000 members, the engineers 100,000, the General and Municipal 40,000 and the Iron and Steel Trades Confederation 30,000.

Thatcher is delighted by the effects. "We are" she said on Weekend World February 1st "getting rid of the wreckers", referring to the wonderful work of Michael Edwards sacking of four shop stewards at Leyland. "High wage settlements, weak management and overmanning are gradually being eradicated in the new economic climate" she chortled, whilst adamantly refusing to consider any reflationary measures even when faced with the figure of 4 million unemployed! The 'Economist' is also pleased and indicates to the bosses the way ahead. "Will managers gain freedom of action from the numerical weakening of the unions? British managers looking forward to employing non union labour should start now to dismantle their closed shops. . . Closed shops are the biggest barrier to a permanent decline in union membership." (January 24th).

Thatcher and Giscard have been joined by Ronald Reagan in the international club of deflationary slump politicians. The ruling classes of the world's major imperialist powers have launched all-out class war against their respective labour movements. What have the leaders of these movements done in response?

TUC SHIFTS BLAME

The TUC's response is clear—to retreat without a fight whilst trying to shift the blame onto their own members unwillingness to fight. This is a lie—section after section has given them a mandate for action—has even taken action themselves only to find that the bureaucratic apparatus isolates them, betrays and hands over the militant shop-floor leaders to a vengeful management. Lionel Murray has the gall to say that the unions are responsible for their own 'unpopularity'—unpopularity with the millionaire union-bashing press. "We have to show that we can balance our responsibilities to our members with our wider responsibilities," he moans, and offers the bosses a new

McAliskey shooting shows need to build workers' defence



THE ATTEMPTED KILLING OF Bernadette McAliskey, the sixth leading campaign activist to be attacked or assassinated, poses urgently and concretely to the H-Block campaign the need to defend both its leaders and its actions.

Only the creation of defense squads from the forces of the campaign and above all from *organised workers*, in an armed front of socialists workers and Republicans, can avoid the danger of Republican guerrilla retaliatory action, against the Ulster Defence Association, the RUC and the British Army, being divorced from the needs of the continuing mass struggle for the five demands and political status.

British socialists must vigorously protest at the attempted killing. Its suspicious circumstances and the Army's role in the affair must be made the subject of a labour movement inquiry.

A campaign in the unions and the Labour Party must be launched to force the official representatives of British labour to set such an inquiry into motion.

version of incomes policy policed by the TUC. Equally spineless and treacherous is the 'Triple Alliance' of Bill Sirs (ISTC), Sid Weighell (NUR), and Joe Gormley (NUM) which explicitly rules out action from the outset. If the first 'Triple Alliance' (1921) was a tragedy then this one is certainly a grim farce. Labour Governments or Workers Power?

LEADERS' PLEDGE

A favourite phrase of the left Labour and Trade Union leaders at the moment is the pledge 'to act in Government as decisively in the interests of our class, as Thatcher has in the interests of hers'. There is just one little hitch to this. Thatcher acts decisively not merely because the *Government* itself is powerful. In itself it is nothing. She acts effectively because the owners and managers of the huge banks, industries and commerce etc agree with what she is doing and act in concert with her. So does the civil service and the state bureaucracy. So do the police chiefs, so do the judges, so do the editors and owners of the national press, so do the heads of the BBC and ITV. Thatcher has a formidable phalanx of forces enthusiastically at her disposal. A Labour Government which *wanted* to pursue policies at variance with the key figures in all these institutions would find that all of them became bitter foes, Benn's concentration of his fire on the House of Lords is a demagogic diversion (largely because its unpopular anyway). Why just the House of Lords? *The monarchy and the whole constitutional framework of parliament* would be set into motion against such a 'left' government. Then what would Tony Benn do? His horror of industrial action as a short cut means that he is not willing to take the *first step*

on the road to defeating the bankers, bosses, police and army chiefs i.e. *the ruling class*. To fight effectively the working class must become clear about its *goals* and the means to attain them. The central core of capitalism is private ownership of the great means of production. As long as these remain in the bosses hands planning for human need is impossible; it is thwarted at every turn, not merely by their ill will but by the driving force of their system, maximum profits. Nor can one *buy* these means of production from the capitalist. Even if one were fool enough to imagine they would be willing, to sell their worth far outweighs the pathetic resources of the rest of society put together. If they would not sell, then they would have to be compelled. So whichever way the reformist tries to find of skinning the tiger alive *and with its consent* it won't work. Indeed it will provoke a tigerish response (viz Chile 1973).

BENN'S ALTERNATIVE!

The only alternative for Benn and Co then would be to give in. Back to square one? *No* back further than that in that the disarray and confusion would be so great that the bosses would undoubtedly take the opportunity to rob us of the gains social, economic and political of the last hundred years. The answer revolutionaries have to give to those who have chosen the Benn road to socialism is fundamentally that this road does not lead there. Indeed Benn's strategy is a disaster at every stage. *Now*, faced with Thatcher's attacks he says industrial action is all very well in its place but it must become *political*. It's the business of the trade unions alone and we politicians shouldn't meddle in it. On the other hand elections, parliaments, and govern-

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LEADERSHIP CRISIS THE W.S.L.

By MARK HOSKISSON

BY AN ironic coincidence, November 21st 1980 became a day of double defeat for workers at British Leyland. On that day the union leaders finally sealed the 6.8% pay deal that they had foisted on their members. At the same time some 300 workers from the Longbridge Trim Shop, who were being laid off for the fourth time in as many weeks, staged a protest march through the factory. That incident was used by the BL management to sack nine workers, including four stewards, on the pretext that they were the 'ringleaders' of what came to be described as a riot. A replay of the Derek Robinson saga was about to be staged.

Leyland bosses have agreed to take back two of the eight workers that they have sacked - leaving six TGWU members, including four stewards, victimised. Hawley, the TGWU national official, has called no action in the face of this intransigence - he is merely begging the management for "lenience" to be shown. The fate of the six looks like being similar to Robinson's. They have been sacked because they are active trade unionists opposed to Edwardes' attack on Leyland workers. They are clearly not guilty of any of the trumped up charges that Edwardes' kangaroo court has accused them of.

The initial strike in support of the men was quickly called off by the Works Committee (led by CP convenor Jack Adams), and over Christmas an 'Inquiry' was set into motion. The union officials disputed with management over the composition of the Inquiry and the role of its Chairman, not over the reinstatement

of the sacked workers. This was designed by all concerned to demobilise the strike threat. The officials and Works Committee wanted to avoid trouble, the management wanted to make sure that the sackings would go through. Against this background the AUEW have announced that they will not support a strike in support of the eight, while the T&GWU, safe in the knowledge that the inquiry made the chances of a strike remote, got themselves off the hook by declaring the non-existent strike official! The sad truth is that the moment for action (when the night shift men in Cab 1 came out on strike after the sackings) has now slipped by and the initiative is back in the hands of the bosses and bureaucrats.

These sackings, on top of the pathetic pay deal, are a serious blow to BL workers. They are an important victory for the management who are feeling increasingly confident in executing their plans to sack militants. The question is why have these defeats, on top of

ones already suffered in the recent past, been allowed to happen? Why, when a clear majority of workers (2:1) had voted for strike action against Edwardes' pay offer, were the national officials, in collusion with many of the plant leaderships (in both the Joint Negotiating Committee and the Convenors conference), able to derail the potential strike? Why when 1500 workers showed that they were ready to defend the eight by striking, were the Longbridge Workers Committee and the officials able to get the very same workers to vote by 4:1 on January 4th 1981, against further strike action?

SOCIALIST PRESS

The success of Edwardes, the ability of the union officials and senior convenors to keep the initiative is only possible because of the deepening crisis of shop floor leadership in Leyland. The long term decline of the shop stewards organisation through the period of the participation committees under Labour, and in the face of a series of defeats inflicted by management was merely confirmed by the latest disputes. Each defeat has served to increase the demoralisation of the workforce and further weakened the shop floor. In the face of this decline, militants in Leyland who are supporters of the Workers Socialist League (WSL) have offered themselves as an alternative leadership to both the stalinists and the

Labourites who dominate the Trade Union machinery inside Leyland. Their record during the pay negotiations in October and November of last year bears some inspection. It reveals that the WSL is unable to understand the real nature of the crisis of leadership in Leyland and are therefore incapable of developing a strategy that could effectively challenge the existing leadership.

The WSL refuse to recognise the profound crisis of confidence and direction that exists at all levels of the BL workforce. For them the BL workers are always ready for a fight and are thwarted only by the betrayals of reformist leaders. Of course we agree that the trade union bureaucracy do try to prevent rank and file struggles breaking out, and, when they fail to, then try to choke those struggles. But the WSL's mechanical view ignores the fact that it is political weaknesses inside the rank and file themselves, and crucially amongst the rank and file leaders, the shop stewards, that enable the bureaucracy to get away with their betrayals.

In Leyland this rank and file weakness is rooted in material reality. Throughout the 1970s Leyland workers have suffered heavily in terms of pay, conditions, trade union rights and jobs. Over the last six years wages in BL have risen by 76%—the national average, however, has risen by 310%. Compare this decline with the fact that six years ago Leyland workers stood 25% above the national average. What this means in money terms is that the average Leyland wage stands now at £88 while the national average industrial wage is £122.

Wembley conference opens Pandora's box

That it was the Shopworkers Union resolution which broke the monopoly of the Parliamentary Labour Party over the election of the leader appears at first sight a freak. USDAW, a right-wing union had adopted the proposal in the first place as a stop gap whilst awaiting advice from David Basnett and the General and Municipal Workers Union. Bill Whately, USDAW's General Secretary—an ardent supporter of the '50% for the PLP formula', was horrified that his union's ill-considered resolution emerged as the front-runner for the left, indeed as the cause of the lefts "most striking victory in the party's history" (Sunday Times) or "a turning point in British Labour History" Tony Benn.

The left hail it as a famous victory. The right lament it as a ghastly mistake. Certainly the unions block votes went badly astray from many general secretaries points of view. There would have been a clear majority for Foot if Boyd and Duffy of the AUEW had been able to abandon their self-imposed National Committee mandate to vote only for a motion which gave the Parliamentary party an overall majority (75%). They could not, because the Conference delegation which would have decided any further use of the union's vote, had a left majority of one—a situation that the right wing duo had been unable to alter by disciplinary action against one of the delegates. Had their ruse succeeded the delegation would have had a tied vote and Duffy's casting vote would have handed 928,000 votes and victory to the Foot-Healey alliance.

However, to regard the Wembley decision as either a historic victory for rank and file pressure or a sheer accident would be wrong. That the Conference decided along the line of the USDAW resolution, 40% for the unions and 30% apiece for the MP's and the constituencies was because of a sort of parallelogram of forces. The far-right in the trade union bureaucracy, Duffy (AUEW),

Chappel (EETPU), Weighell (NUR), Jackson (UCW) etc., were pulling in the direction of PLP control. The centre-right Basnett (GMWU), Smith (UCATT), Gormley (NUR), Sirs (ISTC) were pulling for Foot's '50% PLP, 25% each for the others' option. They saw this as a defensible barrier against further democratisation. Moreover for them it provides a fail-safe device for emergency use against an absolutely rogue Labour Government. Basnett and Co did not relish being gored by Healey and Callaghan in 1978/9. Their 5% limit, their last minute call off of the election and their anti-union tirades during the 'Winter of Discontent' determined Basnett and Co to seek some means of preventing a repeat performance. But they do not seek either a change of leadership or policy.

The prospect of Benn and the Tribunites in the saddle scares them stiff. They realise that in a 'normal' passive electoral situation Benn's programme would be an automatic loser. The press would witch hunt him (and them!) as the red revolution incarnate.

For Benn and his Alternative Economic strategy to stand an electoral chance would require a mass mobilisation—larger even than that of 1972-4, of workers more desperate in their needs and far reaching in their demands as a result of 5 years of Thatcher's rule. Basnett and Co want none of this. Their ideal is a normal, stable, mildly reformist Labour Government. Of course that is a utopia in the conditions of the 80s. That is their dilemma.

The 'Centre Left' most prominent of whom are Moss Evans of the T&GWU and Alan Fisher of NUPE were the hardest done by of the unions under Labour. These leaders were caught between their militant and irate members—lorry drivers or low-paid public sector workers—and the obdurate IMF-man Healey. Their desire is to instal permanent union (bureaucrat) control over the PLP and the Government. The 'third' solution would

have enabled them to avoid open political responsibility for the party's actions whilst leaving them free to block right-wing excesses by the PLP and Cabinet or left-wing excesses by the constituencies or the NEC.

The 'outside-left' in the Unions is weaker in terms of whole unions (and block votes), than is the far-right. In the NUM they control the regions of Scotland, Wales and Yorkshire but the antiquated and undemocratic union constitution leaves control in the hands of the right winger Joe Gormley. The new leaders of the radicalised Fire Brigades Union Ken Cameron and Bill Deal bring only a small block voting strength to the Bennites. All these leaders however are more closely tied to the militants in their unions. All of them have actually led struggles and stand at the head of workers whose militancy is well known. They know that the prospect of warmed-up Wilsonism in 1984 will not contain their members.

The pull of each of these factions of the trade union bureaucracy in their several directions allowed the Bennite constituencies (organised by the Campaign for Labour Party Democracy) to take advantage of the misplaced USDAW motion to win the 'famous victory'. However the forces are mobilising that could make it a Pyrrhic one.

Firstly the far-right leaders are set on revenge, having been made to look very foolish. They had hoped to retain Williams, Rodgers and Owen as prominent leaders for a future Labour Government. Sid Weighell of the NUR irately announced that there would be a post-mortem at the next 'Trades Union for a Labour Victory' (TULU) meeting: "We will have to talk about the Conference. Some of the voting positions were very peculiar. You cannot make the party look ridiculous in this way." (for 'party' read Sid Weighell!)

The right is thus determined on a reversal of the Wembley decision in the Autumn, followed by an invocation of the three year rule, which would mean that the constitutional amendments could not be re-discussed until 1984. Terry Duffy, speaking with new confidence, in the light of a certain right-wing majority on the expanded AUEW National Committee has declared "We hope to put matters right next time round." The TU bosses have galvanised the bulk of the PLP. Under the leadership of Healey, Hattersley, Shore and Kaufman, 150 MPs have issued a statement pledging to fight the Wembley decision. Dashing the hopes of the centrist Socialist Organizer that he would be the left's 'interim leader' Michael Foot has already announced that there will be a shadow cabinet resolution to reverse the decision. Putting himself firmly at the head of this crusade against Labour Party Democracy Foot has behind him not only the right and centre of the PLP, but also

spineless ministerial careerists like Neil Kinnock. Indeed the 'Tribune' group of MPs has refused to come out in support of the Conference decision.

The question of what to do about the imminent defection of the twelve renegade 'social democrats' has split the Tribunites down the middle. It also appears to have divided Heffer from Benn.

Shirley Williams is the only serious Labour leader in the gang of four. Rogers is a venomous anti-unionist that even Chappell and Duffy find an embarrassment like Prentice before him he would probably be a right winger in the Tory party. Owen is a pathetic nonentity, catapulted into a position of prominence by the Callaghan-Peter Jay mafia. Roy Jenkins, a bon vivant, more at home in a cocktail party than in a political one, is an outright liability. A dozen or so MPs may be willing to steal their seats from the Labour voters who elected them but they have as much chance of keeping them in an election as a snowball in hell. (A MORI poll conducted in the 11 constituencies found that they would lose them right now).

The serious right in the party Healey, Hattersley, Shore etc know that a centre party is a nine-day Fleet Street wonder. In Britain social-democracy stands or falls with the trade union bureaucracy. Even Chappell would open his union to enormous strains if he tried to disaffiliate from the Labour Party and re-affiliate to a new Social Democratic Party. However the mainstream right sense that the time is ripe for a counter offensive. Thus Healey could say "Tony Benn has over-reached himself. I think a fight back is now possible, with a fairly united party in Parliament. Just over 50% of the unions support us." (Observer 1st February, 1981).

If the left forces in the Labour Party want to beat off this attack then they will have to change their tactics radically. Benn after his correct NEC motion to demand an "oath of loyalty" from the treacherous four found himself isolated. Since then he has hurriedly joined the Tribune Group and joined the chorus of calls for party unity. Heffer had got there before him (indeed before the Wembley decision). At the Central Hall Rally on the eve of Conference he called for a party which included not only the "socialism of Nye Bevan but also the socialism of a Crossland." Scargill and Firebrigade Union leader Bill Deal were more outspoken. Scargill said there was no room for non-socialists in the Labour Party and Deal gave the timely advice to the gang "On 'yer bike!" The response of rank and file labour and TU supporters should be "Kick them out!" Out of the NEC, Out of the Shadow Cabinet, and the PLP, out of their constituencies and

Mark Risher, IFL



CANNOT ANSWER

(Picture: Laurence Spartan (IFL))



ALAN THORNETT

At the same time there has been a massive wave of redundancies. The closure of Speke was only a foretaste of what was to come as the Edwardes' plan took effect. In 1980 23,000 workers were made redundant. This was accompanied by a production drive that pushed levels up by 30%—an increase that can be accounted for by speed ups, attacks on mutuality and the implementation of job mobility, new technology and the savaging of recreational facilities. All of these attacks were codified into Leyland law in Edwardes' ninety two page 'Slaves Charter'.

For the WSL this real deterioration in the living standards of workers has only one effect—it fuels militancy. Thus, two weeks before the sell-out, the WSL's paper, Socialist Press, said of low pay and inflation that: "These are the forces that have driven forward the fight for action in BL and make it difficult for the bureaucrats to sell the Edwardes' offer." (29th October 1980).

This is only partially true, as events revealed. It is true that low pay did arouse anger amongst Leyland workers but so long as that anger is not channelled into a decisive struggle against the bureaucrats, then the officials are able to dissipate the fighting spirit of the workers. The bureaucrats rely on the absence of a decisive challenge to their power to maintain the divisions in the workforce, to sow demoralisation and dissaray, prior to their inevitable sell-out. Such an active lead, active resistance to the bureaucrats, in the shape of defiant direct action against the Edwardes' offer, was missing throughout the pay negotiations.

The WSL's view of an uninterruptedly militant workforce, betrayed by leaders who could be exposed to thousands of workers, led them to accept tactics that dodged a real fight with both the bosses and the bureaucrats. Clearly there was a will to fight the pay offer. Three years of pay deals which totalled only 16.8% (less than one year's rate of inflation) did provoke a militant response from the majority of BL workers. In the face of this, the moves by the union leaders and their agents in the plants, were absolutely predictable. After the strike was announced, the eleven days notice given before it was due to start, enabled these people to engage in a series of meetings with BL in order to avert the action. By a series of manoeuvres they turned the attention away from a strike against 6.8% into a discussion about bonus payments. These talks were held against a background of Edwardes' threatening to close down the whole firm—they also served to deflect thoughts away from the one answer that workers should have given to this threat—a pre-emptive occupation of every plant. Instead the talks continued. When the Joint Negotiating Committee failed to make a deal the General Secretaries moved in, including ones like Grantham and Jenkins (APEX and ASTMS) whose members in BL were not affected by the pay offer!

The situation changed from one of massive militancy at the end of October, to one of confusion by November 11th when the union general secretaries issued a statement urging acceptance of the offer. On November 12th, the convenors conference voted to accept the 6.8% on the basis of continued

discussion around bonus payments. The proviso was added that the deal had to be ratified by a further round of mass meetings.

The mass meetings held demonstrated that there was still a very large section of BL workers opposed to the deal and prepared to fight. At Cowley a mass meeting of 4,500 workers voted for strike action and only seven voted against. The vote at Longbridge the following Tuesday was very close and even the bourgeois media expressed doubts when Adams hurriedly declared it in favour of acceptance. This did not matter because the Stalinist Adams was determined to avoid a strike. He ignored the position of his stewards committee which favoured rejection, and instead argued the Works Committee's capitulationist line. The chance to bring out BL's two major plants, Longbridge and Cowley, faded and Edwardes was assured of yet another victory. In this situation what did the WSL do and what should they have done?

We ask this question because the WSL claim to hold the leadership, or at least to have an important influence within it, of the Cowley Assembly Plant near Oxford. Here the WSL's leader Alan Thornett is deputy convenor. This is the showpiece of the WSL, a factory led by its cadres. Further the convenor, Bob Fryer, is regarded as a sort of fellow traveller of the WSL, if not by himself, then certainly by his admirers on the Editorial Board of Socialist Press. Cowley is the second most important plant in the BL combine. Its actions can influence what goes on in other plants, its intervention could significantly alter the balance of forces in a dispute. It is this very significance, no doubt, that led the WSL to claim in 1978 that:

"The banner of new leadership for the trade union movement in the car industry was unmistakably raised last month when the existing right wing leadership was overturned in a shop floor ballot in British Leyland's Cowley plant." (Socialist Press 4th January 1978).

SOCIALIST PRESS ★

However this 'new banner' proved fairly useless when it came to action. During the engineers dispute in 1979 for example Thornett was unable to bring the Cowley workers out on the one day a week strikes. In fact Cowley under the new leadership of Fryer and Thornett steadily lost its reputation as a trouble spot in the BL empire. The real weakness of the Cowley leadership and the political weakness of the WSL that it revealed, was highlighted during the last round of pay negotiations.

The first thing to note is that Fryer was actually party to the acceptance of bonus payments as a basis of negotiation rather than the original 20% claim. He was called into line by his stewards committee and did get the decision to hold mass meetings through the convenors conference but he demonstrated clearly his unreliability as a rank and file leader. The WSL's paper mildly reprimanded Fryer but did not call for his replacement (even though he has committed similar errors in the past, e.g. calling off a strike that was to have been held in support of the victimised

Cowley 9). We are forced to ask why Fryer is treated with such leniency by a paper and organisation that declare themselves to stand against all betrayers and waverers? We suspect that it has more to do with a non-aggression pact inside Cowley than with a principled fight for a revolutionary rank and file leadership.

At the mass meeting after the convenors' conference, the Cowley stewards did get support for strike action and for their position of no confidence in the JNC. This mandate should have been used by Thornett and other WSL militants as the signal for a massive campaign to get Cowley to take immediate action. To the argument that says Cowley won't take strike action until Longbridge does, a revolutionary leadership would have answered, Cowley must take action to ensure that Longbridge does.

Of course if Longbridge had rejected a strike then things could have been reviewed but action was vital in order to reverse the trend towards acceptance of the offer and point the way to an alternative course of action. Adams was hoping to play the 'Longbridge can't go it alone' card at the mass meeting. A strike at Cowley would completely rob him of that excuse and placed him on the spot. Thornett could have and should have organised coachloads of striking and occupying Cowley workers armed with leaflets, appeals and so on to lobby the Longbridge meeting. The demand that 'if you support rejection then strike with us' would have had a decisive effect on the ability of the Stalinist betrayer Adams to carry through his plans. If the 'new banner' of leadership in Cowley could have been raised in the shape of a defiant occupation against Edwardes, then rank and file confidence in Longbridge and elsewhere would have received a massive boost. The situation would have been fundamentally transformed. In these circumstances his moves to betray would have been far more glaringly exposed to workers than they actually were.

Instead of fighting for this course of action the WSL pursued their miserable 'literary' exposure scheme—allow Adams to betray, then denounce him and, abracadabra, he stands exposed to thousands. Thus, after the Cowley vote, Socialist Press did not call for action. They posed the question for Cowley workers in an entirely passive fashion: BL PAY FIGHT HANGS ON LONGBRIDGE!

This article went on: "If Adams does put the Works Committee policy and obtain a vote for acceptance of the 6.8%, she (Thatcher-WP) could be spared a confrontation which her government may not survive." (19th November 1980).

But Socialist Press does not mention a course of action that could prevent this betrayal. By failing to take action, Thornett and the Cowley leaders let Adams off the hook. We have a ludicrous situation where the would-be revolutionary leadership, in trying to expose the Stalinists, ends up by giving them a golden opportunity to dodge a fight. But after all the WSL schema was fulfilled—two weeks later Socialist Press declared: "Margaret Thatcher's crisis ridden and reactionary regime has been kept in power by the conscious and deliberate intervention of the Communist Party." (3rd December 1980).

If one accepts the ludicrous (thoroughly Healyite) logic of this assertion, then by the same token it is possible to see that by its conscious non-intervention in the Longbridge mass meeting, the 'new banner' of leadership at Cowley helped Adams to avert a strike and thereby saved the Tory government! We reject such oversimplified interpretations of both the Leyland strike and the likely fate of Thatcher had one taken place. We recognise in the defeat a confirmation of our understanding of the crisis on the shop floor in BL, a crisis that the WSL have no viable solution to, and of which they are in fact, a part.

The WSL seek to dodge the blame for the failure of the strike to materialise by arguing that it is impossible for one plant to strike successfully on its own. Thus as early as October 23rd Socialist Press argued:

"The most important question will be the position taken by the union leadership. If they leave the decision to individual plants instead of calling out all BL workers—or if they call only limited action—then they know this to be a recipe for defeat."

But, as we know, and as Socialist Press knows, that is precisely the sort of thing a rotten leadership like the one at BL is likely to do. Is the WSL therefore suggesting that nothing can be done until they have the leadership of the whole combine!! In their actions that is exactly what they do imply—the WSL lead at Cowley, but Cowley cannot do anything alone because of the other leaderships. This leaves unanswered the question of how do you challenge those existing leaderships in the here and now. The WSL fall back on their 'exposure' tactic yet again, attacking Adams, exonerating themselves and conceding a defeat without even having waged a fight to test whether or not one plant striking could alter the situation:

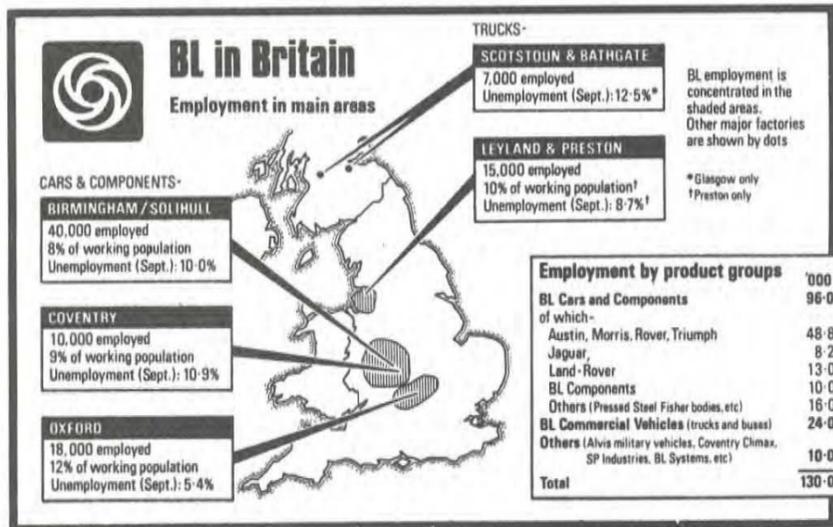
"Adam's treachery tipped the scales in BL as a whole—producing a result claimed to be 2:1 against strike action. This was a majority big enough to make action by an individual plant extremely difficult." (Socialist Press 3rd December 1980).

This is not the attitude of a revolutionary leadership. The unity that the WSL claim they need before they act does not depend simply on which way the bureaucracy choose to jump or even from the 'claimed' results of votes. It is something that a revolutionary leadership can forge by leading its followers in struggle. As the WSL admit a massive number of workers were prepared to strike—Cowley could have given a determined lead to those workers, could have convinced Longbridge workers of the need for unity in action alongside those already struggling.

SOCIALIST PRESS ★

The WSL's strategy is, in essence, a thoroughly passive one. Until the day that the false leaders are finally exposed the task of the WSL and their supporters is to hold on to their positions at Cowley. That is why the WSL would not commit themselves, and thus test the mettle of their much vaunted base in a decisive battle to take the initiative out of Adam's hands.

The impact of this wavering policy is clearly being felt by the workforce that the WSL lead. The crisis of shop floor leadership is particularly acute in the Cowley factory. It is one of the hardest hit by voluntary redundancies. After last April's 5% deal 2000 workers at Cowley accepted voluntary redundancy. This has seriously undermined shop floor organisation in the plant. For example, out of the 190 shop stewards elected in December 1979 by April 1980, 85 of them had accepted voluntary redundancy and in one section 10 stewards out of 15 had taken voluntary redundancy. Now, following this last pay deal, there has been a new wave of applications for voluntary redundancy including requests from dozens of stewards. This takes place against a background of years without a major fight against wage and job cuts. Such is the sad state of the shop floor at Cowley, a state that will get worse so long as the leadership, the WSL and their fellow travellers like Fryer, refuse to face up to the arduous task of building a revolutionary communist leadership rooted in the rank and file and able to lead that rank and file in action and not merely in words.



Map showing Leyland plants and local employment levels in September 1980

VITRY: MARCHAIS PLAYS

The Communist Party-led attack on a Malian hostel in Vitry-sur-Seine, a large working class suburb of Paris, on Christmas Eve, was the latest and most dramatic reflection of the PCF's willingness to go to almost any lengths to improve its electoral prospects in the coming elections.

Communist Mayor, Paul Mercieca, accompanied by Communist town councillors and Marcel Rossette, a Communist Senator, led 50 heavies from the town hall into the immigrant workers hostel and cut off electricity, gas and telephone before smashing up the entrances and stairway with their bulldozer and piling up rubble in front of the emergency exits. Total cost has been estimated at over 300,000 FF, (£30,000), in repairs. The Malians, who immediately began the most urgent repair work themselves—sacrificing their Sunday off work to do so—had to suffer temperatures of around 5° Centigrade and go without hot water.

The PCF dared label this disgusting racist attack "a spontaneous demonstration of angry Vitriots." Not content with this lie, (a spontaneous demonstration? . . . with a bulldozer and tools to cut off essential supplies? !), they are also now denying that Mercieca led this 'demonstration'. He was only there to 'calm down spirits'.

Unfortunately for Mercieca, his own newspaper, *Le Travailleur*, (The Worker), a communist regional weekly for the Val-de-Marne, reported the attack in glowing terms with a photo of the bulldozer and the caption: "Communists immediately react to block racism" (no less. . .) (27th December 1980). This region is a traditional PCF stronghold. It has had the dubious pleasure of having Maurice Thorez, the father of French Stalinism, and Georges Marchais, current PCF leader, as its parliamentary representatives.

The Malians, mainly labourers and street cleaners, had been transferred to Vitry from neighbouring Saint Maur by its right-wing council. The hostel in Saint Maur desperately needed renovation work, claimed Gaullist mayor, Beaumont. The Vitry council claims it was only informed of this at the last minute; "the 23rd of December" stated *L'Humanite*. Not true. The Malians arrived on Sunday, December 21st and were, to all accounts and purposes, glad to leave their slum hostel in Saint Maur. They even chose the Vitry hostel themselves because "It was the nicest one", (*Liberation*, 5th January 1981).

The PCF argues that this is not an isolated case. They claim that, nationally, the right is deliberately getting rid of foreign workers by sending them to communist controlled towns. It is doubtlessly true that the right likes immigrants even less than the PCF does. It is also true, however, that workers in general do not live in bourgeois areas. Both white and black workers go to areas where there is work—to industrial and, in the main—communist controlled municipalities. That is the logic of capitalism—a logic which is not questioned by the PCF in its haste to shout, "Enough! Send them back to Saint Maur!"

There are 4,124,317 immigrants, (including families), in France, a country which has a population of 53 million, (*Le Monde*, 3rd January 1981). No figures show the political colour of the towns these immigrants live in. And the PCF has made a great mistake in picking Vitry as an example. There 14% of the population are immigrants, compared to 11% in near-by Saint Maur. What is more, in Ormesson, (Gaullist), 25% are foreigners while only 8% are foreign in Arcueil, (communist).

BY R. ASCAL

But it is the PCF itself which is pandering to racism when it calls for 'equal distribution of immigrants' and in talking about 'tolerance thresholds' rather than denouncing the housing conditions and continual harassment from which immigrants suffer in France. The hostels, one of which the PCF smashed up, are generally reserved for North Africans and blacks from French-speaking Africa. They were set up to replace the shanty towns outside some of the biggest towns in France. Their aim was clearly not to provide decent housing conditions for immigrants, but rather to discourage them from bringing their families with them. The PCF prefers to concentrate on getting rid of the immigrants from their areas.

In Vitry, the Town Council has posters everywhere with the slogan: 'Vitry shall not be a ghetto'. The CP's local paper, *Le Travailleur*, (24.10.80), stated that: 'In Vitry, 20% are immigrants. In certain parts of town this reaches 50%'.

Frankly, we say: this is too many! . . . Our elected representatives limit the amount of council housing which goes to immigrant families'.

The PCF demo in Vitry on January 10th, called to support the Mayor, pulled out 5,000. The slogans included the call to immediately rehouse the Malians in Saint Maur, opposition to mixed classes in schools because they 'lower the general level of achievement', for 'labour exporting countries' (sic!) to help pay for welfare expenses for 'their' workers in France, and for a complete halt to immigration 'so as not to worsen unemployment', (*L'Humanite*, 9.1.81).

This is not the only incidence of the CP's racism. At Rennes, in Brittany, a plan to build

an Islamic cultural centre, approved by the Town Council last April, was opposed by PCF councillors and the party's Departmental Federation. Michel Collet, Federation Secretary, argues that the plan to construct the centre, which will include a mosque and a Koranic school, is 'neither in conformity with the republican tradition of the separation of Church and State, nor is it in the social or cultural interests of French and immigrant workers. We are against both council house ghettos and cultural ghettos.'

These incidents are only a stepping up of the PCF's already stated position on immigrants. The PCF's history of fighting racism is as sordid as its attack on the Malian hostel. In 1977, it condemned the Government's immigration policy on the grounds that it was *too soft* and called for a complete halt to immigration. Marchais, speaking on the radio after the Vitry march, yet again informed the Government that 'there is no question of having more immigrants come in when there are 2 million on the dole'.

Since last October, seeing itself slowly but surely losing its electoral support around the large towns and cities, the PCF has stepped up its racist activities. It is openly playing with the deeply-rooted racist sentiments of the French people—once a 'great colonial power' like Britain. It answers widespread feelings of insecurity which stem from the economic crisis with talk

of increasing 'law and order' and police patrols through working-class areas. In this way it hopes to appear to be concerned with the opinions of the voters.

Ten years ago in Vitry the PS (Socialist Party), had just 6% of the vote while the PCI held nearly 60%. The situation has radically changed since then. Today the PS can claim around 20% while the PCF vote has fallen to 48%. The PCF is out to reconquer its electorate at the expense of foreign workers who, after all, don't have the right to vote, and are therefore of no significance to it.

The PCF's actions have led to a wave of protests throughout France. Even the Government has been able to hypocritically criticise the CP and appear 'moderate' by comparison. Lionel Stoleru, Secretary of State for Immigration, was able to righteously condemn the CP for its 'electoral racism'. Here he is speaking as an expert, with three years' experience of expelling foreign workers from France. Mitterand's Socialist Party was quick to take the opportunity to score off the CP by condemning its actions at Vitry, but this doesn't reflect any real difference over his party's attitude to immigrants. The Socialist Party (PS) agrees with the PCF that all immigration must be stopped and that the 300 Malians must be

The roots of S

The PCF's racist policies flow directly from its reformism and nationalism. Since the Popular Front period, when the party proudly added the adjective 'French' to its name and adopted the national anthem and the imperialist red, white and blue tricolor flag as its symbols, the PCF has spent its time trying to prove that it is more patriotic than the bosses. Its militant anti-common market position - based on the threat to 'French sovereignty' and its fervent support for a French nuclear deterrent are just two more examples of this, as is its anti-German stance - 'No to a German Europe' etc.

In an imperialist country like France, nationalism is automatically chauvinist and even racist. But the CP's disgusting defence of 'French culture', the French language' etc. flows primarily from the reformist, class collaborationist programme of world Stalinism. In the last analysis it is a direct product of the degeneration of the Russian revolution; it is a reflection of the interests and perspectives of the bureaucracy that has usurped political power in the USSR.

The 'patriotic' reformist perspective is based on the Stalinist schema that divides the world between the forces representing monopoly capitalism and militarism on the one hand, and peace and socialism on the other. The bulwark of the progressive forces is, of course, the Soviet Union and the other 'socialist' states. The very strength of the USSR makes possible, as well as necessary, an alliance between the working class and those sections of capital which are considered to be patriotic, 'anti-monopolistic' and 'peaceful'. The strategic objective of such an alliance is the creation of governments committed to a programme of peace and democracy (ie the British Road to Socialism). 'New democracy', neither capitalist nor socialist is an intermediate stage in human development made possible by the consolidated strength of the USSR.

An alliance can thus be struck between the working class and those sections of capital which are 'patriotic' anti-monopolistic and 'peace-loving'. Thus the economic programme of the French Communist Party is aimed at nationalising these militaristic and monopolistic sections of capital which are increasingly 'transnational'. This meant for the French CP nationalising those of a non-French character, and

the development of a mixed economy in which French capital and the French economy would benefit from co-operation with the 'peace-loving' countries of the world. So, for these reasons, the PCF sees itself as the staunchest defender of French capitalism and the French nation.

'What is at stake in the crisis thus becomes clear: will France be master of its economic and social development, or will the transnational corporations and the dominant imperialist powers (W.Germany, USA, Japan) decide in its place'. (The Underlying Principles of the Economic Policy of the French Communist Party - F. Di Ruzza in *Economic Bulletin of CP* Autumn 1980).

Marchais became secretary general of the PCF in 1972 apparently committed to developing a Eurocommunist image for the French party along the lines of the Spanish and Italian parties. This meant primarily expressing a commitment to bourgeois democracy on the basis that its institutions were compatible with the transition to socialism and a sharp distancing of the PCF from the Communist Party of the Soviet Union - both from the USSR's foreign policy and its repression of opposition in Russia and Eastern Europe. Hence the ditching of the empty programmatic commitment to the 'dictatorship of the proletariat'. This demonstration of independence from Moscow and commitment to parliamentary institutions was seen as necessary if the bourgeoisie was to accept these parties as 'parties of Government'. In France it was the basis of the electoral alliance with the Socialist Party and the Left Radicals, the 'Union of the Left'.

In France this strategy failed abysmally - far from increasing the electoral strength of the CP it was the Socialist Party under the leadership of the veteran bourgeois politician Mitterand who benefitted. The Socialist Party's electoral support grew from a mere 5% in 1967 to nearly 25% in 1977, the PCF gained just over 20% of the vote in the 1978 elections - 25% less than it achieved in 1973. This was the logical outcome of the Eurocommunist strategy. Had the Socialist Party not been saying all along and more outspokenly what the PCF was beginning to say so belatedly and so hesitantly? If anyone wanted a social-democratic policy and party regime why not vote for or join a real Social-Democratic Party? The Marchais' denunciations of the USSR encouraged the flowering of explicitly social democratic opinion among the intellectuals and professionals in the PC ranks. It brought into question the entire Stalinist dictatorial regime within the party. The historical *raison d'être* of the bureaucratic regime in the Stalinist party is the need to defend the policy of the bureaucracy of the USSR against the bulk of the bourgeoisie and against the social democrats. Unlike the latter they cannot allow 'public opinion' - ie bourgeois propaganda - a free range in their party. That is why they could never tolerate the norms of bourgeois democracy in their ranks. This democracy lets the rank and file discuss their hearts' content but leaves principal decisions to the parliamentarians and municipal councillors. But without



THE RACIST CARD



Workers from Mali clear rubble after CP attack.

More surprising has been the response of Lutte Ouvriere (LO) one of the largest organisations in France claiming to uphold the revolutionary traditions of Trotskyism. LO in its desire to relate to the Communist Party militants have made inexcusable concessions to the PCF's racism. Thus Lutte de Classe, their theoretical magazine, could virtually endorse the CP's demands for 'quotas' of immigrants in particular areas.

'The French Communist Party demands quotas on the number of immigrants throughout France and is in favour of forcing Communes (administrative units-WP) to lodge a certain number of immigrant workers so that real ghettos may be avoided and so that, in particular, the communist town councils are not the only ones to have to bear the expenses involved in lodging categories of workers whose income is not only the lowest but also the least regular. The PCF is obviously not a revolutionary party...However, we cannot criticise it over the essentials because what it is denouncing is valid and sound. That is why we have not associated ourselves, and will not associate ourselves, with the criticisms, usually electoralist moreover, made by those who criticise the PCF on this question'. Lutte de Classe (No.81, 22 Dec. 1980).

Thus LO limits itself to criticising the 'methods' used by the PCF in Vitry. While it criticises the PCF's reformism in the abstract, it refuses to criticise the racist policies which

flow from it in practice. Instead it concentrates virtually all its fire on the hypocrisy of the 'anti-communist' campaign - with headlines like 'An anti-communist campaign, even in the form of the defence of immigrants, is still an anti-communist campaign'. (Lutte Ouvriere 3.1.81).

Ironically this position comes very close to that of the British CP. Predictably the Morning Star launched a cover-up campaign for their fellow Stalinists in France with an article headed 'French media smears Communists'. Trying to absolve the local PCF from their role in the attack on the hostel, the article brazenly declares 'regrettably some local inhabitants took on themselves to destroy symbolically the gates leading to the premises and cut off water, gas and electricity' (Morning Star, 15.1.81). The CPGB echoes the arguments of the PCF, implying that Vitry has enough immigrants - 'twice the national average'. Can we expect Brixton and Southwark Communist Party members to start demanding an end to immigrants coming into their areas?

The PCF's actions in Vitry indeed show with startling clarity exactly where the calls for immigration controls actually lead. It is a short step from saying 'there are enough immigrants in the country' to saying 'we don't want any more in our area' and from that to taking practical measures, as the Vitry CPers did, to drive new arrivals out.

sent back to Saint Maur. It also refuses, along with the PCF, to fight for full, equal, political rights for immigrants, including the right to vote.

Le Matin, the daily newspaper which supports the PS, had to admit that 'socialist mayors largely share the same demands as the communists'. It is little wonder then, that a demonstration in Vitry against the CP's attack, organised by the PS and CFDT (the Trade Union federation which supports the Socialists) attracted only 400 demonstrators.

Stalinist chauvinism

that rationale, with the party trying to minimise its differences with the French social democrats, it was inevitable that the internal regime would come under attack. The explicit social democrat Jean Ellenstein and the old Stalinist Althusser were able to make common cause against the Marchais regime.

Eurocommunism threatened the PCF with marginalisation and internal disorder. It objectively posed the possibility of the final collapse of the CP into social democratic reformism. This would have required a final break with the definition of the USSR as a progressive force, the repudiation of this central pillar of their Stalinist past, as the essential prerequisite of organic unity with social democracy. The Spanish Eurocommunist, Claudin, has drawn the logical conclusion of this position and declares the USSR to be non-socialist and inferior to (bourgeois) democracy.

The nationalist programme of Stalinism always contains within itself the potential for CP's to back their own bourgeoisie in a conflict with another bourgeoisie similarly backed to the hilt by its own Stalinist party. The French and Italian CPs, for example, cannot reach agreement on a common strategy towards, and characterisation of, the European Common Market. But the PCF is not simply an extension of the Kremlin bureaucracy, or of its own bourgeoisie.

Its historic roots lie in the best organised, most militant sections of the working class, who rallied to communism because it seemed an intransigent fighter for socialism and a defender of the world's first workers' state. While the party degenerated politically in the 1920's, and was firmly bureaucratized in the Stalinist mould in the 1930's, it continued to organise the largest sections of militant workers. The PCF leaders therefore have to preside over a permanent, and potentially destructive series of contradictions. The social base of the party contains some of the most militant workers, but in political programme it is committed to an alliance with the bourgeoisie. What makes this contradiction qualitatively different to that confronting the Social Democratic Parties is that, while pursuing class collaboration with their own bourgeoisies, the Stalinist leaders remain ultimately tied to the Soviet bureaucracy to the extent that they must defend the USSR as a historic gain for working class progress and peace. If they do not, then the entire edifice of their political programme crumbles and they become indistinguishable from pure and simple social-democratic reformists.

The growing strength of the Socialist Party within the working class and the possibility of a deal being struck between Mitterand and Giscard D'Estaing posed the real possibility of French Stalinism losing its bargaining power with the French bourgeoisie. September 1977 saw a sudden break from the Socialist Party and the Union of the Left. The PCF having emerged from its 'fortress' was badly mauled and proceeded to retreat into it and strengthen its self-preserving isolation by all means possible. It is in this light that events in Vitry must be seen. Thus the apparent 'sectarianism' of the PCF in its onslaughts against the socialists before the last election was designed to rally CP members and voters to the party once again.



George Marchais

This campaign has been taken to the lengths of making Mitterand and the Socialist Party almost the main enemy of the working class even to the point of covering up various scandals which have involved Giscard D'Estaing. For example L'Humanité declared the well-substantiated exposures of the President's pocketing of gifts of diamonds from the French stooge Bokassa as a 'campaign of vilifications not worthy of the French press'.

In the industrial sphere this meant a 'left turn' - putting forward through its Trade Union organisation, the CGT, a more militant image. It meant insulting party members from the attacks of the bourgeois media by a return to class struggle rhetoric, and a break with Eurocommunism's intellectuals and fellow-travellers within its own ranks - Ellenstein for example. Thus Marchais condemned the Mitterand-Berlinguer 'summit' in Strasbourg in March 1980. He vehemently attacked both parties for favouring 'austerity measures'.

The past period has seen a positive wave of disillusioned Eurocommunists leaving or being thrown out of the PCF. Above all this new strategy has meant an openly closer relationship with Moscow. Most striking was the almost instantaneous support given by the PCF to the invasions of Afghanistan. Within days of the invasions Marchais was in Moscow giving an interview staunchly defending the Russian action, an interview beamed live by satellite back to French TV viewers.

The pro-Moscow, anti-austerity turn of the French Stalinists has not been without success - over 90,000 new members have been claimed since last year - most of them workers - whom Marchais will happily exchange for his dissident intellectuals..

But the retreat from Eurocommunism - a headlong retreat back into the arms of the Soviet bureaucracy in the case of the PCF - cannot solve the problems facing the party leadership for long. The Kremlin bureaucracy's operative tactics are not aimed at securing governmental power for the PCF.

BY STUART KING

Their strategic aim is to build reliable and lasting alliances with the French and any other bourgeoisie. Tame CPs are useful to them as reminders to these bourgeoisies of the pressure the Soviet bureaucracy can bring to bear should they wish to. But the Soviet bureaucracy will seek out every opportunity to subordinate the independent actions of the CPs to their own diplomatic needs.

The reversal of tack by the PCF only brings it headlong against new contradictions. The Soviet bureaucracy is not unfavourably disposed to the Giscard regime. The long-term strategy of the leading sections of the French bourgeoisie has been towards relatively friendly relations with the USSR. This gives them a counterweight to the otherwise overpowering embrace of the USA. This policy of De Gaulle, Pompidou and Giscard is characterised by the Kremlin leaders as 'realistic' and 'peace loving'. For them a Giscard regime is preferable to that of the dangerously 'Atlantic' ie.pro-USA Mitterand. Giscard broke ranks with the united front of the 'Western' leaders to visit Brezhnev in Poland in an attempt to defuse the Afghan crisis. He has once again called for a conference to guarantee the independence and security of Afghanistan. His reasons are a desperate desire to save 'detente' and protect the growing trade and financial links between France and the USSR.

The Reagan administration - supported by Thatcher - is determined to drive a wedge between Schmidt Giscard and the USSR. It is determined to cut the economic links, to make Western Europe completely dependent on Arab oil and gas, and thus at one with US interests in the Middle East. Europe's successful attempts to 'diversify' their sources left Carter with little support in his confrontation with Iran or his attempts to police the Gulf.



The French workers on the other hand, including those organised by the PCF, will take little solace from Giscard's line on Afghanistan or Soviet energy supplies. Unemployment in France stands at 7.2%, over the last year industrial production has dropped by 4.5%. The potential of a contradiction between the interests of the Soviet bureaucracy's diplomacy and the fight of the French workers to defend their jobs and living standards by breaking Giscard's regime threatens to further complicate the world of the PCF leadership.

In the face of these contradictions the PCF is capable of further dramatic changes of direction. Its internal regime ensures that rapid changes of line are slavishly followed by all levels of the party apparatus. The events of Vitry are just one example of the depths the PCF leadership will stoop to maintain the flagging morale of the party. Attacks on immigrant workers may win the PCF the votes of lumpens and labour aristocrats. But they must also sharpen a sense of revulsion amongst important sections of party workers at the poisonous policies of their leadership.

It is the task of Trotskyists to ensure that such revulsion does not serve to bolster Mitterand or the Eurocommunists but leads to a decisive break with the reformist programme of the PCF.

Labour Groups. The Social Democratic Council and all its adherents—plotting as they are to split the party and steal its parliamentary and local government mandates—should be expelled from the party. Vigorous action in this direction can go a long way to spiking the guns of the PLP Bourbons. Indeed it can force Healey and Co to align themselves with the splitters and shatter their alliance with the majority of union bureaucrats.

Yet the bulk of the left leaders are already on the defensive. As so often before the horror of a split has already turned their spines to jelly. Labour's Local Government Committee joined the NEC (who rejected a similar move on MPs) in defeating a proposal to make councillors pledge "their allegiance and support for the Labour Party as the only way forward for democratic socialism in the country and their determination to secure the implementation of its policies as decided by annual conferences and local government policy conferences." Its mover, Nuneaton MP Les Huckfield was (like Tony Benn on the NEC) the only supporter of such a position.

The NEC's decision to scupper annual re-selection by blocking an open list of candidates replacing this with a yes/no on the sitting member indicates that the 'soft left' (or 'legitimate left' as it likes to call itself—Kinnock and Co) are right behind Foot and his crusade for the MPs' privileges.

If the campaign to democratise the Labour Party is not to be thrown into total retreat it cannot rely on the parliamentary and trade union tops. The Foot crusade has already more than enough block votes behind it. It will have the full weight of the press, the PLP and at least half the Tribunes before long. The fight for Labour Party democracy must take a sharp turn away from its exclusive and obsessive concern with the constituencies and their white-collar, middle class milieu. The tactics of packing moribund wards and committees is self-defeating and will be swept away like so much chaff when the union leaders agree on a united front against reform.

The fight for democracy must be taken into the unions. A massive fight needs to be waged to stop the Basnetts, Duffys and the Fishers and Moss Evans from doing a deal behind their members backs. Scargill, Cameron and Co must be put on the spot to campaign throughout the whole union movement on this issue. Yet the enthusiasm and interest of rank and file trade unionists will not be engaged if this campaign restricts itself to constitutional reform or to talk about what a 1984 Labour Government might do. Forces gathered to reform the Labour Party have other vital, indeed more immediately vital questions to face. How to fight the Tories now—not by policies for 1984 governments—but by direct action to turn the tide of Tory victories.

BENN AT HIS WEAKEST

Here Benn with his horror of a "short cut by industrial action" is at his weakest. But if working class organisation is smashed by mass unemployment, if the class is divided and set against itself, then even Benn's dreams of a 'left' election victory will go up in smoke. No, the rank and file must be rallied for effective resistance now. The Tories cannot be beaten without fighting rank and file organisation, without democratised unions, without calling to account or kicking out the same bureaucrats who block reform in the Labour Party. What is more the power of the parliamentarians to sell out on their promises can never be ended until the power of the union leaders over the block votes is broken. Since the conscious bosses agents in the Labour Party and the Unions will never concede to this without attempting to split the movement, anyone who places unity above fighting tactics and accountability to the rank and file is a false friend. The reputation of a lot of 'lefts' should come under close scrutiny in the coming months.

- ▶ For an oath of loyalty for all MPs and councillors
- ▶ Reverse the NECs decision on re-selection - open lists
- ▶ Kick out the gang of 12 and their declared supporters
- ▶ Defeat any attempt to revise the Wembley decision in favour of the PLP
- ▶ Put the block vote in the hands of the unions' members
 - ▷ Break its block nature and make it reflect the proportions of opinion within the union as decided at its most democratic body—conference, national committee, etc
 - ▷ Put political questions on the agenda at the branch and workplace level in the unions
- ▶ Conference itself should decide the Manifesto, the leadership of the party and the posts in a Shadow or Government Cabinet. No special rights for MPs

by Dave Stocking



El Salvador

On January 10th, the military command of the unified guerrilla force, the Farabundo Marti National Liberation Front (FMLN), issued a call for an insurrectionary rising against the blood soaked military/Christian Democrat junta of President Duarte. General Order No. 1 announced in ringing tones over Radio Liberacion, urged the Salvadorean masses: "To total battle until the final victory, to the decisive military battles, to popular insurrection. Prepare for the general strike until victory. United to fight until final victory! Revolution or death! We will win! (Intercontinental Press, 19. 1. 81)

In total accord with the urgency of the call, the guerrilla forces surged forward with seemingly irreversible momentum. On January 11th, Santa Ana, El Salvador's second largest city came under FMLN control. The northern city of Chalatenango fell to the guerrillas on January 12th.

And although the general strike call met with little response, heavy fighting was reported throughout El Salvador, including street fighting in the capital, San Salvador. Despite this, the junta seems to have managed, with American assistance, to halt the offensive and inflict heavy losses on the guerrilla forces.

The FMLN chose this time to launch the 'final offensive' in response to the prospect of the inauguration of Ronald Reagan as President of the United States.

The guerrilla leaders evidently believed that hardliner Reagan would be less likely to ditch the junta and negotiate with the opposition than his 'human rights' predecessor, Carter; indeed that there was the distinct possibility of direct military involvement by the Reagan administration in support of Duarte's regime. This belief, which resulted in the premature call for the 'final' offensive, was based more on the opposition's political perspectives than on a realistic appraisal of Carter's policy towards El Salvador. As if to prove that there was no difference when it came to defending US imperialism's vital interests in the area, Carter immediately resumed military aid to the junta, aid which had been suspended after the killing of four American nuns by right-wing death squads, only four days before Reagan's inauguration.

US-REPLACEMENT GOVERNMENT

Carter has not let his 'human rights' image get in the way of his support for the murderous junta.

The attempt to construct a 'liberal' military/civilian regime was a total failure. The US supported Government which replaced the hated General Romero in October 1979 fell to pieces within weeks, under the hammer blows of the Salvadorean landowning oligarchy and their right-wing supporters in the army. Since then, Carter has been unswerving in his support for the rapidly rightward moving regime. US military aid poured in to bolster the increasingly embattled government.

During 1980 US imperialism has provided the junta with military hardware, including six helicopter gunships and 200 marines to 'advise' on counter-insurgency tactics and stiffen the backbone of the army - or in Pentagon jargon to 'professionalise' the army. As a means of avoiding direct military intervention the US has set up an Israeli-trained force of shock troops based on the Honduran and Guatemalan armies, Cuban counter-revolutionaries and assorted torturers and murderers from Somoza's regime. In addition, the Guatemalan and Honduran Armies have been carrying out joint manoeuvres on the Salvadorean borders to smash the guerrilla movement and appear to have up to 500 troops fighting alongside Duarte's army. Internally, the forces ranged against the guerrillas are formidable. Apart from a standing army of about 12,000 troops there are perhaps as many as 100,000 'irregular' troops organised through the Fascist Orden, and the landowners private armies. The forces commanded by the FMLN are estimated at anything between 5,000 and

Salvadorean guerrillas.



Imperialists tighten their grip

20,000 armed guerrillas although of course the strength of a social movement cannot be measured in terms of its armed detachments alone.

The size of the forces pitted against the FMLN and the Salvadorean masses shows how seriously US imperialism takes the situation. This is because the civil war in El Salvador has massive implications for Central America as a whole.

Following as it does hot on the heels of the overthrow of America's most trusted puppet in the area - Somoza in Nicaragua - US imperialism has decided to go on the offensive in El Salvador. In itself the 'loss' of El Salvador, a country the size of Wales with a population of less than 5 millions, would be a relatively minor blow but combined with Nicaragua and with the distinct possibility of the revolt spreading to neighbouring Honduras and Guatemala, where US military forces intervened directly in defence of 'United Fruit' in 1954, this is a battle the US imperialists cannot lose. The FSLN victory highlighted the dangers of a bourgeois-backed rebellion against a hated American puppet getting out of control, and posed the threat of a generalised revolutionary upheaval throughout Central America.

US PLAN TO CRUSH REBELLION

The vital importance of this area for the US economy; the massive investments of American corporations, the Panama Canal, the growing importance of Mexico as an oil supplier etc. means that it is a high priority for the American ruling class to crush the Salvadorean rebellion and stabilize or defeat the movement in Nicaragua. The only differences within the American ruling circles are about the best tactics for achieving this - one wing, which was only slightly stronger in Carter's administration, favoured negotiations with the oppositions and sufficient reforms to defuse the struggle, the other favoured the traditional policy of supporting the most reactionary dictatorial elements of the landowning oligarchies and the comprador bourgeoisie in these areas in crushing the slightest reform-based opposition. Whenever Carter's incorporationist tactics misfired, he himself was willing to send arms on any trumped-up pretext - like the boatload(!) of guerrillas supposed to have arrived from Nicaragua.

While Carter may have had problems in squaring his actions with his hypocritical human rights waffle, Reagan - for whom combatting terrorism comes before human rights, has brazenly given the go-ahead for the second

Solidarity: disaster

January's renewed strike wave underlines the continuing instability and crisis facing Poland's bureaucratic rulers and the working class.

Each of the principle forces committed to 'renewal' and reconciliation - the Communist Party leadership, the group around Walesa at the head of the Solidarity Union network, and the Catholic hierarchy - have all failed to stem the mounting tide of militancy and self-organisation.

The Communist Party leadership knows that its credibility is so low and its ranks so divided and demoralised that it must continue to play for time. It is waiting for the various forces in revolt to play themselves out sufficiently, and for the differences of interest between the various social forces to express themselves more sharply, before making a new bid to seize the political initiative once again. It will not shirk from physical force when, and if, it is ready.

While the Warsaw radio has announced that the Government will take "the necessary steps aimed at

ensuring the normal functioning of enterprises" under industrial unrest subsidies it does not have, at the moment, sufficient reliable forces to enable it, single handed, to carry through that threat. It has used armed police to eject demonstrators from government buildings in the southern towns Nowy Sacz and Ustrzyki Dolne. But it does not have the resources to confront a general strike wave with armed force. The Polish Stalinists would have to look to assistance from the USSR, the GDR and Czechoslovakia to carry that through.

In the short term the regime hopes, in concert with the Catholic Church, to incorporate a section of Solidarity's leadership. It has tried to put off a confrontation with Poland's 3.5 million private farmers. While the Party leadership is committed to non-recognition of 'Rural Solidarity' its tame Supreme Court has prevaricated and postponed a final judgement on the matter. Kania, and his Minister for Trade Union Affairs Ciosek, hope to secure a deal with Solidarity on working hours and Solidarity

on Central America



strategy. Robert White - US ambassador in El Salvador previously attacked by Reagan's team for being too 'liberal', was recently declaring: "We have always taken the position that it is unacceptable to have El Salvador fall into the hands of marxists. We will do everything we can to prevent it." (Newsweek 26th November 1981).

While Reagan's new ambassador to the UN, Jean Kirkpatrick, went on record as saying the Administration would support "moderately repressive regimes" against "Cuban-trained" oppositions.

Against these plans of imperialism and those of the Salvadorean bourgeoisie the strategy of the FMLN and its political counterpart, the Revolutionary Democratic Front (FDR), must be weighed. The FDR was formed in April 1980 from a fusion of the Revolutionary Coordinating Committee of the Masses (CRM) and the Salvadorean Democratic Front (FDS). The FDS was a motley coalition of disillusioned Christian Democrats (including some ex-cabinet members), Social Democrats, who represent little in terms of social forces within the country, and middle class professionals.

CP SUPPORTS FDR

The treacherous Salvadorean Communist Party, which for years tailed the Christian Democrats as the progressive wing of the bourgeoisie, has also managed to drag its tired limbs into the FDR. The formation of the FDR represents the conscious consolidation of the popular frontist policy of the major guerrilla leaders. The avowed aim of the FDR is to establish a new government based on capitalist property (ie "respecting the rights of private property") which will include "progressive" sectors of the bourgeoisie and middle strata. The new army will be forged from a fusion of the guerrilla army and those elements of the old army who declare their support for "social progress". The policy statement of the CRM, supported in all essentials by the FDR, declares:

"The Revolutionary Democratic Government... will be based on a broad social and political foundation formed in the first place by the working class, the peasants and advanced middle classes. Intimately united with them will be the social classes prepared to carry forward this platform, managers of small and medium-sized industries, artisans and agricultural businessmen, (small and medium coffee growers and other branches of agriculture and cattle raising). It will also include honest professionals the progressive clergy, democratic parties such as the MNR (Revolutionary Nationalist Movement), the advanced sectors of the Christian Democracy, worthy and honest army officers, who are willing to serve the interests of the people and all other sectors, groups, persons or segments which are in favour of broad democracy for the popular masses, independ-

ent development and popular freedom". (Latin America 2).

In other words the FDR have taken as their model the strategy of the Government of National Reconstruction (GNR) in Nicaragua before the fall of Somoza. However, the opposition sections of the Salvadorean bourgeoisie and the Social Democrats, as well as the 'revolutionaries' in alliance with them, have learnt none of the lessons of the Nicaraguan struggle. The GNR's strategy of a takeover, leaving in tact as much of the existing state machine as possible - army, police, etc - collapsed in the face of Somoza's intransigent refusal to hand over power, an intransigence only made possible by US military and political support up to the last day of his regime. As a result, the Sandinista guerrillas smashed Somoza's apparatus and power fell to the FSLN and its armed, mass base.

Despite these lessons, or perhaps because of them, the FDR has expressed its deep commitment to the policy of rapprochement with imperialism, with continuous appeals to the US administration, both Reagan's and Carter's, to recognise its alternative ruling junta as the legitimate government of El Salvador.

The seven person junta consists of five guerrilla leaders and two ex-members of the October 1979 cabinet - Manuel Ungo and Ruben Zamora. The inclusion of these figures, referred to in sections of the American press as "respected non-marxists", is a promissory note to imperialism that the FDR Government is prepared to leave private property intact and retain its economic and political relations with the US.

In their search for respectable support and allies to pressurise the Americans, the FDR has leaned heavily on Helmut Schmidt and the good offices of the Socialist International. This agency of the 'democratic' counter-revolution specialises in channeling funds to liberal and social-democratic parties to enable them to head off a turn to communism. After his successes in Portugal and Spain, Schmidt turned his attentions to Nicaragua where he supported the pro-bourgeois majority of the FSLN.

'GET TOUGH' POLICY

The reasons behind this policy lie in the growing interests of West German imperialism in Central and South America. However, Reagan's 'get tough' policy to restore order in the USA's back yard would threaten a serious clash and this Schmidt is unlikely to risk. The FDR has even attempted to woo the European Christian Democrats away from the US-supported Duarte regime. This explains also the continual stressing by the FDR that it wishes no aid from Nicaragua and that it is the Americans via their allies in Guatemala and Honduras who are seeking to 'regionalise' the conflict not them.

looms under Catholic-Nationalist leaders

access to the media, before facing up to the demands of the farmers.

The Politburo hopes to weld the party together again, and refurbish its public image by convening an emergency Party Congress for April. It has already announced plans to unveil a reform programme at the Congress which will include economic decentralisation and consultative powers for workers councils in the factories. After every major working

Pope urges prudence and moderation on Walesa



class upheaval the bureaucrats have offered the formation of such councils, only to render them powerless and eventually disperse them.

But the Party is visibly shaken and demobilised. About a half million party members are rumoured to have returned their party cards since last summer and 60% of the party's worker members are in Solidarity. But this has not allowed the party leadership to gain control of Solidarity from within. For example, Bogdan Lis is the only notable Solidarity leader in Gdansk who is also a member of the party, and he has made clear his attitude to the authorities "None of us has trust or belief in those people. We consider them opponents." (Time Magazine 29th December 1980).

According to Rouge, CP members in Fonica factory in Lodz have circulated a document calling for the formation of a new Polish Socialist Workers Party because the Communist Party is discredited (Quoted in Socialist Challenge 29th January 1981). Against this background the Catholic Church continues its attempts to dampen down the conflict in a manner that augments the social position and political weight of its hierarchy. Church spokesman Father Orszulik attacked KOR on December 12th 1980 for its lack of responsibility and called for an end to its actions "which might expose the homeland to the danger of losing independence and statehood." Jacek Kuron was singled out for particular mention in Orszulik's attack. Similarly the reactionary Polish Pope Wjytola called for "prudence and moderation", when the fawning Walesa threw himself before "his holiness" at the Vatican in January.

While the Catholic Church is trying to restrain the struggles of industrial workers it has had noted success in rooting itself firmly within the decision making and propaganda machinery of Solidarity. The editor of the weekly paper due to be published by Solidarity is to be the Catholic intellectual Tadeusz Mazowiecki. So considerable is the potentially arbitrating role of the Church, that when Deputy Prime Minister Mach met Szczecin Solidarity in late January Cardinal Wyszynski sent his own representative to sit in on the talks.

BY CHARLIE SHELL

The European bourgeois clericals, the dyed in the wool reactionary pope, and Schmidt, are broken reeds even for the popular front strategy of the FDR. They spell bloody reverses for the Salvadorean workers and peasants.

The US offensive in Central America is showing the glaring inadequacies of the national isolationist, class-collaborationist policies of both the FSLN and the FDR. The revolution in Nicaragua which dramatically weakened the US stranglehold in the country and achieved important democratic gains for the Nicaraguan masses is under increasing threat. Externally, it will face increasing US economic disruption and CIA interference, aiming to strengthen and link up with the internal foe, the Nicaraguan bourgeoisie. The Sandinista Government's strategy of seeking an accommodation with the "anti-Somoza" bourgeoisie and US imperialism, its attempts to construct a "popular democratic" regime, threatens all the gains paid for with the blood of the Nicaraguan workers and peasants.

BOSSES FLEX MUSCLES

The result has been that 70% of industry remains in private hands, as well as much of the land. From this powerful base and with US encouragement, the Nicaraguan bourgeoisie had begun to flex its muscles against the FSLN. In November, the bourgeois parties and COSEP (The Superior Council of Private Enterprise) staged a walkout from the FSLN dominated Council of State, shortly after the Vice-President of COSEP, Jorge Salaza, was implicated in a plot aimed at overthrowing the Government with the help of Somoza supporters in Honduras.

The FSLN leaders, however, refuse to change course, despite the demands of the masses for the expropriation of the allies of imperialism. The Guardian quoted an example of this when at a mass rally, called in Managua to protest at the bourgeois actions, Jaime Wheelock, a 'left' Sandinista leader declared: "If we had wanted to demonstrate to them (the private industrialists-WP) how popular the ideas of Sandinism and the revolution are, it would have been enough to tell the workers and peasants, 'From today on, all the farms and factories of this country are yours; put them into production'".

Hearing the final words as a slogan, at this point, the 100,000 plus crowd burst into tumultuous applause at this apparent new turn in policy. The embarrassed Wheelock was forced to hastily add

"That is not the position of the revolutionary leadership that had to understand things above and beyond party politics."

This policy of compromising with imperialism inside the country is reflected externally both in the FSLN's recent agreement to pay back the debts incurred by Somoza to American banks and by the government's almost entirely verbal support for the Salvadorean

insurrection. The FSLN Government and its apologists in the USEC justify this in terms of the need for a "breathing space"; unfortunately world imperialism is not noted for giving much of this to revolutionary regimes—be they democratic or communist.

In fact, the breathing space the Sandinistas are giving is to the Nicaraguan bourgeoisie and US imperialism. To this 'breathing space' are being sacrificed the revolutionary aspirations of the Nicaraguan masses and the heroic fighters in El Salvador.

A corollary of the popular front strategy of the nationalist revolutionaries in El Salvador is the neglect of the working class and its organisations as the necessary central leading force of the revolution. The call for general strikes by 'high commands', divorced from the class struggle of the Salvadorean proletariat, the timing of the insurrections to act as bargaining counters with US imperialism, will break the back of the Salvadorean revolution. This is confirmed by the failure of the general strike call in January.

The gains of the masses in Nicaragua can only be defended by extending and deepening them. A revolution that falters, that stands still will sooner or later be thrown into retreat. For the workers and peasants of Nicaragua, the overthrow of the agents of US imperialism in El Salvador is a life or death matter for their own revolution.

The stabilisation of Duarte's junta based on the defeat of the guerrilla forces will strengthen the counter-revolutionaries in Nicaragua and provide a launching pad for their offensive backed by US imperialism. The overthrow of Duarte would break one more link in the chain which binds Central America to US imperialism and give tremendous impetus to the anti-imperialist forces in Guatemala and elsewhere in Latin America.

This is why revolutionaries in Nicaragua would be right to demand that the Government provide massive military aid to the FMLN—to actively intervene through FSLN forces on the side of that opposition. It is vital to attack the national divisions created by US Balkanisation.

The gains of the masses in Nicaragua can only be guaranteed by making the revolution permanent—by breaking the hold of imperialists through expropriating the bourgeoisie and landowners and by placing control of industry and agriculture into the hands of soviets of workers and poor peasants. It is around these policies that a revolutionary Trotskyist party would be built in Nicaragua and El Salvador.

In Britain, we must fight in the trade unions and Labour Party for maximum support for the struggle in El Salvador and Nicaragua. **Imperialists Hands Off Central America! For Unconditional Financial and Material Aid For the FMLN and FSLN. No Aid To The Duarte Regime—Black All Shipments and Transfers.**



The Catholic Church has invested enormous resources in a campaign to boost and maintain the credibility of Walesa. Last summers strikes showed that militant workers in struggle could not be depended on to heed calls from the pulpit to cool the strikes and compromise. Solidarity still does not have the organisational structure to discipline its members and force a return to work on strikers. Hence the Papal invite to Rome, and the publicity campaign that accompanied it.

The Church hopes that the Papal anointment of Walesa will serve to strengthen his influence against the imprudent and immoderate elements within the working class.

Walesa has taken his cue from the clergy. "We won't allow for any crackdown, particularly on KOR. They are our friends and they can always count on us," he declared to the Time Magazine published on the 29th December. But by the time he left his Holy Father in Rome the Guardian could report that he said "that Solidarity no longer needed the help of KOR, the Workers Self Defence Committee" (20th January 1981).

Similarly he has consistently echoed the Catholic hierarchy's calls for industrial order and restraint. Before he went to Rome he was declaring his opposition to strike action on the vexed issue of the length of the working week. "We do not want a strike and will be looking for better solutions." (Time 29th December 1980). By the time of his return this call had become even more strident "We have to stop all the strike so that the government can say that Solidarity has the situation under control. We all have to concentrate on basic issues. There is fire in the country." (International Herald Tribune 29th January 1981).

Walesa has been in receipt of a number of new material privileges. He now possesses a new six room apartment. He is being chided at union meetings by delegates declaring "You're going to get the way all the big bureaucrats get—mark my word" (quoted by Time). His 'bureaucratism' is being taken in hand by experts; by the privileged castes, clerical and Stalinist alike. It is the government that has been regularly laying on helicopters to ferry Walesa from Gdansk to wherever agreements are endangered between the government and Solidarity locals.

The fervent nationalism of Walesa and other leading figures in Solidarity, renders them immediately susceptible to appeals to Poland's 'national interest' from Politburo and pulpit alike. Walesa expressed this clearly when he declared in Italy "We are first Poles and then trade unionists. The interests of our country come first, and we do not want to do anything that could harm them." Walesa and the national leadership of Solidarity tried everything in their power to prevent the wave of strikes against Saturday working. They were in favour of bargaining with Kania and Ciosek. But they have been over ruled by militants demanding action to secure the 5 day week agreed with the Government in the Gdansk agreements.

SILESIA STRIKES

The campaign of Solidarity strikes has been widespread. On the 27th January over 100 enterprises were on strike in Silesia in pursuit of their own grievances and the full implementation of the Gdansk agreements. But the independent militants within Solidarity have not shown themselves politically capable of breaking with Walesa and the Catholic Church. They have not been able to weld themselves into a force that can destroy the power and privileges of the bureaucracy.

While Walesa struggles to reach agreement with the bureaucracy, those resisting him have adopted positions that can only strengthen the hand of Catholic reaction. In the South of Poland—in Rzeszow and in the giant Mielick aircraft factory, workers have struck in support of Rural Solidarity. They are in practice supporting a farming system within which the average farm is only 15 acres in size and cannot sustain a technological level sufficient to bear comparison with the bureaucratically managed state farms. It is an irrational and anachronistic system. Its continued existence is a direct cause of the shortages, queues and black markets which the workers suffer. For the workers to deploy their massive industrial strength to defend this system is a reactionary diversion from the struggle for their real needs. While we do not stand with the bureau-

leaders

cracy in their bureaucratic reprisals against Rural Solidarity leaders we oppose absolutely an alliance between the workers and the richer peasants and priests who are orchestrating Rural Solidarity. Workers must demand the immediate provision of funds—made available by refusing to repay the massive debts owed to Western banks—for the cooperativisation of Polish agriculture. Only in this way can advanced workers build an alliance with the poorer peasants against the richer farmers and the Stalinists and advance a programme that meets the needs of the workers for regular and adequate supplies of food.

As it stands Rural Solidarity is not a trade union, but a reactionary association of better off farmers. Ultimately it is backward peasant Poland that provides the social base for the Catholic Church. In backing Rural Solidarity the Church is consciously backing a movement that has only one unifying aim—the maintenance of private property in the Polish countryside.

Equally ominous is the petition campaign being organised in defence of the Confederation for an Independent Poland (PPN). This body is openly committed to abolishing nationalised property relations in Poland and to its inclusion in the EEC and the Western European political system—i.e. NATO. At the present Walesa and the Catholic hierarchy will not put all their weight behind PPN. They are still looking for a new deal with the Stalinists. But revolutionary marxists in Poland must argue that the working class has no interest in bolstering the efforts of those who seek to restore capitalism in Poland. While denying the right of the parasitic bureaucracy to speak or administer justice on its behalf the workers must demand that they themselves should conduct an enquiry into the PPN, should express their complete opposition to its programme and apply whatever coercive measures are necessary to prevent the Restorationists growing in strength.

The events in Poland do not take place in a nationally isolated vacuum. Every worker, bureaucrat and priest in Poland knows that. The imperialist powers wish to use the present crisis to prise Poland loose from the Warsaw pact, to consolidate private property and weaken the Stalinist party by pressuring them into a deal with the Catholic Church. The Catholic Church—ultimately committed to capitalist restoration—wants to establish Catholic trade unions and dramatically strengthen its political role. Both hope that such a weakening of the Stalinists in Poland would give them enormous leverage as they step up their anti-soviet drive and as they attempt to destabilise Eastern Europe and the USSR on the road to a capitalist restoration.

The Soviet bureaucracy is increasingly alarmed at the inability of the Kania regime to stabilise Polish society. It can tolerate private agriculture and the increased sway of the Church as long as its interests are not threatened, so long as Poland remains a reliable part of the Russian backed Warsaw pact. The constant instability is a threat to this. Any Soviet invasion of Poland provoked by this threat can only have, in the final analysis, a reactionary content. Its first task would be to destroy the independent organisations of the working class. These are the central threat to the bureaucrats because they have the potential to become the vehicle for a real solution for Poland's working class. A political revolution against the bureaucracy, taking political power directly into the hands of the workers on the basis of nationalised property. Without them such a solution would be impossible.

The imperialists have far less to lose from a Soviet invasion than do the Polish workers. It would enable them to push their new Cold War drive to a sharp and feverish crescendo. The potential of a Soviet invasion is used by many—Kania, Kuron and Wyszynski—to hold back the struggles of the Polish workers. But if workers do hold back on those struggles the coalition of anti-working class forces arrayed against them will be strengthened.

The only defence the Polish workers have, is to organise their revolution to take political power from the bureaucracy, on a programme of defending nationalised property and the USSR against imperialist attack, and in solidarity with all workers in the Stalinist states in struggle with their bureaucratic oppressors. Only on such a programme can the Polish workers extend and finally consolidate their gains, and defeat the project of the Stalinists to emasculate and destroy their organisation.

Such a struggle cannot be waged without the leadership of a revolutionary Trotskyist party. Thousands of workers have seen, and objected to, the compromises that Walesa and the Cardinals will make. The burning question in Poland is whether or not those workers can be organised into a new revolutionary communist party. If they are not, then either it will be the imperialists, the private farmers and the Catholic Hierarchy who will benefit from the heroic struggles of the Polish workers or it will be the Soviet bureaucracy that moves to destroy their organisations.

BY DAVE HUGHES

workers power

British Government reneagues on Maze deal

BY A MEMBER OF THE IRISH WORKERS GROUP

The Thatcher Government has taken advantage of the downturn in the Irish struggle, following the Maze deal which ended the H-Block hunger strike, to go back on the agreements reached with the Republican prisoners. There should be no doubt in anyone's mind that, whatever the British press has said, the 53-day hunger strike forced the British Government to make important concessions.

The growing mass pressure, which was threatening to explode into a general strike if any of the strikers died, forced the Tory Government to suddenly produce a 34-page document which 'amplified' the original Tory position into proposals clearly containing enough concessions on the five demands to convince the hunger strikers to end their fast. However, what should also be made clear to British socialists in particular, is that the key issue, the question of political status, was not conceded by the British Government.

British and US socialists, Bruce Robinson of 'Socialist Organiser' and Gerry Foley of 'Intercontinental Press/Inprecor', who fail to see that the un-

restrained gloating of the British and Irish Press was not the product of some conspiracy to hide the unpalatable truth of a major defeat, but the correct and unanimous recognition by them that prisoner of war status had been denied the Republicans, delude themselves and their readers.

Robinson and Foley ought to explain the state of total confusion now existing with the forces involved in the campaign as the British renege even on the promised reforms conceded in the Atkins document. Such confusion testifies to the political victory gained by the British Government in getting the strike called off and the mass movement demobilised without actually granting the key demand of political status.

To have been forced to do so would have signalled the end of the present phase of the Tory/Labour strategy in the North, aimed at criminalising and isolating the Republicans. The meeting between Thatcher and Haughey showed that the Tory Government, under the threat of the growing mass movement in the South, was being

forced to promise a change of course involving some concessions to the Southern bourgeoisie on the question of a united Ireland.

Believing themselves to have weathered the storm, the Tories, in the best traditions of 'perfidious Albion', have not hesitated to double cross both the Southern Government and the prisoners in the North and return to their previous strategy which involved a strengthening of the protestants and their state combined with repression of any resistance by the Catholic minority.

The reasons behind this 'success' for the Tories are not hard to pinpoint. As the Irish Workers Group (IWG) outlined in a previous article in 'Workers Power' No. 19, December 1980, (an article on the H-Block protest), the major weakness of the heroic four year struggle for political status was that it refused, under the leadership of Sinn Fein, the IRSP and Peoples Democracy (USFI), to direct itself to the task of building support among anti-unionist and Southern workers for strike action.

Instead it gradually abandoned the explicit political essence of the protest in favour of the humanitarian and prison reform perspectives aimed at capturing the support of respectable middle class and petit bourgeois opinion in Ireland and abroad. The IWG argued at the conference which established the humanitarian Smash H-Block Campaign, in September 1979, that such a fatal ambiguity would enable the most powerful representatives of such 'liberal opinion' - the Catholic Church - to work closely in tandem with the campaign in order to effectively derail it.

The crucial role played in the final settlement by Fianna Fail leader Haughey and Cardinal O'Fiach, along with the SDLP's John Hume, admitted by the campaign spokesperson Bernadette McAliskey, testifies to the close links which existed between some of the campaign leaders and these reactionary forces. These links merely expressed the ideological and political limits of the campaign, limits which until the prisoners had decided to embark on a hunger strike, limited the campaign to

Irish solidarity must be built in Britain

THE 96 PRISONERS IN the H-Blocks who smashed furniture in their cells and went back onto the dirty protest, are living proof of British imperialism's treachery. The prisoners were not allowed to wear their own clothes, when those clothes were sent by relatives to the prison authorities. The prison officers were acting on orders from the Northern Ireland Office. Having demobilised the protest campaign that existed around the hunger strikers, the British Government remains determined as ever to crush all nationalist opposition to their

rule in Ireland. The promised 'concessions' to the prisoners are being withdrawn even before they had begun to be implemented.

The stepping up of the dirty protest and the possibility of a second hunger strike once again raise the need for British socialists to step up their solidarity with their Irish brothers and sisters who are fighting British imperialism. The campaign built up in Britain before Christmas has been demobilised because of the humanitarian content given to it by the SWP/IMG backed Charter '80 Campaign. When human rights appeared to have been granted the campaign appeared to have fulfilled its purposes. The forces mobilised in support of the hunger strikers have to a large extent been dispersed.

They need to be regrouped - but not on a liberal human rights perspective and not tied to the liberal celebrities who were prepared to sign the Charter '80 Appeal.

A campaign must be developed to force the British Government to grant political status to the anti-imperialist fighters imprisoned in Britain's torture camps in the Six Counties. Such a campaign must be built inside the British working class. Its organisations - the trade unions and the Labour Party - must be forced to break with the British ruling class and actively oppose Britain's occupation of the Six Counties. Such a campaign must not simply be won to forcing the government to admit that it is at war with a section of the Irish people. It must also be won to opposing Britain's war effort in Northern Ireland. The way to ensure not merely that Irish prisoners of war are recognised as such, but also to help bring about their eventual freedom, is to fight now, inside the labour movement, for a policy of:

- * British troops out of Ireland now!
- * Black all military shipments to Ireland and all goods aimed at aiding Britain's war effort!
- * Smash the Prevention of Terrorism Act!
- * For solidarity with all those socialists and Republicans fighting British imperialism!

a series of peaceful lobbies and marches presided over by spokespersons from Republican and constitutional nationalist forces.

The response to the hunger strike clearly showed that the perspectives fought for by the IWG in the campaign were the correct ones. It was the strike action by anti-unionist workers, North and South, which began to put real strength and hope into the anti-unionist population. It also began to convince sections of workers themselves that their action could not only win political status, but also challenge the whole structure of British imperialist rule in Ireland.

The overwhelming response of Derry workers who launched the first half-day strike showed that Catholic workers and trade unionists were far ahead of the leaders of the campaign in their perception of what was necessary to force the British to back down.

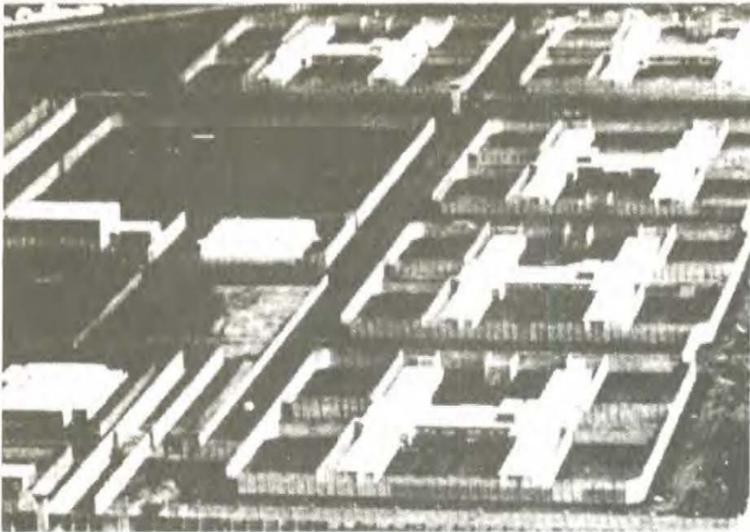
At the HBlock Campaign Trade Union Sub-Committee conference called in Dublin, IWG-initiated resolutions from the Derry Strike Committee called for a redirection of the campaign forces to mobilise for a general strike, for action councils to be formed uniting all the anti-unionist forces in this fight and for the campaign to be built explicitly around the demand for political status - while not excluding those who wished to participate for humanitarian reasons. These perspectives were passed by the conference, despite the opposition of Sinn Fein, IRSP and Peoples Demo-

cracy. However, like the call for the immediate recall of the national H-Block conference to re-orient the campaign and draw in the new forces brought into the struggle, these decisions remained a dead letter. Instead the leaders of the campaign relegated workers action to token half-day protests, which only served to increase the feeling among the activists that only a death would bring the masses out on the streets.

This de facto 'perspective' not only increased the tension as the days passed by but also allowed the psychological pressure to mount on the prisoners. Only a massive mobilisation of the Irish working class can still force the British ruling class to concede both the five demands and to grant political status.

The lessons of the last hunger strike need to be learnt. Sadly it is clear from the decisions of the most recent H-Block campaign conference that this is not going to be the case in the immediate future.

The H-Blocks



Halt the retreat

continued from front page

ments are our business—Of course we should be accountable; we need the rank and file's support to get us there but not their action for themselves. Protests yes—they help to mobilise public opinion and prepare the way for winning at the ballot box.

But despite his undoubted popularity with the Labour Party and Trade Union rank and file millions are not galvanised behind Benn's reformist programme. As revolutionaries we do not wish them to be. This may seem shockingly sectarian to the entrists and centrists who usurp the name of Trotskyism in Britain but as revolutionary communists we have a programme, tactics, transitional demands which are the only sure way forward for workers suffering the blows of and fighting back against the Tories. Part of that programme and tactics arms us to deal with the situation when workers follow Benn (or Foot) into a blind alley. They are tactics for mobilising the forces to

break out of the crippling limits of these leaders strategy for creating the forces and the leadership to replace Foot and Benn. But Benn is not an inevitable stage on the road forward and we are not his foot-soldiers or publicists. Tactically the demands of the anti-Tory struggle clash with Bennery, come up against its crippling legalist-protest oriented limits. Workers must defend their jobs, organisations, militant leaders now not in 1984. They must force the Tories into full scale retreat now. As soon as possible they must break the will of the bosses—must drive the Tories from office—as they drove Heath. Of course this time the bosses are more desperate and more resolved. It will be a tougher job. Massive industrial direct action—a general strike, mobilised by action councils, defended by workers defence squads, these are the only means to stop the Tories before we have 3½ million unemployed, most militants walking the streets, workers afraid to

join a union—chronic poverty with no recourse except soup kitchens on the streets in Scotland, the Midlands, Merseyside.

The time is long overdue to stop the retreat. The militants at rank and file level desperately need unity and co-ordination. To do otherwise is to fiddle whilst the labour movement burns. Organisation around every point of resistance is vital. The miners in Scotland, Yorkshire and South Wales have voted overwhelmingly for strike action when pit closures are announced. They must receive immediate backing from all the unions. Action committees must be formed to mobilise in solidarity with each and every section in struggle. A national movement of rank and file militants a new Minority Movement is the vital need of the coming months. The only final and secure way to deal with the bosses and the Tories is not to take office in Westminster and Whitehall but to take power into the hands of the action councils and the workers militia. To take out of the hands of the ruling class the army, the banks and factories,

to dissolve the reactionary judiciary and their police and to use the organised might of the working class (an 80% active and vocal majority, the like of which 'parliamentary democracy' never knew) to crush the sabotage and resistance of the 3% who own everything (and any of their incurable minions).

Of course—at any point of the struggle a Labour Government might take office with or without an electoral mandate. The bosses would fight for its role to be what it was in 1974. So would most of its leaders. Its task would be to demobilise the working class in exchange for reforms more or less serious—which would last only as long as the ruling class was scared of worse, and not a minute longer. The task for revolutionaries would be to mobilise the working class to push such a government to a break with the bosses over fundamentals—the control of industry and finance and control over the state forces. In that way and that way only, could it be a stepping stone to working class power—a workers and not a bosses Labour Government.

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