

Workers Power

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INSIDE: THE WAR
AND THE LEFT
EL SALVADOR
REAGAN'S VISIT

British Imperialism...

Hands off Argentina

THE WAR LAUNCHED by Thatcher's government against Argentina in the South Atlantic demonstrates that British Imperialism, far from being the decrepit toothless lion that many had supposed, remains a dangerous and determined beast, "red in tooth and claw". Launched in a wave of Jingoism and a degree of hypocrisy that only the British ruling class can muster, Thatcher's offensive has not only pulled her electoral chestnuts out of the fire but left Labour trailing behind her every action.

The Tories have sent a massive fleet half way around the globe under the ideological smokescreen of, "defending the rights of the islanders". That the violators of the national interests of millions in the last two hundred years, the violators TODAY of the right to national unity of the majority of the Irish people, should lay claim to such a role is laughable. Thatcher should tell that to the 1300 inhabitants of Diego Garcia ejected from their island to make way for an Anglo-American military base designed to facilitate intervention by both imperialisms in the Middle East.

The real reasons for the massive expenditure — hundreds of millions at the very least — has nothing to do with the rights of the islanders but a lot to do with the strategic and economic significance of this area of the South Atlantic. As Sir Ernest Shackleton complained in an article entitled, "Falklands Riches at Risk", "The strategic importance of Georgia and the other islands seem seems to have been largely overlooked to date." (Observer 11.4.82)

Shackleton should know. He was the author in 1976 of a Government sponsored economic survey of the Islands. He goes on to say, "Their importance lies firstly in the fact that this area commands the approaches to that part of the Antarctic where there are overlapping claims by the British, Chileans and the Argentine. The value of this area has yet to be fully measured, but exploration has indicated possible major oil reserves."

Besides the economic potential of the islands and of Antarctica itself, the islands have always been seen as strategically important. They are crucial for guarding the approaches to the Straits of Magellan, the corridor between the Pacific and Atlantic Oceans. This continued to be the case even after the opening of the Panama Canal which could always be 'lost' to US and British imperialism. Both world wars witnessed British naval victories launched from the islands — 1914, the Battle of the Falklands and 1939 the Battle of the River Plate.

The British ruling class has a further interest in slapping down Argentina's assertion of sovereignty. As The Economist has continuously pointed out since the crisis began, Argentina's action poses a threat not only to the South Atlantic but could set an example which, if successful, would lead other states to threaten Britain's vital interests. Spain's claim to Gibraltar, a base vitally important for bottling up the Soviet

fleet in the Mediterranean, is one such area. Hong Kong, worth over 1½ billion dollars a year to British finance capital is another. It is such considerations as these which make the millions it costs to 'win back the Falklands' well worth it for British capital.

The British working class clearly has no interest in supporting such an imperialist adventure. Yet, when it came to sending the fleet, the self-proclaimed, "inveterate peacemonger" Foot was beside himself with rage that Thatcher had 'lost' the Falkland Islands. "Its people wish to be associated with this country. We have a moral and political duty to answer that. They have an absolute right to look to us at this moment of their desperate plight..." he declared in the House of Commons on April 2nd.

Falling in behind Thatcher's smokescreen of defence of the islanders against the "fascist jackboots" of Galtieri, Foot has shown the mettle of all 'peacemongers' of his ilk. They are for peace in general but rapidly find themselves in favour of any particular war. Imperialism always claims its wars are fought in defence of someone's rights — in World War 1 it was for gallant little Belgium. They are always fought against 'vile dictatorships'. Does Foot think this argument will not be used in relation to a war against the Soviet Union? Capitalism always ties its war propaganda machine into such arguments and the Labour leaders have hitched their wagon to it.

The Tribunitaries have not only supported sending the fleet but have happily used it to argue for building up bigger conventional armed forces. Thus, Tribune, rubbing its hands with glee, could declare on 9.4.82, There is also a serious possibility that all out pressure on the government on this issue could lead to the cancellation of the Trident programme ... a nuclear capability allows no flexible response to actions which could face Britain in future."

The Tribunitaries and the 'big navy' lobby appear agreed on the important role the force will have to play in defending Britain's world interests. The hollowness of the 'inveterate peacemonger' and the opponents of Trident is cruelly exposed. Scrap Trident to build up the Navy! "Jobs not Bombs" quickly becomes "Battleships not Bombs". The Labourites who jeer at Thatcher's unpreparedness reveal themselves as chauvinists, not a shade better than she is.

Having agreed with Thatcher on fundamentals, the Labour leaders have only



Thatcher's troops preparing for war against Argentina

Arguments on Malvinas

IN TRADE UNION and Labour Party meetings many workers will voice support for Britain's war drive because it is being waged FOR "self determination" and AGAINST a "fascist junta". We don't think that this is what this war is about. It is about Imperialism's ability to maintain its colonies and military bases to police and exploit the imperialised world. That's why

YOU SOCIALISTS TALK a lot about "democratic rights" but what about the rights of the Falkland Islanders, don't we defend their right to live where they are and under what regime they choose?

The Falkland Islanders are not a distinct nation with their own culture, tradition and language. Their hold on the Falkland Islands depends on the power and commitment of British Imperialism to hold on to these South American islands. In fact they are all British settlers who were moved into the Malvinas after it was seized by the British from Argentina in 1833.

They have never expressed their desire to exercise any "rights of self-determination" i.e. to become an independent state. Of course, in practice this would be impossible for 1800 people on an isolated island. Their practical dependence on Argentina has already been demonstrated. It was the soldiers of Argentina who built the only airstrip on the islands, which has now been blown up by the British. It was the Argentine air force which provided the only air service to the islands, it was Argentine hospitals which provided for the seriously ill, and Argentine colleges which provided the only route to higher education for the islanders.

What the islanders have declared in favour of, is remaining part of the

we have no doubts as to which side we are on in this conflict. But socialists must be able to tackle these arguments — articulated most dishonestly and hypocritically by the Labour leaders — in their struggle to defeat Thatcher's war drive. The following article deals with some of the most common arguments that have been voiced within the labour movement.

British Empire. Socialists can have no truck with this desire. To do so would allow every group of British settlers, or British citizens who benefit from imperialism, to continue to occupy someone else's territory. The Malvinas is a South American island, claimed by Argentina as early as 1820 after her struggle for independence from Spain and settled by her. The British settlers have two choices; either to live under Argentine rule, and, we would hope, join with their fellow Argentinian workers and small farmers in the fight to overthrow the dictatorship, or to leave the islands for somewhere of their own choosing.

But doesn't support for Argentina mean supporting a fascist junta that is an even more ferocious enemy of the working class than Margaret Thatcher?

Not at all. We support the demands of the Argentinian people against British imperialism, not the Junta that is trying to solve its own crisis by fighting for those demands. The blood stained Junta hoped it would deflect attention away from the 13% unemployment and 130% inflation through a diversionary action that was certain to be popular with the masses. They hoped that exercising their rights over the Malvinas would head off mounting opposition from the working class.

However, the Junta has met with resistance. Their invasion of the Malvinas was popular, but it has not

made the tyrannical Junta itself popular with the masses. Demonstrations in Buenos Aires have called the anti-imperialist credentials of the Junta into question. Peronist forces in the unions have openly taken to the streets with their own banners and slogans. The Left has been able to distribute leaflets and papers against the Junta and for Argentina's right to the Malvinas. Under pressure, the Junta, which is committed to the imperialists' stranglehold over the economy, was forced to block the repatriation of foreign profits and halt the removal of the foreign investments on April 21st.

The nationalist sentiments of the masses, which the Junta is trying to exploit, are rooted in the imperialised status of Argentina. The flag waving patriotism of the British, to the extent that it is not a media creation, is rooted in Britain's imperialist past — and present. The task we set ourselves is to drive a wedge between the workers and the Junta, not to deny the rights of the Argentinian people, even if these happen to be advocated by the Junta at the moment.

The Argentinian workers can break with the Junta by developing and extending the struggle against imperialism, including the struggle for the Malvinas. Anyone who says the Argentinian

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been able to distance themselves on tactics. Foot is left bleating about keeping to UN resolution 502, precisely the resolution upon which Thatcher is basing her war against the Argentinians. He is left being in favour of force but against "high casualties" a posture which is increasingly incomprehensible to Labour voters. Every successful military operation appears to prove Thatcher right and the Labour leaders just spineless.

Few of the Labour "left" have been able to break with this contradiction because they all basically agree with defending the islanders' rights to self determination. Reg Race has forthrightly managed to nail his colours to no mast at all! In Labour Herald he declares, "We must not commit ourselves to a major (sic) war with Argentina ...

we have to recognise the Falklanders have the right to be defended against unprovoked aggression."

Does this mean he is in favour of a small war? No, not necessarily. His advice to the labour movement is to, "play it by ear whilst keeping our principles firmly before us." (Labour Herald 7.4.82)

With such sound leadership as this the working class will have nothing to fear from Thatcher!

Benn has been more consistent in opposing the fleet and war preparations and in demanding withdrawal. He is only able to do this, however, by calling for the whole question to be handed over to the United Nations. But since when has an imperialised nation received any

justice from this body which is dominated by the big imperialist powers?

Britain's war against Argentina demands only one response, "The main enemy is at home". We recognise absolutely the right of the Argentine to repossess the Malvinas. We condemn the imperialist adventure of Britain in the South Atlantic, we are unequivocally for its failure, that is, for the defeat of British imperialism.

A victory for Thatcher will not only strengthen her arm in her reactionary rampage against the working class at home. It will also strengthen the resolve of imperialism, and of Thatcher as the trusted ally of Reagan, to step up its drive to crush the anti-imperialist struggles that threaten its power throughout the impoverished and underdeveloped world. ■

An imperialised country at war

ALL THOSE WHO have been stampeded into declarations equating Argentina's war effort with that of Thatcher forget one thing. Argentina is an imperialised nation, Britain is imperialist. The opposing armies represent qualitatively different social regimes. In any war between the armed forces of imperialism and those of an imperialised country, our support goes to the imperialised army. That is why we support Argentina against Britain's army, not because the Malvinas happen to be nearer to Buenos Aires than London.

Argentina has its origins in the Spanish Empire which ruled over much of South America from the fifteenth century. That empire finally disintegrated as a result of the conquest of the Iberian peninsula by the armies of Napoleon. Defeated Spain was no longer able to prevent uprisings in her colonies nor to prevent rival empires - particularly the British - making their own attempts to colonise Southern America.

The Spanish had deliberately fostered the growth of the *estancias* - the great class of capitalist landlords of the pampas dealing in cattle. It was this social class that dominated Argentinian political and social life after the break up of the Spanish empire and Argentina's formal declaration of independence in 1816.

Between independence and the 1860s, the country remained a conglomerate of feuding provinces. The ranchers of Rio de la Plata who were the strongest and wealthiest section of society endeavoured to construct a *laissez faire* economy, throwing open the doors to the world market through which they hoped to prosper from the sale of cattle. In 1824 a treaty was signed with Great Britain to this effect. Against them were pitted the bourgeoisie of the interior and sections of artisans who wanted to break the monopoly of Buenos Aires and wished to cream off some of the profits of the ranchers.

This conflict assumed open warfare more than once and even a split between the Rio de la Plata and elsewhere between 1852 - 1861. The founding of a unified Argentine state under General Mitre in 1861 was a victory for the ranching bourgeoisie of the pampas. It was the ability of this ranching bourgeoisie to frustrate the development of an industrial and manufacturing bourgeoisie, and its commitment to an alliance with foreign capital, that was to consign formally independent Argentina to the status of a semi-colony to developing British imperialism.

After the 1870s there was a falling off of profitable investments in the great industrial nations of Europe and the USA. Capital scoured the globe in search of new outlets for profitable investment. This period saw a massive expansion in the export of capital from the industrial heartlands to the rest of the world. This can be vividly demonstrated by the following table for the growth of British and French investment over this period.

Year	Capital Invested Abroad (000,000,000 francs)	
	Great Britain	France
1862.....	3.6	
1872.....	15.0	10 (1869)
1882.....	22.0	15 (1880)
1893.....	42.0	20 (1890)
1902.....	62.0	27-37
1914.....	75-100.0	60

The 1870s saw a dramatic increase in the role of foreign particularly British capital, in the Argentinian economy. Foreign capital came to completely dominate the communication network of Argentina. The length of railway line increased tenfold between 1870-1890. About half of this was directly owned by British capital. Most of the rest was run by public authorities but only via loans borrowed from abroad. In addition, the overseas shipping,

local transport and gas lighting were owned by Britain. The British also soon came to dominate the most lucrative industry - meat-packing, and later, freezing. Six British and US firms controlled 96% of the industry at the turn of the century. In 1895, 84% of the owners of Argentine industry were foreign. Secondary industries were mainly manufacturing before the First World War and other industries like flour mills and some construction companies were often dependent on loans from abroad, although Argentinian-owned.

The ranching bourgeoisie welcomed this with open arms as the precondition for their wealth. Imperialist capital was freed from tax, and profits were guaranteed in advance. The Argentinian bourgeoisie was thus thoroughly dependent on world imperialism, despite its formal status as a nationally independent class. Writing in "Imperialism" Lenin described the dependence of the Argentinian bourgeoisie in the following passage.

"Not only are the two main groups of countries, those owning colonies, and the colonies themselves, but also the diverse forms of dependent colonies which, politically, are formally independent, but in fact, are enmeshed in the net of financial and diplomatic dependence, are typical of this epoch. We have already referred to one form of dependence - the semi-colony. An example of another is provided by Argentina.

"South America, and especially Argentina," writes Schulze-Gaevernitz in his work on British imperialism, "is so dependent financially on London that it ought to be described as almost a British commercial colony." Basing himself on the reports of the Austro-Hungarian Consul at Buenos Aires for 1909, Schilder estimated that the amount of British capital invested in Argentina at 8,750 million francs. It is not difficult to imagine what strong connections British finance capital (and its faithful 'friend' diplomacy) thereby acquires with the Argentinian bourgeoisie, with the circles that control the whole of that country's economic and political life."

Alongside the inflow of capital, the population, mainly immigrant, doubled to 3.6 million between 1870 and 1890, thus allowing expansion of cattle market and opening up of cereal production and export. In order to be able to finance the debt incurred to imperialism by its huge borrowing, a constant increase in the volume of exports was vital if Argentina was not to become destitute. Up to the 1930s this was done. For forty years before then the economy grew at an average of 4.6% p.a., mostly by increasing acreage going to cattle and wheat. In 1890 3 million acres produced 85 million metric tons; by 1900 this had grown to 8 million producing 2.75 million tons of wheat. The historical maximum was reached in 1928-9 for wheat with 9.2 million hectares being sown and a little earlier for cattle land with a maximum of 45 million hectares.

Dependent status for Argentine capitalism did not mean the impoverishment of Argentina in this period. So profitable was Argentina for world imperialism that it was able to sustain the highest living standards in Latin America and, in 1930, the eighth highest per capita income in the world. Imperialism continued, however, to exploit Argentina.

For example, in the 1921-28 period the railways returned a profit of 5% p.a. compared to the Argentine average of 2.2% p.a. In the same period, the largest British meat-packing firm earned profits amounting to five times the invested capital within two years!

Nor did imperialism do anything to diversify or increase the relative weight of industry to agriculture in the first thirty years of the century. The proportion between agriculture and industry in 1899 was 38%-13% and in 1929 31%-16%. British and American imperialists were happy to confine their interests to super-profitable areas, allow a moderate increase in low profit, high risk consumer industries and maintain a vice-like grip over the supply and production in

its homeland of the industrial raw materials and machinery needed in Argentina. In 1929 80% of machinery and vehicles were imported and 98% of electrical equipment.

The only real change in the relationship between imperialism and Argentina before the Second World War was the increasing eclipse of British capital by the US. There were savage wars between the rival meat packing giants - British based Vestey's and US based Smith's - in 1918 and 1939 which led to a reverse in their shares in the market, the US company coming to dominate.

The 1930s depression in the world imperialist economy hit Argentina hard. There was a reduced demand for Argentina's staple exports which caused a drop in prices. In turn a greater proportion of native capitalist profit had to be siphoned off to pay back debts to imperialism. In 1934, for example, of 23.9 million pesos Argentinian profit 22.3 million were so used leaving little for internal investment.

The depression did not mean that foreign capital had to forego its profits in the 1930s. In fact they were one way of offsetting the disaster in the metropolitan centres. Between 1929-34 the meat-packing firms managed a profit of 12.6% p.a., nearly thrice that of the ranching bourgeoisie themselves, itself the only really profitable section of the native bourgeoisie at that time.

There is no evidence therefore that there had been any change in the status of Argentina as a dependent imperialised country prior to the Second World War. Despite the fact that the industrial sector of Argentina was fairly large, contributing 30% of the gross national product in 1945, it remained tied to imperialism. Neither have attempts to develop an industrialised Argentina, relatively more independent of imperialism, had any success or qualitatively changed the status of the country in the post-war period.

The decline of British imperialism during and after the war, coupled with a high demand for Argentinian meat products increased the bargaining position of the Argentinian bourgeoisie within world capitalism. The Peron period, from 1945-55, saw attempts to fashion a more independent national capitalism and concessions to the working class as a means of securing popular support for pressure on imperialism. It is precisely Peron's failure, and the subsequent hold taken on the economy by US capital, that underlines the continued imperialised status of Argentina.

The Peronists purchased a series of imperialist properties at inflated prices taking them into the hands of state capitalist trusts. In 1948 £150 million was paid to purchase the British owned railway system which had not been invested in for a generation!

By 1948 Argentina had a significant state capitalist sector but precious little capital left to invest in it. Intended diversification was a failure with agriculture and livestock still comprising 95% of exports in 1948-9.

In 1950 Peron borrowed 125 million pesos from the export-import bank hoping to revive Argentine capitalism's flagging fortunes. Between 1950 and 1952 there was a 23% cut in wages and severe cuts in social welfare provision. Peron's attempts to create an independent national capitalism had failed. In 1955 Peron was overthrown by a military coup and Argentina joined the International Monetary Fund.

The period since 1955 has witnessed an enormous expansion in US investment in Argentina and the strengthening of imperialism's grip on her economy. In 1957 direct US investment accounted for 2.2% of Argentina's Gross Domestic Product, a figure that had reached 3.5%

by 1966. In the 1960s the US invested more capital in Argentina than in any other Latin American country and more than Panama. By 1970 US investments stood at 1 billion dollars and growing at 5% p.a. They accounted for 50% of all foreign investment in Argentina, compared with Britain's share of 10%.

Of the 120 largest companies operating in Argentina in 1978 80 of them were foreign owned, 39 of them being US owned.

The ownership and structure of Argentina's industry in the 1970s reflected her continued imperialised status. Of the twenty largest companies, nine were foreign owned including Fiat, Shell, Esso, Ford and Renault. Royal Dutch Shell was the second biggest company in Argentina, Fiat the third. British American Tobacco's subsidiary Nobeza owned 80% of the tobacco industry.

Nine of the top twenty companies were state owned service industries but they too are dependent on imperialism in a particular way. Of Argentina's 27.2 billion dollars foreign debt in 1980, 14.5 billion dollars was owed by the public sector. The state capitalist trusts were therefore increasingly tied to loans from imperialist finance capital. Lloyd's Bank, for example, has 8 subsidiaries in Argentina and raised a 100 million dollar loan for the Vidella government in 1978. At the present time Argentina pays 4 billion dollars interest each year.

Argentina paid bitterly for complete reintegration into the grip of imperialist capital. In the 1960s, because of imperialism, Argentina experienced unemployment rates of between 4.7% and 8.8% and an average of 30% inflation rate. In the 1970s as world imperialism plummeted into recession, the US sneezed and Argentina caught pneumonia. Inflation averaged 60% a year; today it is running at 130%, its industrial capacity is running at only 50%.

In order to maintain foreign investment and service debt repayments to imperialism the Argentinian bourgeoisie - along with those of Chile and Uruguay - has launched a savage IMF-backed monetarist attack on its working class, its social services and its public sector. Economy Minister Alemann announced sweeping denationalisation proposals at the beginning of this year. Banking, oil, gas, steel and petrochemicals have all been earmarked for "a transfer to private hands." But, as the Latin American Weekly reports have pointed out, Argentina as in Chile and Uruguay "The main effect of this policy was to transfer resources from productive to financial capital." Industrial and agricultural companies have been squeezed while the banks have profited. For investment has grown while local industry collapses. The number of bankruptcies in Argentina tripled in the first half of 1981. They are now running at 150 million dollars a month.

All attempts by the Argentinian bourgeoisie to alter their status and change the terms of their relationship with imperialism have failed. That status secured relative prosperity for Argentina before the Second World War. It has meant its relative impoverishment since then. By 1972 Argentina's per capita income had slipped to 35th place in the world.

The history of Argentina, and its present crisis, underlines clearly that the army that is facing the imperialist war machine of Margaret Thatcher is the army of an imperialised and oppressed people, not that of an "equal" capitalist or imperialist power. That is why we support it. ■

by Keith Hassel and Dave Hughes



Argentinian workers processing tobacco on a plantation owned by the British-American Tobacco Co.

Arguments on Malvinas

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masses only have the right to fight British imperialism once they have dumped the Junta is, whatever their claims, siding with the imperialists against the Argentine workers.

The workers of Argentina must take the opportunity the army gives them to take up arms and be trained in their use. They should take advantage of the present situation to strengthen and extend their own organisations. They should refuse to relinquish their arms when the Junta feels its adventure has gone too far. Against the 'anti-imperialist' Junta of

Galtieri, which is selling off state industry to international capital, they must fight for all imperialist holdings to be nationalised under the control of the workers themselves.

Of course it is possible that the Junta might win a victory in the Malvinas over Thatcher and leave Esso and Royal Dutch Shell unscathed. Such a victory would not be a lasting one for the workers of Argentina. It would still leave them under the heel of imperialism. But a defeat for Thatcher would weaken one of their major props and weaken one of the major props of the Junta and its like throughout Latin America. It would have served to arouse the workers themselves and weakened the base of the Galtieri regime.

But wouldn't a defeat for Argentina serve to weaken and undermine the blood stained regime far more immediately and dramatically?

By no means. Firstly, it would be a significant and potentially highly demoralising defeat for the oppressed Argentinian masses themselves. Secondly, there is no shortage of potential pro-imperialist right wing dictators to take Galtieri's place should the masses be demoralised and beaten back by Galtieri's imperialist war machine. Neither can we guarantee that the outcome would not be the chance for a Peron-type populist demagogue to come to power. Such a figure could use injured nationalism to further enslave the working class. A victory to Thatcher could even serve to tie the masses to the Galtieri regime. Whatever the outcome of such a defeat, the oppressed masses of Argentina have nothing to gain from a British victory.

In fact, the whole question of the credentials of the Argentinian regime is a complete red herring from the Labourites. There was no dearth of opportunities for Labour's leaders to attack the regime before the Malvinas crisis. But the last Labour government was supplying 30% of the Junta's arms between 1974 and 1976. Diplomatic relations were broken because of friction over Britain's colony in the Malvinas — not because of Labour's anti-fascism.

Imperialism will always declare that its wars are directed against tyranny. Doesn't it claim that its nuclear arsenals are directed against the Russian dictatorship's threat to the 'freedom' and 'liberty' of the capitalist world? Didn't it claim that the Allende regime in Chile was undemocratic and unrepresentative? Wasn't the Vietnamese regime portrayed as being despotic and totalitarian when it took on the armed might of the US forces occupying Vietnam?

Supporting Imperialism in the name of democracy pits Labour's anti-fascists behind the murderous Reagan and Thatcher war drive and against those struggling against oppression and exploitation at the hands of imperialism.

But wouldn't the best solution be to hand the question over to the UN? That way it would be out of the hands of both Thatcher and Galtieri?

No, it wouldn't be out of the hands of British Imperialism. The United Nations was formed after the Second World War to replace the previous "world organisation", the League of Nations which Lenin described quite rightly as a "thieves kitchen of the Imperialists". The great Imperialist powers, Britain, France and USA, together with the USSR and China, all have a complete veto over any actions which they think affect their direct interests. The Stalinists participate in the UN as part of their pursuit of a modus vivendi with imperialism, and are quite willing to sell out the interests of the oppressed nations if it suits their own purposes.

The history of the UN confirms that its major role has been settling disputes in the interests of imperialism. In 1947/8 it played a major role in setting up the imperialist settler state of Israel, with the USSR voting in favour. In 1950, it acted as the collective armed force of western imperialism in the Korean War, at one time advancing across North Korea almost to the Chinese border while its General Assemblies called for the unification of a capitalist Korea. In 1960, it was used to intervene when Belgian imperialism was threatened in the Congo. It played a devious role in the secession of Katanga, a rich copper mining area of the Congo, only moving to end the rebellion when Patrice Lumumba the Prime Minister, who was seeking aid from the Soviet Union, was removed and murdered. By the time UN forces left in 1964 the Congo was once again safe for imperialism, having been re-divided between the Belgians and the USA.

To hand over the Malvinas question to the UN would be to just let the imperialists barter for, which of them should have the biggest slice of the cake. The future of the Malvinas question is one for the Argentinian people to decide, not the collective arm of imperialism. ■

Socialist Organiser

shipwrecked on Malvinas ... any hope of survivors?

DESPERATE TO HITCH a ride on Benn and Race's bandwagon, John O'Mahoney has worked feverishly in the last years to jettison any Marxist baggage and any Marxist principle that might offend the idols of Left Reformism. First on the Workers' Government, then on Marxism and Democracy, O'Mahoney set out to make Left Reformism and his "revolutionary Marxism" indistinguishable by decking out the reformist programme in Marxist clothes. Step by step his collaborators on Socialist Organiser have been pulled to the right, ostensibly by O'Mahoney, but, in reality, by the stronger forces of the Labour Left. The principles to which his collaborators once laid claim have been trampled on, one by one, with the seemingly unanimous accord of Socialist Organiser's editorial board.

The Falklands crisis present the supporters of Socialist Organiser with their sharpest test to date. Will they have the strength and determination to reverse their paper's scandalous attempt to justify, in "Marxist" terms, of course, a position essentially the same as that of the mainstream of the new left in the party, or are they so besotted and mesmerised with chasing the tail of Labour leftism that they have forgotten their once-held principles and even what the categories and programme of revolutionary Marxism stand for?

Ted Grant's Militant Tendency has had long experience in dressing up its craven capitulation to Labourism in Marxist verbiage. Socialist Organiser is learning fast how to tread the same path. Its position on the Falkland Islands shows this only too well.

The "Marxists" of Socialist Organiser have discovered that they cannot support the Argentinian claim to the Malvinas because the paramount issue is the question of "self-determination for the Falklanders". Thus they stand for, "Withdrawal of the Argentine troops from the Falklands. The right of the Islanders to decide their own future free of any outside military presence." (SO Editorial Apr.15)

But what have Marxists always meant by self-determination? Let us "remind" the comrade editors of Socialist Organiser, "The self-determination of nations means the political separation of these nations from alien national bodies, and the formation of an independent national state." (Lenin, The Right of Nations to Self Determination)

At no point does Socialist Organiser offer one shred of evidence that the islanders want self-determination. They offer none because they cannot. The awkward fact is that the islanders want the Falkland Islands to remain part of the British Empire. Does Socialist Organiser support them in this? We are not told.

Perhaps they blanch at this logic, but it does not save them. They have given Marxist cover to the left reformists who deny Argentina's right to take the Malvinas from British imperialism.

For Marxists, even if the Islanders did demand self-determination, which they do not, this would not mean that we would automatically support it. The islanders are British settlers, since when have Marxists granted such rights to settler populations, in Israel or South Africa, for instance? Does this mean that Socialist Organiser will support the "rights" of the populations of Hong Kong or Taiwan against the Chinese? Will it stand shoulder to shoulder with the Gibraltarians against Spain? The principle is no different once one raises abstract democratic rights above concrete considerations of imperialism and its methods of national domination.

The dangers of such a position are clearly shown when SO tries to justify its position by talking of, "a distinct and well established community on the islands. The fact that the island population originates in a colonial settlement is beside the point; there is no recently disposed population reclaiming the islands." (SO Editorial April 22nd.—)

But, do not the Protestants for a "distinct and established community" in Ireland? The Irish population was certainly not "recently dispossessed". Is it any wonder that in the same issue of SO O'Mahoney objects to labelling the Unionist population as "pro-imperialist" and the previous issue

introduced the condition on Irish unity of a Federal Ireland? (SO April 15th.)

As if this distortion of Marxism on the national question was not enough, SO has to revise Lenin's theory of imperialism in order to bolster its position. This is absolutely necessary because, if O'Mahoney's memory of Marxism doesn't deceive him, to admit that Argentina was an imperialised nation would mean either supporting it against imperialist Britain or openly breaking with Marxism. This is not the method of an opportunist in flight from Marxism who is always forced to dump the "excess baggage" of the Marxist programme more quietly and surreptitiously.

At an IMG public rally in Conway Hall, London, O'Mahoney, pursuing his role as the Kelpers' Friend, lectured the meeting on its mistaken support for Argentina. Argentina was a "second rate capitalist power", to support it against Britain was to be like the medieval peasants who worshipped the devil because their enemies worshipped God. The claim that Argentina is not an imperialised nation underpins the whole position of SO on the war — a position of supporting neither side. Of course, it is not developed because this would be too dangerous a target.

Instead, in a whole page article on the economy of Argentina, Bob Sutcliffe (who once laid claim to knowing what imperialism was) fails to come clean on the question of whether Argentina is imperialised or not. We are told, "Argentina is not a mature industrial country like Britain. Yet, on the other hand it is a long way from the more backward underdeveloped countries of Latin America, let alone of Africa or Asia." (SO April 22nd.—)

Have O'Mahoney and Sutcliffe discovered a progressive form of capitalism in the imperialist epoch, one that is neither imperialist nor imperialised? Or, is Argentina imperialist, an equal with Britain, a position which would justify a generalised defeatist position on the war? Of course none of these questions is answered, despite the fact that the assumed answers underlie their whole position.

Trotsky recognised such a position for what it was in his writings on the Sino-Japanese War, "Lenin wrote hundreds of pages demonstrating the primary necessity of distinguishing between imperialist nations and the colonial and semi-colonial nations which comprise the great majority of humanity. To speak of 'revolutionary defeatism' in general, without distinguishing between exploiter and exploited countries, is to make a caricature of Bolshevism and to put that caricature at the service of the imperialists." This is precisely what the editors of SO have been doing over the last weeks.

If SO had the courage of its convictions it would follow the programmatic conclusion of its position. If you believe Argentina's occupation of the islands is "reactionary", that Argentina's troops should be forced to withdraw then should you not be taking some action amongst British workers to achieve this?

Is it any wonder that the National Left Wing Youth Movement lined up with the Militant's more consistent chauvinism when they called for, "backing of Argentina by trades unions internationally." (YS NC statement Militant 16th April) SO might think that calling for Argentine

working class to overthrow the Galtieri regime gets them out of this embarrassing position. Unfortunately the Argentinian working class supports the taking back of the Malvinas, and rightly so. So much for SO's headline "Join up with Argentine workers"!! (SO April 22nd)

As the outbreak of warfare between Britain and Argentina approached, SO 'clarified' its position. It declared bravely, Argentina will have every right to defend itself against any attack by Woodward's forces on its own territory and people" (SO Apr.29) And around the Malvinas, where the fighting was really going to take place? "Around the Falklands we should not be for the victory of either Thatcher or Galtieri". (SO April 29th.)

The sheer cowardice of this position is astonishing. While the second biggest imperialist navy in the world is pounding Argentinian soldiers, shooting down their planes, torpedoing their ships, SO is neutral! It can only wring its hands and cry, "Please stop the war!" But, by singing the same song as the social pacifists it has at least avoided, 'sectarian isolation'!!

But why does SO take a defensive position on the mainland of Argentina? Because Argentina is an imperialised nation facing an imperialist one? We already know that they do not believe that to be the case. Because Argentina is smaller than Britain? Who knows?

Once the Marxist position on imperialism was abandoned one is only left with petty bourgeois moralism to determine a position.

The position taken by Socialist Organiser on the British Argentinian war marks a qualitative degeneration of that organisation. In the first major test of a war in a generation of British Marxists they have buckled to social patriotism. They have failed to support an oppressed nation at war with their own imperialism, they have granted national rights to a British settler population, an outpost of the empire, they have tried to cover their capitulation with Marxist verbiage about pursuing the question through the 'class struggle' in Argentina and Britain.

Trotsky faced a similar position when he was criticised by a grouping around Paul Eiffel, who denounced Trotsky's support for Chiang Kai-shek, butcher of the Shanghai rising, against Japanese imperialism in 1937, "The Eiffelites counterpose the policy of the 'class struggle' to this 'nationalist and social patriotic' policy. Lenin fought this abstract and sterile position all his life. To him the interests of the world proletariat dictated the duty of aiding oppressed peoples in their national and patriotic struggle against imperialism. Those who have not yet understood that, almost a quarter of a century after the world war and twenty years after the October Revolution, must be pitilessly rejected as the worst enemies on the inside by the revolutionary vanguard." (Trotsky On the Sino Japanese War")

The choice facing revolutionary militants in the Socialist Organiser Alliance is either to see their own past principles trampled underfoot or to stand up and fight the shameful position on the Malvinas as part of a fight against the politics of accommodation to left reformism upon which the Socialist Organiser has been built. Their credibility as revolutionary Marxists is at stake!!



Argentine soldiers dug in on Malvinas, SO says they can only defend themselves in Argentina

COMMUNISM

VS. MUNICIPALISM

SOME SIXTY YEARS after the word "Poplarism" was first coined, the struggle between local Labour councils and Tory central government has lost none of its importance. While, after the humiliating retreats of Lambeth, Lothian and the Greater London Council it becomes more and more difficult for "left" councillors to invoke the militant heritage of the Poplar council, it is more important than ever to recognise the strengths and weaknesses of that movement.

Although inadequate in many respects, Noreen Branson's book, *Poplarism 1919-1925* affords us the opportunity to examine the significance and limits of municipal revolts and their lessons for today. Branson's book sets out to tell the story of Poplar and this she does diligently if rather dryly. One of the main weaknesses of the book is its failure to deal with Poplarism within the context of the general class struggle of the period and in particular, to deal with Poplarism as part of the general political movement out of which it arose—municipalism.

Municipalism had its roots in the Great Britain of the 1850s and after; that is, in that period of ascendant capitalism when the grinding misery wrought upon the working class, together with the unplanned, chaotic spread of urban life, forced the liberal bourgeoisie into far reaching compromises with regard to the health and welfare of the class it exploited. Not at all socialist in character, municipalism was a pragmatic attitude towards local government. It was a measured delegation of power over revenue to provincial authorities by the central state apparatus, in order to manage the common affairs of the 'community'.

As long ago as 1907 Lenin grasped the real weakness of pure municipalism from the point of view of the working class:

"Attention is diverted to the sphere of minor local questions, being directed not to the question of the class rule of the bourgeoisie, nor to the question of the chief instruments of that rule but to the question of distributing the crumbs thrown by the rich bourgeoisie for the 'needs of the population'."

Instead of directing the working class towards the need to grapple with and overcome the dictatorship of capital, and its offspring profits, municipalism dissolves the working class into the broad mass of citizenry, thereby uniting employer and proletarian on terms which are drawn up by the former.

Municipal 'socialism' was an outgrowth of this, its logical extension, when the widened franchise increased the number of the representatives of 'labour' in the 1890s and after. The experience gained before the First World War by Independent Labour Party members as participants in the 'distribution of crumbs', provided a solid apprenticeship for Labourite leaders, parallel to, and complementing that other great school—the trade union bureaucracy. If the Liberals and Tories extended public health and education, then the 'socialist' additions were typified by the public baths and allotments.

While such reforms were welcome and necessary and were often implemented with the support of Progressives and Liberals, after World War I in a period of slump, poverty and mass unemployment, more important questions were posed. Could socialist councils take real steps to alleviate the sufferings of their working class electors? Or as Branson asks outlining the dilemma facing the Labour Poplar councillors after winning a majority in 1919:

"What do you do when you get a majority? How far does the existing legal and administrative framework allow you to bring about the changes for which you stand?"

The Third International had already answered this question for its affiliated Communist Parties thus:

"Should the Communists receive a majority in the local government institutions, it is their duty to take the following measures:

- (a) form a revolutionary opposition to fight the bourgeois central authority;
 - (b) aid the poorer sections of the population in every possible way (economic measures, the organisation, or attempted organisation of armed workers militias etc);
 - (c) expose at every opportunity, the obstacles which the bourgeois state power places in the way of fundamental social change;
 - (d) launch a determined campaign to spread revolutionary propaganda, even if it leads to conflict with the state power;
 - (e) under certain circumstances, replace the local government bodies with Soviets of workers deputies.
- All Communist activity in the local government institutions must be seen as a part of the struggle to break up the capitalist system." (Second Congress of the Communist International 1920).

In short, neither to abstain from the responsibility of mounting a struggle against capitalism from any vantage point, nor to sow illusions in the power of local government. The still revolutionary Communist Party of Great Britain (CPGB) put it well in its Municipal Manifesto in February 1922:

"We are, also, and above all, interested in weakening by all means in our power, the hold which capitalism has upon the resources of the country, of hindering its schemes for further exploitation. . . Our tactic is always to be directed to weaken capitalism with a view to its annihilation." (The Communist No 81. 1922).

This position clearly delineated the position of the Communists from that of even the most left wing of the reformists like George Lansbury, leader of the Poplar councillors. Branson's book, coming as it does from the Communist Party of Great Britain's publishing house, shows little interest in the revolutionary attitude to the municipal struggle, or in the positions of the C.P. Any such assessment is avoided, no doubt lest it be used as a yardstick to measure the current opportunist practice of the C.P.

A less forgivable weakness in the book is its almost complete lack of the contemporary historical background to the events in Poplar. Despite the impression conveyed by the singular devotion to Poplar's story, the period 1919-21 was a time of international upheavals, of immense class struggle. Without a grasp of this context it is impossible to understand Poplar's failure in terms of what was possible to achieve, given the objective situation. In an important way the struggles within Poplar were ignited by the sparks that lit the whole European scene.

THE INSPIRATION PROVIDED BY THE RUSSIAN REVOLUTION

The example of the October 1917 Russian Revolution was an immense source of inspiration. Equally important, masses of workers were returning from the battlefield to exchange the discipline of the front for the discipline of the factory. Although the First World War had ended in November 1918, mutinies of soldiers impatient for jobs and 'homes fit for heroes' occurred in France and in five English camps. They wanted payment for their patriotism, a patriotism that outlasted the war long enough to return a strong Tory/Liberal coalition government the same year. This administration was forced to respond by fuelling an inflationary boom throughout 1919. Industrial workers, feeling free from the straightjacket of war time regulations were determined to recoup their losses. Strikes in 1919 reached a pre-1926 peak, double the average of 1910-1914. The Clyde Workers Committee struck for the 40 hour week, beginning a struggle that ended with tanks on the streets of Glasgow in 1919 and the Red Flag being hoisted above the town hall, something that was never to be achieved in Poplar. The working class was greatly strengthened by these struggles. Trade union membership rocketed, reaching 6.5 million in 1920—a threefold increase on 1914.

Given the size and immaturity of the various British Marxist groups, it was to the young Labour Party that workers looked for political leadership. Under the impact of these events the Labour Party rank and file forced the leaders to 'declare in favour' of Soviets in 1918. That same year it opened itself up to individual membership, being at that time only a party of 389 affiliated Trades Councils and local parties. By 1920 it had over 492 constituency parties. The political and organisational groundwork for Labour's success in the November 1919 local borough elections was in this way prepared. That month Labour secured control of twelve out of twenty eight London borough councils. One of these was Poplar, and it was George Lansbury's paper, the *Daily Herald*, which greeted their triumph with the words "at long last, the workers are coming into their own."

In 1919 Labour had yet to be put to the test. Its 1918 programme had declared an intention of, not tinkering with, but reconstructing 'society itself'. Unencumbered by years of adapting its promises to reality,



Picture: National Museum of Labour History

Communist Party banner (note hammer and sickle) on the march to the High Court, led by an Irish fife and drum band.

uncompromised by any record of governmental betrayal and deceit, the Labour Party tapped deep reservoirs of expectation amongst the masses of weary, hungry workers who trudged home from the imperialist carnage of the Somme and Ypres.

The very composition of the Poplar councillors themselves reflected the impact of the industrial struggles and working class recruitment to Labour. Of the thirty nine councillors there were seven dockers, seven railworkers, four labourers, two postmen, a toolmaker, a boilermaker and a leadworker. Only a minority were in non-manual occupations. Keenly aware of the poverty, disease and deprivation they lived amongst, they were determined to do something about it, to act.

Moreover, they had a tradition of using what they termed 'direct action' to achieve their ends. David Adams, a stevedore and councillor, played a leading role in May 1920 in the blacking of munitions on the ship *Jolly George*, bound for the white counter-revolutionaries of Poland. These events and these characters guaranteed that any struggle in Poplar was bound to be intense. This was especially likely given the considerable degree of political autonomy that local government possessed in the early twentieth century. Most welfare responsibility, together with various utilities were in their charge, allowing them to effect considerable impact on the lives of the local working class.

Whether the Poplar council had captured an outpost of the bourgeois state or whether they were prisoners of the Tory-Liberal central government coalition was to be decided by the calibre of the political leadership in the borough. Poplar began in 1921 by tackling the question of the equalisation of the rates. At that time the cost of poor relief was met largely out of each borough's rates, however rich or poor that borough was. Thus, Westminster, one of the richest councils, contributed virtually nothing to the vast sums of money needed for the relief of the unemployed masses a few miles away. It was decided by Poplar's Labour group, after a conference which consulted with local trade union representatives, that they would, until the system was made fairer, stop collecting rate precepts for bodies funded by the Tory dominated London County Council, such as the Metropolitan Police. This, of course, outraged both the local employers and central government, and court action was instituted against the councillors by the LCC.

In due course they were ordered by the courts to levy the required rate. The alternative to this was simple, contempt of court and inevitable imprisonment. The councillors answer was unequivocal: "If we have to choose between contempt of the poor and contempt of court, it will be contempt of court." It was in July of 1921 that the famous march to the Law Courts took place, over 2,000 workers following the councillors behind banners declaring that they were marching 'possibly to prison to secure EQUALISATION OF RATES FOR POOR BOROUGHS'. It was quite clear to the council that this was not a question of a 'bad' law, or a 'mistaken' judge. As George Lansbury put it, "It is well that organised labour should understand that in the Courts of law all the scales are weighted against us because all the judges administer class-made laws, laws which are expressly enacted, not to do justice, but to preserve the present social order."

The response from the local working class community to Poplar's principled stand was to immediately identify with it, and support it. Large crowds gathered as each councillor was arrested and carted off to Brixton or Holloway prison. Preparations were made for an immediate rent strike should any outside body attempt to collect the rates. Thousands enrolled in a Tenants

Defence League set up for this purpose. A demonstration of 40,000 unemployed, organised by the Communist Party led by the National Unemployed Workers' Movement (NUWM) took place, calling, amongst other demands, for their release.

It is questionable as to who was more embarrassed by Poplar's stand. From the Tories point of view, they were in a difficult position. Whilst they were in control of the local borough of Bethnal Green (with a Co-operative Mayor) had decided to follow Poplar's stand, whilst Stepney were about to do the same. Were they to uphold the collection of the full rates they faced the possibility of mass resistance—on a demand which some of their own supporters had voiced support for before this episode had blown up.

Equally opposed to Poplar's measures were the wing Labour leaders such as Herbert Morrison, who were tied lock, stock and barrel to the original conception of municipalism—administration of utilities in interests of the people. His argument with the Tories was that they were inefficient not that they were biased. Action outside the law was an anathema to Morrison and his ilk. On the eve of the imprisonment of the councillors, Morrison summoned a conference of London Mayors and executive members to try and prevent 'Poplarism' spreading. His criticisms, which ran to two foolscap pages are revealing. They include the chief that the only way to achieve the equalisation was by educating people to vote for Labour candidates at elections not through direct action. He went on to declare: "by accepting office on the various borough councils we accepted the responsibilities of discharging the functions and liabilities of those councils." (Branson p.55).



Herbert Morrison

That is Morrison was convinced that the job of councils was to administer capitalism, albeit as fairly as possible, not to challenge it. The only challenge that was acceptable was through the ballot box. Both the Tories and the right-wing Labourites were desperate to engineer a compromise and this they hoped to achieve through a special conference of the LCC borough government representatives. Lansbury and Co. were obstinate. They refused to negotiate before being released. Eventually their release was conceded, the conference held and a compromise reached—a compromise which all sides saw as a victory for Poplar and direct action.

CLASS STRUGGLE

• AFTER THE SOUTHERN ELECTIONS

REVOLUTION AND COUNTER-REVOLUTION IN POLAND

EL SALVADOR

SOCIALISTS AND REPUBLICANS - WHAT BASIS FOR UNITY IN ACTION?

Crisis Deepens For World Capitalism & Stalinism



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Up to a certain level, the equalisation of the cost of Poor Relief throughout London had been achieved. With this achievement the struggle of the councillors entered its second phase. In 1922 they began to challenge two sacred canons of Tory law on unemployment relief: the principle of 'less eligibility' and the 'Household Means Test'. The former meant that relief for the unemployed must under no circumstances approach the level of the lowest wages of the employed in the district. The latter stated that the wages of every employed member of the household of the unemployed person must be taken into account when calculating relief. Poplar flouted both principles in its fight for a decent standard of living for the unemployed and again came into conflict with central government. On the first issue they even (briefly) fixed the scale of benefit above that demanded by the NUWM, before conceding that it was financially 'impracticable'. Even so, the Tories were not pleased but, again, were not eager to press home an attack. The official scales were ignored and another victory (in effect a truce) was celebrated in Poplar.

The last major struggle against central government taken up by Lansbury and company was in 1923, over wages. The Council saw the high rates it paid its own employees as being a contribution to the general fight against wage cuts which were rampant, particularly in the docks where Poplar drew much of its support. The £4 minimum wage was far above private industry rates, and employers were mortified because their workers saw the council rates as something to strive for. The bosses again forced the issue to court. Again the councillors were found 'guilty'. This time, the end result was a cut in wages—but even having done so they remained 20% above the prevailing rates for men and 50% above that for women.

COMPETITION BETWEEN THE I.L.P. AND THE YOUNG C.P.

Branson's book says little about the conflicts within the council, the competition between rival political leaderships, the demands that were raised and how they were fought for. Whilst she is aware of the presence of CPGB members Edgar and Minnie Lansbury (the son and daughter in law of George Lansbury), and their energy and devotion to the cause, she presents them as though they were in no way distinct from the dominant strain within Poplar as regards programme. In competition between the I.L.P., of which George Lansbury was a key figure, and the young CPGB was intense after the latter's formation in the summer of 1920. The I.L.P. was the Labour Party at grass roots level; it could count as its own all the best activists in the Party. On the other side, the CPGB progressed by leaps and bounds in East London. It had half a dozen branches there—the Poplar branch being formed in February 1921 shortly after the unity conference of the Party and on the eve of the great struggles of Poplar.

The attitude taken by the CPGB and Edgar and Minnie within the council, fully conformed to the policy of the Comintern. They were prepared to stand on an uncompromising platform. As the October 1921 Municipal Manifesto made clear, they did not deceive workers about the limits of town hall socialism: "Unemployment, overcrowding and general distress are direct results of the capitalist system. No local authority can do more than relieve some of the worst effects of the system. Its complete abolition is the task of the revolution and therefore the imperative duty of the workers." (The Communist No. 64 October 1921).

But to have left it at that would have been empty, abstract, posturing. Recognising that workers required immediate answers to immediate problems, the CPGB set to work to formulate these answers in a way that would strengthen and take forward the struggle. As The Communist remarked in 1922: "Our tactic is always to be directed to weaken capitalism with a view to its annihilation." This, essentially transitional method, was reflected in a series of demands relating to unemployment, housing, police, housing etc. In particular, the CPGB demanded the right of the infirm and aged to full and free maintenance; the right of the unemployed to work or full maintenance at trade union wage rates. The strength of the CPGB can be measured in Poplar by the fact that these demands were precisely the ones taken up by the council and which did so much to help protect the local workers from the worst ravages of the bosses offensive in the 1920-23 period.

Yet despite their presence in the council chambers of East London, particularly influential in Bethnal Green, Stepney and Poplar, they were a minority. Many of their demands were not taken up. For example, their radical housing policy to ruthlessly suppress overcrowding "within the law if possible, outside the law if necessary" based upon trade union and unemployed committees. Furthermore, the CPGB demanded of any 'Workers Council' that it use its powers to cripple the ability of the local police to repress working class struggle, smash pickets and protect blacklegs.

The CPGB did not issue revolutionary manifestos for propaganda purposes alone. They were serious about implementing it, in part or whole, where possible. They therefore had to take a serious attitude to holding on to office and financing their programme by making the bosses pay. The CPGB argued for taxing the bosses directly via industrial and commercial rates: "It is the duty of a workers party to see that the rates are assessed and levied on the capitalist factories etc to the utmost possible extent. We must never allow payment of rates to reduce the amount we require to purchase food and clothing for ourselves and our families." (The Communist October 1921 No. 64).

From 1921 onwards it was around this programme and method that the early Communist Party endeavoured to both unite the whole working class against the bosses and split the workers off from its existing reformist and pacifist leadership. The dominance of the I.L.P. within Poplar council explains the weaknesses and failures of the struggle between 1921 and 1924 to

build on the mass support generated and thus win more than the 'truces' and partial victories which were achieved.

Two crucial and inter-related weaknesses stand out in the Poplar events which flow from the programme of the I.L.P.: the failure to organise employed workers in active support for the council; and the 'civil disobedience' perspective with which George Lansbury and the Poplar councillors defied the law. Measured against the craven knee-bending of Lansbury's latter-day municipalists these weaknesses should not be allowed to obscure their moral and political vitality. Their individual courage is unquestioned—threatened by surcharge, with the strong probability of losing what little they possessed, and suffering great hardship in prison (which undoubtedly shortened the lives of some of them) they stuck to their fight. That fight, however, was eventually crippled by the reformist and pacifist ideology shared by all the Labourite councillors.

EAST END WORKERS - INDUSTRIALLY PASSIVE IN POPLAR'S STRUGGLES

Despite clear support for the council's stand, despite proven ability to fight against wage reductions (1923) unquestioned willingness to strike on the 'non-economic' issue of 'Hands off Russia', the workers of the docks, heartland of East London, played an essentially industrially passive role in Poplar's disputes with Westminster. On the one hand there were massive demonstrations in support of the councillors stand. A trade union conference of local council employees was even called to endorse the actions of the council in early 1921. At the same time, from the evidence available, there was no strike action organised by the trade unions—even when the councillors were imprisoned. Even when the Board of Guardians premises became the de facto H.Q. of the dockers strike in 1923 people like Adams, a councillor and stevedore, did not make the connections between the disparate struggles.

Poplar council contented itself with servicing the 1923 dock strike, relieving cases of hardship, in the same way as the dockers simply gave their encouragement to Poplar's stand against the Tories. The involvement of workers like the dockers was crucial to the prospects of a sustained victory. The councillors and the public sector workers employed by Poplar had limited strength on their own since they depended on revenue which it was in the power of the bosses and government to choke off. Only by drawing in those who, by their supportive action, attack capital itself and its profits could the Tories and bosses behind them have been knocked back, in a generalised anti-capitalist offensive, transcending municipal horizons. Once again, it was only the CPGB at that time which sought to further the struggle and explain the imperative need to transcend the crippling reformist divide between 'economic' and 'political' issues that was a key feature of 'Poplarism'. Reviewing the lessons of the first Poplar campaign ending in the councillors release and the reform of the rating system, The Communist pointed to the chronic weakness of Lansbury's pacifist leadership of the struggle:

"All the same, it is true that the Poplar action cannot end in a permanent victory on any large scale. An arrangement will have to be come to. And this is because



Picture: National Museum of Labour History

Poplar councillors marching to the High Court in 1921, followed by 2,000 workers

the mentality of the Poplar Council is not Communist. George Lansbury is no Communist, and what he says—in Poplar—goes. The point of this was made clear at the arrest of the women councillors. The angry crowd then only wanted the word to rescue them. One woman councillor courageously argued that if they were breaking the law they might as well do it thoroughly: and it was agreed that if Poplar showed its determination strongly enough they would never dare ill-treat George Lansbury and the others as they were doing. But Susan Lawrence cleverly defeated this by the simple demand 'What did George say? What was his last message to you? It was: No violence.' Exactly so. The Government at the present has finally always the whip hand, because it has force and does not hesitate to use it. It laughs at moral force and moral victories." (No 64 October 22nd 1921).

The CPGB earned the right to make such criticisms through its genuine attempts to unite with the other councillors and workers to secure the municipal reforms. Substantial as some of these were the CPGB argued three things. First, it was the adoption of communist demands which helped to achieve this success. Secondly, that the struggles could have achieved much more than municipal reforms, a national generalised offensive spreading outwards from Poplar could and should have been built in which Poplar would have been one organising centre for the proletarian revolution.

The CPGB were to be proven correct in their estimate of what would happen to the reforms. They were granted largely in order to isolate and defuse the struggle. After 1925 and particularly after the failed General Strike in May 1926, Poplar fell victim to the generalised defeat inflicted upon the whole working class. The Tories took back the gains on wage levels and took away the power of local authorities—for example in the sphere of unemployed relief—severely reducing Poplar's ability to mount resistance in the future. Thus it would be wrong to reach the conclusion from Branson's book, as it is so easy to do because it is treated in isolation, that Poplarism simply illustrated the strengths of militant reformism.

The conclusion would then be—carry out the same tactics in a determined manner and success is assured. This ignores the forced involved in the early 20s: a militant working class movement newly politically aroused and with a young revolutionary party strong enough to be win representation on the council. Under this pressure left reformists like Lansbury went much further than today's Knights Livingstones and Blunketts. But it would be utterly false to draw the lesson that left Labour councillors can be successful leaders and initiators of the defence of local services. They were not in the early 1920s and are infinitely less so today. What was needed then and now was revolutionary leadership and the mobilised strength of the organised working class. ■

by Dave Garroch and Keith Hassell

THE MUNICIPAL ELECTION

Manifesto of the Communist Party of Great Britain

YELLOW WORKERS:—

In the election about to take place we appeal to you to show your sense of class solidarity and the power that solidarity gives. The Communist Party knows no other basis of appeal whether in national or local elections. The Class issue—the never ceasing struggle between the working class and the privileged class—dominates this as every other action of our daily lives.

The Communist Party with its Watchword "All Power to the Workers" welcomes any and every election so far as it gives a chance for the expression of the workers' grievances and the workers' determination to take in hand the solution of their own class difficulties.

We are fully aware of the limitations of municipal activity. A thousand checks and counter checks have been devised by the governing class to prevent the workers obtaining control over local governing bodies. Parliament bars the way and working class councillors are threatened with expensive law suits when any municipal council is audacious enough to overstep the bounds carefully set by the vested interests.

DISTRESS

The Communist Party demands that the full powers of the local Council be used for the relief of distress. The excuse that their powers are limited cannot be admitted here. If necessary these limitations must be broken through and the workers representatives take their stand with those of Poplar, Bethnal Green, Stepney and other places. Above all the relief granted must neither be given nor taken as charity. We affirm the right of the physically disabled to full and free maintenance.

UNEMPLOYMENT

The above applies here also. In both cases, moreover, the problem is a national rather than a local one, and the definite policy of the council should be to compel

the Government to shoulder the burdens created by the continued existence of the capitalist regime. This policy, however, must never be allowed to provide municipal councillors with an excuse for shirking their own responsibility.

The Communist Party demands work for the unemployed or full maintenance at trade union rates of wages. All the resources of local administration must be used to meet this demand and to compel the national administration to accept responsibility. We ask the workers, in short, to wage a double fight; on the one hand against existing misery and distress, and on the other against the capitalists and their government who are responsible. The worker in employment, no less than he who is unemployed, has a direct interest in this demand. To-day it is the turn of his workmate; to-morrow it may be his own.

POLICE

We affirm that a Workers' Party could and should use the public powers to aid the workers in their day to day class struggle. They could use their authority over the police (so far as the government has left them any authority) to put an end to the repression of working class opinion. They could refuse to protect blacklegs brought into a district by the boss-class for the purpose of beating down the workers' level of existence.

HOUSING

The failure of the municipal councils to deal with the problem is tragic and complete. With the government they must take their share of the responsibility. Overcrowding should be ruthlessly suppressed, within the law if possible, outside the law if necessary. A rigid rationing of house accommodation must be carried out, with the assistance of the trade unions and the unemployed committees.

RATES

All these measures, if carried out, will and must mean an increase of rates.

Because of the house shortage and the Rent Restriction Acts the property owners are able, as never before, to shift the burden on to the shoulders of the workers. In these circumstances it is the duty of a workers party to see that the rates are assessed and levied on the capitalist factories etc, to the utmost possible extent. We must never allow payment of rates to reduce the amount we require to purchase food and clothing for ourselves and our families.

But, even though the granting of relief to the distressed means that the municipality must declare itself bankrupt, there must be no hesitation in deciding upon relief. The "Bankruptcy" of the municipality merely involves loss of revenue to a class of financial exploiters and speculators. Moreover, the fight for national responsibility for the relief of distress will be carried a stage forward.

CAPITALISM THE EVIL

Unemployment, overcrowding, and general distress are direct results of the capitalist system. No local authority can do more than relieve some of the worst effects of the system. Its complete abolition is the task of the revolution and therefore the imperative duty of the workers. Starvation must not be tolerated without a protest.

The Communist Party therefore urges you to take part in municipal elections; to use local administration for the purpose of relieving distress; to capture the machinery of local government so that it may be used for and not against you.

Let your slogan be:—
WORK OR FULL MAINTENANCE FOR THE UNEMPLOYED.
NEITHER SLUMS NOR MANSIONS, BUT HOUSE ROOM FOR ALL.
FOOD FOR THE DESTITUTE, THE RIGHT TO LIVE FOR ALL.
AND ALL POWER TO THE WORKERS!!

ZIONISM UNBOWED AFTER SINAI WITHDRAWAL

FOUR YEARS AFTER the Camp David Peace Treaty was signed by the USA, Israel and Egypt, the eastern third of the Sinai Peninsula was returned to Egypt on April 26th. At dawn the Israeli flag was lowered and a convoy took the last Israeli soldiers and civilians out of the territory occupied by Israel since the 1967 war with Egypt. In the afternoon, over the northeast town of Rafah, the Egyptian flag was raised once again while Arab residents shouted "Down with Zionism. No Zionists after today."

Israel's hard-line Defence Minister Sharon made it plain to his departing troops however, that Zionism was unbowed: "...we have reached the red line of our concessions. We shall turn to strengthening our security, to our development...to increasing and consolidating our settlements in the Golan Heights, in Judea and Samaria and the Gaza Strip."

The bitterness in Sharon's declarations that day reflected the entrenched conflict between the Israeli troops and the Zionist settlers who resisted their dispersal, and claimed they were being betrayed; that the government was reneging on the fundamental tenet of Zionist doctrine - ruthless expansionism at the expense of the Palestinians.

The problems and contradictions facing the Israeli state today have their roots in the Zionist ideology on which the state was founded and on which it still rests. Zionism arose in Russia and Eastern Europe in the late 19th century as a response to the pogroms and anti-semitism that beset the Jews in those countries. Zionism was a nationalist response to a very real oppression but it accepted the logic of the oppressors - that Jews could never be acceptable in gentile society. Thus the only solution had to be physical separation and the forced establishment of a Jewish homeland - the "promised land." Historically, the Jewish leaders had no fixed conception of where this land might be. Eventually in 1948, it became the British mandate territory of Palestine. Thus the refugees from racist persecution set out to become the oppressors of the Palestinians, turning Zionism into an oppressive and racist ideology, now backed militarily by an ever-more swollen capitalist state apparatus. By the end of 1948, 750,000 Palestinians were refugees. Yet this was only the start. The flock of Jewish immigrants and its inherent sense of insecurity - born of its crimes against the Arabs - compelled Israel to expand. As a result of the '67 war with Egypt, Israel occupied Gaza, Golan Heights, West Bank and Sinai to form a buffer against the hostile Arab world and gain more "living space."

However, Israel today would not be able to survive if it were not for the fact that US imperialism provides it with massive economic and military aid. Reagan's 1983 budget calls for 1.7 billion dollars in military aid and 785 million dollars economic aid. Israel was a creation of imperialism, a charge placed on the Middle East to safeguard its immense wealth. The protective US umbrella has never meant great stability and the world recessions of the 1970s and 1980s have left deep scars on Israel, imparting an economic and political instability without which it is difficult to understand its frenzied foreign policy.

Inflation is currently running at 130% and unemployment at 5-6% mainly hitting the oriental Jews and Palestinians, while the government is slashing social services. Together this means a very significant fall in living standards. The situation is not likely to improve because Israel attracts virtually no foreign investment. The economy is further grotesquely distorted by its arms budget which runs at an average of 16% of national expenditure.

The simple one-sided reliance on Israel, by USA within the Middle East came to an end after the 1973 war with Egypt. The oil embargo by the Arab oil-producing nations threatens to damage the US. Prior to 1972, America had provided nearly all its own oil but during the 1970s this situation of self-sufficiency has evaporated. By 1985 the USA may even have to import some half of its oil. A rapprochement with the Arab bourgeoisie became a matter of life and death.

The Camp David accords were the fruit of years of delicate diplomacy. The aim of the US was to achieve stability, however tenuous, between Israel, its client settler state and the leader of the belligerent Arab nations to ensure the fragmentation, political helplessness of the Arab world and safeguard American economic political interests in the area. The pack was heavily stacked in Israel's favour. In return for an agreed withdrawal from Sinai Begin achieved fragmentation in the Arab camp, and disorientation in the Palestinian leadership (the PLO). This was achieved by four years of unremitting attempts to terrorise the Palestinians of the occupied territories into submission, and military attacks on PLO bases in the Lebanon. Begin has built up a considerable anti-PLO force within Southern Lebanon in the shape of Colonel Hadad. The bombing of Iraq's nuclear installation in 1981, to pre-empt the emergence of a dangerous Arab rival, illustrated the self-confidence of the Zionist state as a result of Camp David.

Unfortunately for Begin, the problem of Palestine has refused to go away. The refugees in Lebanon and the 750,000 Palestinians on the West Bank still strive for self-determination. The oppression meted out by the Zionists is unremitting. One in five of the population of the West Bank has tasted the comforts of an Israeli

jail. Confronted with the obvious support for the PLO within the occupied territories. Begin was afraid of the encouragement the Sinai withdrawal might give to the Palestinians in the West Bank, Gaza and the Golan. For that reason, Israel in December 1981 annexed the Golan Heights and threatened the same in the West Bank by introducing tighter civil administrative control. Sharon barked at the world: "The US has decided to try to return Israel to the 1967 borders after the withdrawal from Sinai... Israel had to make it unequivocally clear by a substantive legislative act that she would not return to the 1967 lines."

Begin, stricken with guilt over Yamit has pledged legislation to make the future disbanding of settlements illegal. On the day of the Sinai hand-over the cabinet approved 6 new settlements on the West Bank to add to the 87 others and the establishment of a regional centre at the Northern end of the Golan Heights.

With the Sinai problem settled the attention has focussed upon the outstanding - and central - element of Camp David; Palestinian "autonomy". The formula agreed commits no-one to anything specific. It allows all to keep their ideals intact, and their room for manoeuvre also alive. On one side, Egypt's Mubarak claims the aim of autonomy talks is "a general outline for the principles of transferring powers from the Israeli government on the West Bank and Gaza to the Palestinians."

On the other is Begin who, at best, would tolerate a limited settlement within Jordan's borders, on the East Bank, ceding full control of the West Bank to Israel. Begin recognises that to give real autonomy to the Palestinians would undermine the very existence of the Zionist state.

Hence his intransigence against having a dialogue of any kind with the PLO in spite of the pressure from their Imperialist masters to find a solution. But with the population of Arabs growing far more rapidly than Jews, they have to find a way of dealing with the problem. They have tried to do this firstly by encouraging emigration and secondly by implementing a carrot and stick policy in the West Bank which they hoped would co-opt some Palestinian quislings and reduce the influence of the PLO on the population. Sharon promised civilian administration, which would create a "new atmosphere" by reducing road-blocks and troop movements and increasing local autonomy over municipal schemes. He then stopped all cash from the PLO-Jordan joint committees to vital projects, thus effectively stopping them proceeding in an attempt to stop PLO influence. In fact the money from these committees contributes to the finance of essential services such as schools, clinics, water, electricity and hospitals, so there is a very real danger of the collapse of all public services.

In an attempt to provide an alternative favourable to Israel, Sharon initiated the setting up of village leagues under a central head, a rich landowner called Mustafa Dudin. These leagues comprising rich Arab villagers were to be the channel of all Israeli-sponsored development projects - and were the direct cause of the recent spate of rioting and militancy among Palestinians on the West Bank.

A Jordanian Minister, Adnan Abu Odeh, summed up the Israeli strategy: "These village leagues have been set up by the Israelis to bypass the elected mayors and to establish a political constituency in which they can hold elections later this year." Candidates would be drawn from the Leagues to elect an administrative Council "without legislative powers which will administer local government tasks in the territory. This will institutionalise the occupation and open the way for the absorption of the West Bank into the Israeli state."

The sporadic outbursts against this policy recently reached a crescendo of violence, deaths and strikes on the West Bank, when the Israelis sacked, during April, 3 popular pro-PLO mayors in Nablus, Ramallah and El Bireh, in an attempt to curb PLO influence, the Arab Council workers promptly went on strike in spite of an Israeli threat of 6 months in prison.



• Israeli settlements * Recent clashes

It is likely that in the wake of the Sinai occupation, Israeli attention and firepower against the Palestinians will once more be concentrated on the PLO presence in the Lebanon. To crush the PLO's bases there has been Begin's dream for a long time. Almost everything Begin does in the Lebanon is by way of a provocation to the Syrians who dominate the North and give aid to the PLO. The real aim of the Israeli government was spelt out by a senior official "It is not that the PLO is a real military threat... But if we wipe them out militarily they will lose their political power. That is what we are really aiming at." Sunday Times, 2 May 1982.

The same Cabinet meeting which confirmed the Sinai withdrawal in late April decided to break the nine month truce with the PLO in the Lebanon and attack its bases by air. At least 30 were killed. Yet these attacks, likely to become frequent, by American-made F15 and F16 planes are window dressing, compared to the some 36,000 Israeli troops massed on the Lebanese border, and awaiting the order to drive deep into Syrian and PLO territory. As one US official recently put it, it is not a question of whether this will happen, but when.

Within Israel itself, the political scene reflects the divisions, conflicts and fine balances of the Middle East as a whole. Begin survived in the Knesset by a precarious majority made up of a few extreme right nationalist and religious parties. The insatiable desire of these zealots for settlement land constitutes a great point of pressure on Begin. But, on the other hand, he has to contend with a growing "Peace Movement" which recently re-emerged from a four year slumber. This, together with US pressure, helps explain the decision to go ahead with the Sinai withdrawal. On March 27, 50,000 people demonstrated against Israel's crackdown. Most demonstrators were Jewish but there was a significant

Arab contingent. But the majority of the support for the Peace Movement comes from members of the intelligentsia and petty bourgeoisie who are not prepared to break with Zionism and actively fight for Palestinian self-determination, but are frightened of the possible military and economic consequences of the constant Israeli war drive.

Meanwhile the Israeli workers are tied to the state by their membership of the Histadrut, the Israeli so-called TUC, which is consciously pro-Zionist, and also one of the largest landowners and employers in Israel. Although some strikes have been organised recently outside the Histadrut by the "13 Committee" the Israeli working class is committed to defend its privileged status in Israel which can only be broken in struggle by the Palestinians.

Within this scenario, what chance is there for the Palestinians to regain their land and win self-determination? If the Palestinian struggle could go beyond the rioting and demonstrations of recent years there is room to exploit the fissures and divisions within the Arab bourgeoisie and the Zionists to win their struggle. But this will not be achieved as long as the PLO continues to stand back and allow Palestinian youth to match Israeli bullets with sticks and stones. The PLO's strategy for too long has been one of conciliation and diplomacy coupled with guerilla struggle. The petty bourgeois leadership of the PLO is committed only to the goal of a democratic secular state of Palestine - a goal which can only mean a bourgeois state. Not only is this ideal utopian in that an independent capitalist state can never hope to be achieved in a region where every state is dependent on Imperialism, but it restricts the Palestinian cause to one of knocking at Imperialism's door for help. Hence the PLO holds great store by UN resolutions. Arafat called a ceasefire in Lebanon when UN troops were sent in - a ceasefire he still respects despite Israel's endless military strikes - and runs diplomatic offices in all the European capitals. This has also led them to the demand for a Palestinian West Bank state, which has weakened the fight to smash the Israeli state. While the PLO's guerilla strategy has led them to orient to Palestinian refugee camps for their base, they have neglected the Palestinian workers inside Israel, and occupied territories throughout the Middle East, and the Arab working class as well, since a working class leadership would not only go far beyond a bourgeois Palestinian state, but in so doing topple the Arab bourgeois. While giving every support to the PLO in so far as they fight for Palestinian self-determination against Imperialism, a new working class leadership and party must be forged to fight for a workers' secular state of Palestine and the smashing of the Israeli state.

The recent fighting on the West Bank points to the futility of arming kids with sticks and stones against Israeli bullets. The depressing toll of Palestinians killed will continue to mount unless the struggle is organised and armed under a strong leadership able to protect them from sophisticated Israeli military technology. However, even this would not be enough without the escalation of the recent strike action to the proportions of a general strike of all Palestinian workers. On the West Bank 25% of the population live in the towns, 63% in villages and 11% in refugee camps. It was mainly the refugee camps which saw the scenes of rioting and anti-Israeli sentiment.

The Palestinian population of West Bank and Gaza is 1.3 million and 650,000 Arabs live in Israel itself. The active labour force on the West Bank and Gaza is 200,000 of which 80,000 commute on a daily basis to Israel, competing with one another for low-paid, unprotected, temporary work. The West Bank's small industrial sector has declined but Gaza's has increased with the establishment of 23 factories by Israel. In Gaza and the West Bank strike action to date has been mainly limited to the shop keepers and commercial activity. This has recently been taken up by Arabs in Israel itself on Land Day on March 30th a one-day general strike of all Arabs was called. Thousands of Arabs working for Jewish companies went on strike. If this working class action could be co-ordinated to extend to all Arabs in Israel and the occupied territories in a general strike, then the real possibility would open up of a Palestinian movement, led by the working class, which could realise its aspirations for self-determination. ■



Israeli troops, unarmed, confront zealot settlers in Sinai, meanwhile Palestinians are shot dead in their own streets.

Picture: Judah Passow / Network

DEATH SQUADS IN POWER

THERE IS A famous story that when Franklin D. Roosevelt saw Somoza, dictator of Nicaragua, on a list of heads of state to be invited to Washington he asked "Isn't that man supposed to be a son of a bitch?" His Secretary of State replied "He sure is but he's *our* son of a bitch." Reagan and Haig are undoubtedly feeling the same way about the winner of the El Salvador 'elections' Roberto D'Aubuisson. He might be a 'pathological killer', as the previous US Ambassador described him, but at least he's *their* killer.

However it was with some embarrassment that the US Government saw their favoured candidate, Duarte and the Christian Democrats, defeated by the extreme right. The relatively high turnout in a country where whole areas were under the control of the guerrillas, led Haig to immediately claim the elections as "a political and military defeat for the left wing guerrillas" (Times 30th March 1982). The high turnout however, was due largely to the desire of the Salvadorean people to obtain verification of voting on their identity cards, since not to vote constitutes a crime in this country, and therefore runs the risk of death, like any other form of opposition to the ruling junta. In spite of this fact, and the conditions of civil war under which polling took place, the two official British observers, Sir John Galsworthy and Professor Derek Bowett, testified to the House of Commons on their return, that the elections were "free and fair", and similarly, Washington claimed that they were "the first clean ballot in more than 50 years of Salvadorean history" (Sunday Times 4th April 1982).

Despite both America and Britain's cynical endorsement of the legitimacy of the election process, the outcome has not resolved any of the problems which are posed for US imperialism by the current struggle in El Salvador. Having won only 26 of the seats the Christian Democrats backed by the US attempted unsuccessfully to form a coalition with the more right wing PCN (Party of National Conciliation) and PDA (Democratic Action Party), which would have given them a majority in the Assembly and therefore made this more acceptable to the American Government. Instead, the open horse-trading of votes and alliances which followed the election has resulted in a coalition of the five extreme right wing parties headed by Major D'Aubuisson's ARENA party, D'Aubuisson himself being notorious both for his various attempted coups against Duarte and his involvement in the assassination of Archbishop Romero. D'Aubuisson's coalition proceeded to take all ten leading positions in the Constituent Assembly excluding the Christian Democrats.

Although the election process has been recognised as valid by the American government, the failure of the more 'moderate' Christian Democrats to secure a majority is likely to cause the Reagan Administration some problems when the question of supplying further military aid to the regime next arises. The increasing reluctance of Congress to openly back such a not-

orious regime (due mostly to doubts about the successful outcome of the civil war) and increasing pressure inside America (with large demonstrations taking place in March) are forcing the Administration to re-think their policy towards both El Salvador and the rest of Central America. In the pre-election period, the Reagan Administration clearly backed the Christian Democrats as the only acceptable ruling party. As it became clear that they might not win the election, however, the US government began to modify their policy, stating only that the ruling party must continue to develop the land reforms (which have been virtually abandoned in any case) and to improve the human rights situation (which again could hardly be any worse than it was under Duarte). As a result, D'Aubuisson, who promised, in the pre-election period, to bring in "more emergency powers", and to pursue the war against the guerrillas, "using napalm if necessary" has now, under pressure from the US Ambassador and the higher ranks of the Salvadorean army, who are worried about losing the military aid which the US is currently supplying, begun to modify his public image in order to maintain the American backing which the government in El Salvador needs to prevent the military victory of the guerrillas.

The US government has used all its pressure on agreeing to a more 'acceptable' President, for which post they favoured Alvaro Magana, a reliable right wing banker. A US inspired PCN boycott of the Assembly appears to have had the desired effect with Magana being elected on the 29th April. Whether the Magana election, with D'Aubuisson remaining the real power behind the throne, will be enough to satisfy Reagan's critics at home remains to be seen. If the Christian Democrats fail to swallow being ousted from power or themselves once again become the targets of D'Aubuisson's death squads and are forced to join the FDR Haig's strategy will be in tatters. For the moment, the US hopes to shore up the regime, believing that massive economic and military aid and the 1500 officers being trained in the US, due shortly to return to El Salvador will turn the tide against the guerrillas.

El Salvador still remains the crucial link in what Thomas Enders, Assistant Secretary of State for Inter American Affairs described as the "decisive battle for Central America now going on". In this battle the Administration is using the carrot as well as the stick, and everything it can find in the dirty tricks department to maintain US support behind it. US military strategy in Central America has suffered a cruel blow with the new situation arising as a result of the dispute between Britain and Argentina, since the Reagan Administration has used its influence to encourage Argentina's support for the Salvadorean junta, Argentina having sent officers and free grain to El Salvador, as well as undercover agents to Nicaragua. Obviously the US government, having now openly come down on the side of Britain, will no longer be able to rely on this source of indirect intervention with which to prop up the Salvadorean government.



Picture: Network

Bodies of three guerrillas killed in fighting in San Salvador in March this year.

Its dirty tricks department has also signally failed to come up with the goods. The US government attempted to show, in March, that the Salvadorean opposition was both backed and inspired by Cuban and Nicaraguan Communists. Unfortunately this attempt badly backfired on the Reagan Administration, with their key witnesses either disappearing, or, as in the case of Tardencillas, whom the Americans claimed had been sent by the Nicaraguan government to fight in El Salvador, publicly stating that he had been "tortured and beaten into collaborating with Washington and El Salvador" (Newsweek 22nd March 1982). 'Newsweek' had to admit that there was "nothing in the declassified material which showed a direct conduit of arms into El Salvador."

This has not stopped the US administration continuing to claim a "firm link" between Nicaragua, Cuba and the resistance in El Salvador. This allows them, raising the Communist bogey, to go ahead with covert operations against these regimes, and to openly train right-wing opponents of the Nicaraguan regime.

All this is directed at intimidating the FSLN and warning it to keep its nose out of El Salvador. It certainly appears to have had its effect, not only do Cuba and Nicaragua strenuously deny helping the FMLN, but the Nicaraguans have even offered joint border patrols with the Honduran government as a guarantee (see "Latin American Weekly Reports - 26/2/82").

US imperialism's prime concern in Central America remains to prevent the spread of the revolutionary crisis which led to the overthrow of Somoza. They need to isolate the FMLN in El Salvador and either militarily defeat it, or reduce it to manageable proportions. In Nicaragua they intend to continue the economic blockade and covert operations until the FSLN agrees to "negotiate", their major aim being to achieve a reduction in the armed strength of the Nicaraguan army, the better to overthrow it at a later date. Thus the recent two-pronged propaganda barrage aimed at "proving" both the FSLN's involvement in aiding the El Salvador guerrillas, and the claimed Cuban-supported military build-up, supposedly aimed at spreading the revolution to Central America.

Although D'Aubuisson has been denied the Presidency for the moment, effective power remains in his and Arena's hands. A renewed offensive against the strongholds of the FMLN must be expected. Against the power of the oligarchy, the mere spectre of guns supplied by mythical FSLN "gunrunners" will be of no use. Only the concerted power of the El Salvadorean workers and peasants can cut short this latest experiment in US State Department "democracy".

by Chris Dawson

REAGAN'S RECEPTION: CND declines the invitation

THE RONALD REAGAN Reception Committee was set up with the support of the Socialist Workers Party and various trade union bodies and individuals. It had as its declared aim the coordination of the growing wave of opposition within the CND and Labour Party to Reagan's prospective visit to Britain on June 7th and 8th. Socialist Challenge, which now seems certain to be the driving force in the campaign, has called for the demonstration on June 6th to be given an "anti-imperialist" aspect by raising, in combination with opposition to the siting of Cruise missiles in Britain and to the purchase of Trident, opposition to American Imperialism's bloody intervention in Central America.

Socialist Challenge quite rightly wanted to draw attention to Thatcher's collusion with US Imperialism in Central America. Not only did Britain send "observers" to the gruesome farce which passed for a general election in El Salvador, but it was also involved in the US naval manoeuvres in the Caribbean—"Operation Saffpass"—through allowing the use of the British naval base at Belize. By linking this to Cruise Socialist Challenge hoped to reel in the big fish—CND—with its tens of thousands of supporters into a massive demonstration against Reagan.

While the aim of winning the mass of youth opposed to war, sporadically mobilised behind CND, to an anti-imperialist position is absolutely correct, the methods used by the IMG have been classically opportunist. For weeks the IMG has been lauding "the

giant CND demonstration, now planned for June 6th." (Bob Pennington Socialist Challenge 18th March). But history can play cruel tricks on the opportunist—as British imperialism prepared for its own war against Argentina, the CND leadership, as should have been expected, ran for cover. The April CND National Council declared that CND "should have nothing to do with the Reagan Reception Committee Event on 7th June". (i.e. the picket of the US Embassy) and the executive has ordered its full timers to "cease work" on the event.

For revolutionaries the fact that the CND retreats in the face of Thatcher's war drive comes as no surprise. CND is a cross-class alliance whose leadership aims to build the broadest popular base to 'pressure' governments into abandoning nuclear weapons. To stand against their own ruling class in time of war would split such a coalition asunder when jingoistic fervour is running high. To commit themselves to "anti-imperialism" at such a time would be in their eyes foolish.

Any revolutionary organisation would have made these arguments clearly to the youth drawn behind the CND, warned of the nature of the CND leadership and on this basis would have sought to win those militants away from a pacifist, anti-war position to a clear understanding of the link between capitalism, imperialism and war. But this is not the method of Socialist Challenge. Having been kicked in the teeth by their erstwhile partners earlier in the month, they proceed to heap praise on the CND's 'actions' on the Falkland question.

Socialist Challenge declared that the CND's 18th April National Committee Statement on the question

was "the first step in building a mass movement against Thatcher's war." (Editorial April 22nd). First this statement was totally contradictory, demanding Thatcher "categorically rule out the use of nuclear weapons by the task force." (the Argentinian soldiers were undoubtedly reassured that they could now only be blown up by conventional weapons!) and at the same time calling for the withdrawal of the task force and ending of war preparations. Secondly it called for negotiations on the basis of UN resolution 502 which calls for the withdrawal of Argentinian troops and branded the Argentinians as unjustified aggressors. A resolution on which rests Thatcher's whole ideological justification for sending the fleet!

Socialist Challenge went on to declare: "We welcome the call for CND for a picket of the Ministry of Defence and for a national demonstration in the event of hostilities breaking out." (Socialist Challenge April 22nd.) The IMG are undoubtedly still waiting! South Georgia came and went and National CND did nothing. It was left to the Communist Party and its own 'peace machine' to take the initiative on Sunday 25th April, an initiative that drew behind it CND activists especially the YCND.

If Socialist Challenge and the IMG refuse to criticise and indeed continue to cover up for the CND, one might expect better from IMG members themselves, given the clear defeatist and anti-imperialist position espoused in their paper. Indeed their editorial in Socialist Challenge 29th April 1982 calls for "Mass public meetings, backed by CND and Reagan Reception Committees."

In practice however the IMG's calls remain for consumption of its readers only. At the inaugural meeting of over 70 people of the Birmingham

Reagan Reception Committee on April 12th a Workers Power delegate moved that the campaign should adopt as additional central slogans "Britain and America hands off Latin America. British Fleet back to Port." This was voted down and actively opposed by Socialist Challenge supporters (who received support in this from the SWP). Two weeks later the proposal was rejected again. At the third meeting on the 26th April, while Socialist Challenge that week was declaring that the CND initiative made it possible "to link resistance to Britain's adventure to the mobilisation around Reagan's visit." (Socialist Challenge 18th April), Socialist Challenge supporters again opposed any inclusion of the question. This, after the invasion of South Georgia.

Despite the IMG's fine rhetoric about the main enemy being at home and the importance of action against Thatcher's imperialist adventure, in practice they flinch from 'alienating' their CND partners. In doing so they tie themselves to the practice and policies of CND and fail to give a revolutionary lead to the most important sectors of the CND movement—its youth. It would appear that the IMG's position on the Malvinas is to be taken more seriously in polemics with other left groups than in practice in the class struggle.

Workers Power supports the Reagan Reception Committee and its opposition to Reagan. We fight for

- * Solidarity with the Central American struggle against imperialism;
- * Stop the Thatcher/Reagan war drive against the Soviet Union;
- * Hands off the Malvinas. Hands off Argentina. Bring back the fleet.

workers power

Health workers:

ALL-OUT STRIKE IS THE CURE!

BATTLELINES ARE BEING drawn and all the indications are that we are facing, what many in health unions have called, a 'summer of discontent.' In some hospitals already 2 hour stoppages are being organised and only emergency admissions are being accepted. Nurses are being drawn into the fight by refusing to do non-nursing duties and refusing to 'act-up' (ie do jobs they're not paid to do.)

Health workers have always featured high on the Tory government's list of those that they are prepared to take on. So yet again 3 million health workers are being rigidly held to the government's pay norm of 4%. The reasons are clear. Health workers have traditionally been regarded as a weak section, with a leadership that has always seen its duty as limiting effective industrial action. By launching a vicious press witch hunt the government hope that health workers can be more easily forced out of industrial action than other sections of workers. But certain sections, such as ambulance men, have shown their resolve in the past to withstand such blackmail and the mood at present is one of anger and determination.

This mood has been inflamed by Thatcher's war drive against Argentina. For months health workers have been told there is no money to be had and yet we have witnessed the gathering of millions of pounds to send the task force. The cries of no money are wearing very thin in the hospitals. Feelings are running high and what makes this years fight very different from any other is that there is a common claim and a common settlement date (April 1st). This was the only positive result of the pitiful deal accepted by the trade unions leaders for ancillary workers last year. It has forced the trade union leaders to come together and talk of unity throughout the health service. It has made the government's job far more difficult being unable to pick off section by section. Of course they have tried by offering the nurses 6.4%, even though it is clear that anything over 4% has to be paid by local authorities and be found by making cuts in services.

THE PAY CLAIM

The background to this campaign has set the alarm bells ringing for many militants. The TUC Conference last year passed a resolution calling for public sector unity against the Tory pay limits. Only in certain localities, on the initiative of local shop stewards was anything done. The public sector shop steward committees were undermined, however by the acceptance of the local government workers offer. Dusting 10 years of cobwebs from itself, the Health Services Committee of the TUC decided to act as coordinator of the health service unions. Without any attempt to involve the rank and file in the drawing up of a claim, a claim was agreed and a campaign 'launched' to convince 'the public'; a lobby of Parliament, demonstrations in some localities. Given that this has been the meagre diet of ineffectual campaigns in the past there was not a great deal of response from the members. In this context, the 1 hour stoppage on April 15th was a crucial test. If the response had been disastrous the

bureaucrats would have turned around, blamed the members for their lack of leadership, and shut up shop for another year. But the stoppage was well supported. There was a large demonstration in Scotland, and most mass meetings throughout the country were well attended. The officials attempted to squander this capital by going for arbitration. But the Tories stern refusal has cut off another escape route.

UNITY? YES! - BUT ON WHAT BASIS ?

For the moment the officials have accepted that a fight must take place. But *in place* of a detailed strategy to win, they have advanced the formulae of unity. The call for unity has, of course, captured the hearts of health workers who only too well remember the past fights wracked by splits and divisions. But the way it is being posed holds many dangers that are already emerging. First, it is a means by which the bureaucracy can maintain the fight at the lowest common level, so that everyone can be involved. It is the argument most used against the calls for all out action. Secondly, COHSE'S moves to start action ahead of other unions instead of being welcomed has been seen as divisive. NUPE rather than acting on COHSE's decision decided to engage its members, not in strike action, but in a balloting exercise to accept or reject the 4%—something the rank and file thought they had already done. The results of this ballot are not expected until early May, some 2 or 3 weeks into the COHSE action. Finally, by pushing unity as *paramount* the logic is if one union caves in and accepts so too should all the others, yet another convenient get-out clause.

The message has to be shouted loud and clear - watch your leaders! Their interests are not the same as ours. When forced into a fight by rank and file pressure they will seek deals and compromises at the first opportunity. Fisher has already tried to undermine the strength of the fightback by stating that: "Nurses and other health workers directly involved with patient care or emergency services would not be asked to take industrial action over their pay claim." (Guardian April 21st).

This has been met with an angry response from health workers who see the crucial importance of drawing nurses into the fight. Fisher has gone further, showing his absolute contempt for the membership, by announcing that the executive would *never* call all out strike action even if *all* the membership wanted this!

Let's be under no illusions. Health workers are facing a hard and vicious battle, not just with the government but also with their leaders. The fight is on two fronts: one over the question of rank and file control of the action and the other over the question of embarking on the most effective action, that is, all out strike action. Resolutions backing all-out strike action have come from Beverley, Leeds, Cambridge and Sheffield. This has partly been acted upon already by West Yorkshire ambulance workers who have agreed to take lightning all-out action with no emergency cover. Naturally, this excellent action has been roundly condemned by the NUPE leadership.

Health service militants have a difficult task ahead welding a common commitment to all-out action. 'RED PULSE', a monthly bulletin for health workers in Sheffield, issued by Workers Power health workers over the last 18 months, has been consistently pressing the case for strike action and trying to equip militants with the arguments. This has undoubtedly paid off; where the arguments have been put at mass meetings, union branches and Joint Shop Stewards Committees (JSSC) they have usually been won.

The crux of the argument centres around the question of responsibility. By arguing for action that includes the provision of emergency cover health workers are being forced to accept responsibility for their action. Any deaths or suffering inevitably highlighted by the capitalist press is then presented as the fault of health workers. Militants have to stand firm against the hysteria and lay the blame on the government's door. The government is wholly responsible for the threat to patients caused by strike action, not the workers—this needs to be shouted loud and clear.

Health workers have to take action that is wholly *effective*. Limited strike action with lots of strings by way of cover, allows the government to hold out. It demoralises the workers and therefore makes it easier for the Tories to spit in our face next time. Many hospital workers are women, many of whom are one-parent families and therefore main bread-winners. Long drawn out disputes cost more to such workers.

SUPPORT FROM INDUSTRIAL WORKERS IS VITAL

Perhaps most important of all, all-out action releases health workers to build up effective links with industrial workers and the rest of the public sector. Time can be spent to argue and win the case. Financial support—vital to maintain strikers and their families—can better be collected. We only have to look back a few years to learn the lessons about effective action. In 1974 when the nurses and radiographers threatened all out action, and won supportive strike action from the Kent miners, nurses received the biggest pay rise ever. In 1972 and 1979 when ancillaries took limited, selective and divided action they were forced to hold out for weeks at great financial loss and were finally sold out by their leaders. This led to tremendous demoralisation and a vow by many that they would never take action again.

This sharply raises the question of control by the rank and file. Control at present is very firmly in the hands of the TUC and the health unions bureaucracy. As has already been said they are not prepared to act on the demands of the membership if they go against the aim of keeping the action limited to disruption. Now is the time for militants to be arguing for wrenching the control out of the bureaucrats hands. Strike committees should be built in every hospital. These committees should regularly report back to mass meetings and issue bulletins to keep everyone informed of the latest developments and to air their views. Links should be built between the



COHSE demonstrator outside the DHSS

Picture: Barry Lewis (Network)

committees on a local, regional and national level to discuss stepping up the action into all out action. These strike committees should take a clear lead in the fight. At all times they must be accountable to the membership, unlike the full-time union officials. Delegations should be sent out to all factories, mines, union branches, Joint Shop Stewards Committees to argue the case for supportive strike action. These links should be transformed into permanent links. Strike funds should be set up immediately to alleviate hardship.

Only if the health workers aspirations for unity are focused in this direction will results emerge. Already, the RCN have turned their fire on COHSE and NUPE, showing how fragile unity really is. Real unity would mean *one union* for the health service, breaking the RCN leaders effective veto on effective action and depriving the likes of Fisher and Spanswick of scapegoats. Of course, it is these officials who would do most to obstruct one union, fearful as they are of relinquishing control over their funds and privileges and undivided power. But it is in this direction alone that a fighting health service union can be built. ■

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