

# workers power

MONTHLY NEWSPAPER OF THE WORKERS POWER GROUP

## SUPPORT THE HEALTH WORKERS

## Smash the anti-union laws

**ALMOST FIVE MONTHS** after the first stoppage during the health dispute, the TUC has at last named the date for a Day of Action, by all its members, in support of the health workers. They have asked all workers to stop work for at least an hour in solidarity on September 22nd.

Already the NUM and the GMWU have committed themselves to action. It is down to militants everywhere to make sure that September 22nd becomes a one day general strike — and it will be the work of the militants, not the TUC leaders, that ensures the that the day is a success.

Throughout the dispute there has been ample evidence of mass rank and file support for the health

workers against the Tories. Miners, dockers and, of course, the Fleet St. electricians, have all staged solidarity stoppages. But the TUC leaders have been running scared of a showdown with the Tories. Even now, when the TUC is eventually forced into supporting action, because neither the Tories nor the workers will budge, they refuse to issue any clear call for strike action which would break Prior's Employment Act. The pathetic Albert Spanswick, of COHSE, is still on record as saying he would prefer the unions to get their members out with an unofficial, "nod and a wink" so as not to break the Tory laws against "secondary action".

The entire course of the health dispute has proved the need for organised solidarity stoppages, blacking and picketing in order to beat the Tories. It is, however, precisely these working class weapons that the Prior anti-union law and Tebbit's

bill are designed to destroy. Effective working class action is to be made totally illegal by the Tories. Successful action in support of the health workers must bring the organised working class into a collision with the law. The Tories will not hesitate to use that law if they think they can get away with it. Victory in this instance is sure to embolden them in the future. That is why they will only be beaten by action that will secure full victory for the healthworkers and consign all of their anti-union laws to the dustbin.

This is not the first time that the working class has found itself on the verge of a generalised offensive against this Tory government. In 1980, the steelworkers stood poised to be joined by a general strike in South Wales that could have turned the tide against the Tories. Early this summer ASLEF action, if it had been linked to the healthworkers

John Sturrock (Network)



battle could have threatened to spearhead a struggle against the Tories throughout the public sector. But the prospect of such struggles terrifies the TUC leaders. Each time they have worked like demons to defuse the conflict. They stabbed both the steel workers and ASLEF in the back. It is, therefore, vital that the organisation for the 22nd of September is not left in the hands of the TUC leaders and that the TUC plans to organise it as only a one-off day of protest must be spiked. It must become the launching pad for an onslaught on the Tories.

Delegate action committees of health workers and representatives of all workers due to take action must be formed in each locality. They should organise the solidarity pickets for the 22nd, recognising that effective solidarity with the health workers means breaking the Tory law. They should remain in operation after the 22nd — the law will not be beaten and the health workers will not win in one day. Rank and file organisations of militants in the localities must be held together to carry on the fight that the leaders are, in fact, seeking to limit.

Possibly the Tories, or an individual employer, will invoke the Employment Act before the 22nd. The TUC, and each individual union must be forced to state now that they will declare all strikes in defiance of court orders to be official and refuse to squander one penny of union funds on paying fines for their members. No recognition of the Tory law in any form — that must be the battlecry of all organised workers.

Successful action on September 22nd, however, will not send the Tories into immediate retreat. They have staked their future on breaking

the health workers and on strengthening their anti-union legal machinery with yet another round of anti-union legislation aimed at making secret ballots for union officials and industrial action compulsory.

The course they are set on is one of inflicting a lasting defeat on the organisations, services and living standards of the working class. Today the NHS workers are in the firing line. Tomorrow other public sector workers will be facing the same intransigent government. Private sector workers have, and will again, suffer the blight of low wages and unemployment thanks to the Tories' policies. For these reasons September 22nd must be the beginning of a class-wide offensive against the Tories. Solidarity strike action from unions, such as the miners, alongside all-out strike action by the health workers, are the goals that militants fighting for mobilisations on the 22nd must set for themselves.

As the fining of Geraghty shows, however, the health dispute has highlighted the class-wide implications of the Tories' laws. So, the 22nd must become not only the starting point for real solidarity action to win the health strike but also a GENERAL STRIKE aimed at smashing the Tories' anti-union laws, the existing ones and the ones being pushed through Parliament by Tory hit-man Norman Tebbit.

No effort must be spared to guarantee that the 22nd September is a day of ALL OUT STRIKE. Leaflets, bulletins and work-time meetings must be organised to put the case across. But militants must have no illusions. Only an indefinite general strike will destroy the plans of the government. ■

## Boycott Foot's register

THIS YEAR'S LABOUR party conference promises to register the gains that the Labour Right has made over the last year. The last twelve months have borne out all too clearly Workers' Power's judgement that the 1981 conference represented, "a decisive victory for the anti-reform, anti-Benn forces" (WP 26). The Right, in conjunction with the main trade union leaders, are out to cap their gains with conference acceptance of the NEC's witch hunt proposal for a 'Register of non-affiliated groups'.

It is symptomatic of the weakness of Labour's left that the principal resolutions they have managed to place on the conference agenda are of an entirely defensive character. They primarily concentrate on trying to stop the NEC's witchhunting plans. Despite the Labour front bench's role

as recruiting sergeants for Margaret Thatcher's imperialist war against Argentina, there is not one resolution that so much as attempts to call the NEC and the PLP to account. This makes a mockery of the claims of the Left that their constitutional victories put them in a position to control the PLP.

All the evidence suggests that it is now the right who are making the running. Not only have they pushed the register through the NEC. They are well placed this year to act on their carefully leaked 'hit list' and to shift the NEC further to the right. Huckfield seems set to be replaced by Foot's nominee, Evans. At present the gossip column reports of bureaucratic bar-room preparations to oust Foot seem premature. But Foot has always been a 'caretaker' candidate for the Right during the period in which they groomed a new candidate and organised to re-assert their grip on the party.

With the trade union bureaucrats

increasingly mindful of an impending election and doubtless aware of Foot's potential as an electoral albatross, victories for the Right at conference could well be followed up by a drive to install a new hard right leader atop a rightist NEC. Murray and the TUC General Council manouevred desperately before the TUC conference to refer back the AUEW Construction Section's bid to tie the TUC to opposing all incomes policies in whatever guise. The TUC tops and the Labour Right still hold out the hope of taking a purged Labour Party to triumph at the polls on a platform of incomes policy, import controls and national reconciliation. The Economist is correct when it reports that the Right in the Labour Party and TUC now, "hope they can put the horrors of the last three years behind them."

The determination of the Right and its not so 'soft left' allies of the

CONTINUED ON PAGE 2

FILE COPY

National Left Wing Movement Islington Poland NUM Middle East

All out Sept 22nd

## PREPARING FOR A TORY SEIGE?

ISLINGTON COUNCIL IS the 'piece de resistance' of Labour's 'new left'. Last May's Council election returned 51 Labour Councillors out of a total of 52 (the 52nd was taken by the SDP with a one vote margin over Labour). The victory was significant not only because it went against the national trend at the height of the Falklands war, but also because the campaign was conducted against the old Labour Party machine which had defected to form the first SDP Local Authority only 6 months previously.

Labour's victory at the polls, therefore, meant that the power fell to a younger, more radical Labour Party and one that was largely untested. The Labour Group was indeed something of an unknown quantity, a mix of moderate careerist elements, community activists, representatives of minority groups, overwhelmingly Bennite and including four supporters of the left-wing Socialist Organiser Alliance.

Expectations of the Council among Islington workers and party activists ran high. Lenin's bust was placed prominently outside the Council Chamber (he was a one-time resident of the borough). The Red Flag was sung in the Chamber and hoisted over the Town Hall of 'Fortress Islington'. The Gutter Press, a local 'independent socialist' monthly, proclaimed the Socialist Republic! And there was no dearth of Labour Councillors ready to defy the Government and prepare for Thatcher's defeat. As Councillor Keith Veness put it in the June issue of London Labour Briefing, in language typical of these heady days "The Left must prepare carefully for the next few months. The leadership of London is now ours - and we must see this is used to bring an end to this Government once and for all!" After three months in office how has the fighting talk been translated into action?

To begin with, the emphasis has not so much been on preparing the fight against Thatcher but carrying through some of the most visible electoral promises. Many of the cuts made by the previous SDP administration have been reversed and services restored. The town hall boss most closely identified with the cuts 'has been allowed to go.' The invidious policy of selling empty Council homes has been stopped as has the practice of bed and breakfast for homeless families. Council trade unions can now meet in work time and there have been a number of other changes.

To put this into perspective it has to be said that the manifesto itself 'A Socialist Programme for Islington 1982' is a modest one indeed and, in the best tradition of Labour Manifestoes, is 'open-ended': much of its promise - on housing, social services, employment etc - is medium/long term and is, in any case, predicated on an increased supply of Central Government funding. For example on Housing "Labour will restore all the building programmes as soon as central government increases the amount of money the Council is allowed to spend."

Of course "There will not be enough money available for all the work which needs to be done in Islington, until the Conservative Government is thrown out of office." The programme is notably wanting on how this latter objective is to be achieved. Presumably this aspect of the 'Socialist Republic's' plan hinges on the outcome of the next general election.

This approach is a variation on the 'municipal socialism' theme that has already had disastrous results for the working class in Lambeth and Lothian. It fails to take as its starting point the need to mobilise workers in Islington now in preparation for the inevitable conflict with Thatcher. Next year Thatcher intends cutting cash limits for local government by up to 20%, the intention being to prune a further 120,000 or so local authority jobs by 1983/4.

It won't be long before Thatcher and Heseltine decide to attack the Islington Council. With this in mind the right-wing in the council are already hinting at the need for a 42% rate rise.

While such a solution is politically unattractive in the wake of the Lambeth debacle, it does reflect the dilemma of 'municipal socialism'. How can a council honour its manifesto without incurring the legal wrath of the government?

According to the manifesto, this dilemma can be overcome by rallying the 'community' to the council's defence by the watchwords 'participation' and 'decentralisation'. In their own words "In facing the attack of the Tory Government the Council will need the support of the people of Islington. This means that decision-making must be based on discussion across the Borough...." At the same time "It is also vital that the Council secures the active support of its staff. Steps must be taken to open up policy-making to all staff and to improve relations with the Trade Unions."

These objectives are to be attained through decentralising services to neighbourhood offices, while all interested parties are consulted by a variety of means.

There is nothing particularly new in any of this and nothing intrinsically socialist either. Both Labour and Liberal local authorities have used this approach in the past with varying degrees of failure. Hardly a formula for success, this pink herring is a potential distraction which at worst can weaken trade union organisation and divide the Council and its employees. It does not approach the conflict with the Tories from the standpoint of the class struggle. The 'community', the 'people' are complete abstractions. Who are they? What are their fighting organisations? The task of a real socialist council would be to base itself on the mobilisation of the fighting organisations of the working class - the trade unions and shop stewards committees in Islington, which would lead real working class community groups - tenants associations, etc. behind them. Their power can provide a crucial starting point in extending the fight to defend one borough into a national conflict with the Tories.

To really secure such support the council would have to start not from any budgetary considerations necessarily limited by the preceding council, the central government etc. It would have to start by implementing a programme of action based on the immediate needs of workers. And Islington, while by no means a special case, is in need of a massive injection



of public funds. Over 10,000 substandard homes, 15,000 people waiting for houses, and 21% of the population (18,260 in June) unemployed. Action on these points would give Islington workers something worth defending.

After years of Labour Party cuts a massive scheme of public works is essential now. Facilities for the very old and young, housebuilding, road improvements environmental and recreational facilities would restore faith in the council and satisfy some of the burning needs. Furthermore the council should meet the national wage claims of its employees in full without waiting for a national agreement.

This was done in Camden in 1979. It can be done again in Islington. The council's offer of 'support' for the national claims is just not good enough - it could allow them to pay out less than that full claim when a settlement is eventually made.

Of course the cry will go up, where is the money to come from? The fact is that a determined council could find the money at a stroke without so much as adding a penny to rents or rates. Last year Islington Council paid over £58 million in debt charges. The lion's share of this sum is interest payments to various creditors. If the council refused to pay these crippling bills it would be in a good position to meet some of the urgent needs of the Islington working class, and in a position to call on their support when the bankers and government retaliate.

The likely consequences of such an action would need to be spelled out in a campaign reaching all those workers who live and work in the borough, drawing support from further afield too. Arguments supporting the Council's stand would need to be taken into the workplaces. At shop stewards committees, factory gate meetings and on the estates these workers must be won to strike action to defend services. An action committee of delegates from workplaces, community groups and of housewives must be built to conduct the action. Such action is a real class struggle alternative to the blind alley of 'municipal socialism'.

In Islington, communists, whether on the council or not, would be duty bound to fight for such an approach. The ostensible 'marxists' around Socialist Organiser, however, have not elaborated such a strategy.

The Socialist Organiser supporters on the council appear to recognise the need to prepare for a conflict with the Tories. They were the only people on the council to put forward a set of proposals designed to lay the basis for a fight with the government. The proposals, which were accepted by the leadership of the council, aim to ensure that manifesto commitments are honoured by forcing the government to give the council more money:

## Foot's register

CONTINUED FROM FRONT PAGE

Kinnock stripe must have been strengthened by the response of the Bennite Left, and its 'broad Left' foot soldiers, to the witch hunt proposals. Firstly, the Left has failed to take advantage of their much-heralded gains in order to stand a candidate against the witch-hunting, union jack-waving leadership of the discredited Michael Foot. Benn delivered a quiet, "No thank you" to polite recommendations from his 'hard' Socialist Organiser supporters that he should stand against Foot. Now, as has always been the case in Labour's history, the Left's weakness is underlined by its refusal to break with and destroy the Right. The Right can play the 'Unity' card against the Left to keep their front-man in position until they judge it the right moment to push forward harder against the Left.

Similarly, 'Tiger' Benn has refused to put himself at the head of a struggle to defy the register. He may well die an unregistered socialist - but no one is asking him to register! His response to the NEC decision to endorse the Haywood/Hughes report on Militant and its recommendations was a classic example of evading a fight. "There are hundreds of groups in the Labour Party. I don't know if they will register or not, but all I know is that if anybody is expelled, and that is the intention, it is going to be an awful waste of time and they will be re-admitted anyway ... so, I'm sorry about it, but I would

say to local parties, 'Don't worry, we've been through it all before it's never worked before and it won't work this time, and we should stick to the policies in which we believe.'" (Quoted in Labour Herald)

Benn evades issuing a call, or even a recommendation, for non-registration. And he consoles those who face potential expulsion with the warming prospect that they will get back into the party - sometime!

If the Labour Right, and their TUC backers, could take comfort from such statements they could hardly have been scared by the response of the 'hard lefts'. The starting point of any campaign against the witch hunt must be a refusal to register and a commitment to boycott the registration machinery. Any other approach concedes to the Labour leaders that they have the right to decide which newspapers, opinions and resolutions can be circulated in the Labour Party. But the editor of the Militant, Peter Taaffe was quick to declare that Militant was prepared to accommodate to the NEC on the question of the register. While Militant has called for opposition to the register their paper has carefully avoided giving any commitment to organising a boycott of it should it be passed by conference. The September 11th conference that it is sponsoring seems set to be a classic Militant-staged rally with little or no debate on the

strategy to fight the witchhunt.

While the LCC initially welcomed the register the CLPD, itself initially opposed to the registration plan, has now decided that the only, 'realistic' strategy is to put forward an 'alternative register' which embraces most of the NEC's conditions for membership and a few more besides! For their pains and ingenuity the Right has rewarded them well. Their 'realistic' alternative has been ruled out of order.

The witch hunt can only be defeated if the Right know that they will face intransigent opposition. This means winning the commitment of as many constituency Labour Parties as possible to refuse to comply with the registration procedures. It means showing the NEC that the pursuit of the witch hunt will mean expelling a large number of constituency parties. It means organising to coordinate the struggle of the CLPs who are committed to a boycott.

The witch hunters are also out to destroy the re-selection procedures as a mechanism for rendering individual members of the PLP accountable to the rank and file. All constituencies must declare that, as well as boycotting the register, they commit themselves to standing democratically elected candidates - Tatchell in Bermondsey for example - whatever the views of the NEC on the legitimacy of the candidates.

It is further evidence of the

weakness of the Left that they have not been able to present a slate in the NEC elections which commits itself to these two elementary measures in defence of Labour Party democracy.

Instead large sections of the Left have tended to cry, 'Foul!' - with the CLPD howling that the Right has upset the 'new sense of unity' achieved at Bishops Stortford. But it was Bishops Stortford and Benn's agreement to backpedal on the party reforms that opened the door for the latest confident offensive of the Right wing.

The crucial task facing the Left in the Labour Party in the face of the ascendancy of the TUC and PLP Right is to win the unions against the purge of the Left. This means fighting to take the block vote out of the hands of the general secretaries and putting them in the hands of the rank and file membership. Every betrayal and defeat that the trade union leaders are allowed to get away with - like the defeat of ASLEF and the NUR - strengthens the right wing block in the TUC and Labour Party. The struggle around the healthworkers workers' pay claim and the massive solidarity being shown by the rank and file of the trade unions allows revolutionaries to draw the links as to who are the real splitters and demobilisers of the fight against the Thatcher government. The Left must build on this struggle to sabotage the plans of the right wing witch-hunters.

**BOYCOTT THE REGISTER!**

**DEFEAT THE WITCHHUNTERS!**

"Islington Council should draw up a detailed assessment of how much extra money we will need from the Government to carry out the manifesto commitments without placing extra burdens on Islington tenants and ratepayers. We should then go out and publicise the facts in a massive campaign among tenants, council workers and community groups explaining, in simple terms, what the benefits should be and why they should join with us to demand the government pays up." (SO 95)

This approach has a major flaw in it - one that could lead to disaster for the Islington working class. Instead of giving workers' material incentives to defend the council - through the programme we have outlined above - the Socialist Organiser Strategy postpones action on many of the Islington working class' pressing needs until after the outcome (which they hope would be successful) of a fight to make an intransigent government make funds available. In fact workers are being asked to fight for jam tomorrow. Whatever the intentions of the Socialist Organiser, this is a recipe for a potential defeat. It is a back-to-front approach. Real communist councillors would immediately, in the words of the Communist International's 1920 directives : "aid the poorer sections of the population in every possible way . . . . . launch a determined campaign to spread revolutionary propaganda, even if it leads to conflict with the state power."

While these directives were meant for communist councils with a majority, they also indicate what a minority of communist councillors would be duty bound to fight for.

The signs that the Socialist Organiser supporters are likely to take heed of our advice are not encouraging. In a response to criticisms from the SWP, Nick Barstow defended Islington council adding:

"But Socialist Worker seems content to sit on the sidelines and passively predict that it will all go rotten. You may in the end be proved right, but no one will thank you for it unless you join in the fight that's going on now instead of setting up straw men" (SO 98)

This is a defence of Islington council's current reformist strategy. The job of revolutionaries is not to defend such a strategy even though we will defend intransigently pro-working class actions that may form part of that strategy. No our job is to enter the fight with our own strategy and through joint struggle, but under a communist banner, win reformist workers and councillors to our alternative. Socialist Organiser's strategy, on the other hand, relegates them to the position of "marxist" apologists for left reformists.

by Dave Jenkins

## Fight the deportations

BABA BAKHTAURA - A popular Punjabi singer - is the latest victim of the racist immigration laws. He has lost an appeal against deportation at Wolverhampton Crown Court.

The case of Baba Bakhtaura is similar to that of many other victims of the immigration laws. After being here 3 years his application to extend his stay was refused. He instructed his solicitors to appeal on his behalf but they failed to do so within the prescribed time limit. He was arrested and sent to prison for two months by an Oldbury magistrate who recommended him for deportation. Owing to wrong advice from counsel he pleaded guilty to knowingly overstaying his leave to be here under the immigration laws.

Baba Bakhtaura is well known and loved in the Sikh community. But countless other deportations are taking place with only a small circle of family and friends to weep over the brutal separation. 18 people are threatened with deportation in Bradford, at present 30 families in Oldham have lost relatives as a result of deportations. *It is vital that the Labour Movement organises now to stop the deportations.*

Since the successful case of Anwar Ditta, there has been a tendency to campaign against deportations on the basis of individual campaigns in the communities from which the detainees come. This is attractive because the campaigns usually meet with a positive response in the communities. But as the Home Office and the magistrates turn on the screws it is becoming ever more necessary to unite the struggles of individual deportees within a unified campaign against the deportations and the racist laws that make them possible.

During the massive agitation mounted by black organisations against the 'Nationality Bill' the Labour and Trade Union leaders were conspicuously absent. The campaign within the rank and file of the Labour movement was weak. If the wave of deportations is to be stopped it is necessary to organise now to take this question into every Labour Party ward, shop stewards committee and Trade Union branch. And we must ensure that a united campaign against deportations and the immigration laws bases itself on working class action so that the particular communities and families are not left to fight alone.

A defence committee has been formed to fight the case of Baba Bakhtaura for further information on the case contact:

Baba Bakhtaura Defence Committee,  
19A Birmingham St.,  
Oldbury, West Midlands  
(021-552-6121)

# The rise of the Broad Left: 1967-74

WITH JOE GORMLEY now having departed to join the "vermin in ermine" in the House of Lords, many militants inside the NUM and throughout the trade union movement are looking to his successor Arthur Scargill, to spearhead an onslaught on the Tory government. The miners' wage claim of 31% and Scargill's much publicised opposition to the NCB's secret pit closure programme provides the ingredients for a potentially explosive struggle this Autumn.

Arthur Scargill represents two things. On the one hand he is the symbol of the miners' rank and file militancy at its peak. A key organiser of the Saltley Gate victory when the coke depot was shut down by mass picketing, Scargill is remembered by militants as a strident rank and file leader of the 1972 strike.

He also represents the politics of the Broad Left inside the NUM, politics which have shaped, limited and at key moments dissipated the militancy of the rank and file. Scargill is now the figurehead of an alliance comprising left labour miners like Emlyn Williams of South Wales and Communist Party veterans like Michael McGahey. For these reasons Scargill and his supporters in the NUM do appear to be very different from other "lefts" within the trade union movement. By comparison, Moss Evans appears a model moderate when measured against Scargill. However the history, not merely of other "lefts" corrupted by high office, but of the recent history of the NUM left itself should serve as a cautionary reminder to militants to put no blind trust in 'King Arthur' in the possible struggles ahead.

At the beginning of the 1970s the miners emerged as the most militant and well-organised section of workers in the trade union movement. As a result of the 1972 and 1974 miners' strikes they gained a reputation as being the only group of workers capable of taking on and defeating governments. Many workers naturally looked to the miners to smash incomes policies or set the leading norm for wage negotiations. Few other groups of workers in struggle have evoked the same measure of sympathy for their cause, or the recognition as the vanguard of the British working class movement. The close solidarity of the mining community, bred from the dangerous nature of mining work and the long tradition of harsh struggle against employers and governments, goes a long way in explaining the important role the miners have played in the labour movement. But there were other specific factors behind the emergence of the miners' militancy in the early 1970s, factors which also explain the relative quiescence since the miners' strike in 1974.

Between 1947, after the nationalisation of the mines, and the late 1960s, the NUM was dominated by a fiercely anti-communist, right-wing National Executive Committee. The union's leaders, Arthur Horner and then Will Paynter were both in the CP. Yet both were voluntary prisoners of the right-wing. Having won their position - no mean feat in the cold-war years - these CPers were determined to hold onto them even though their policies were constantly thwarted by the right-wing.

This right-wing complied with the NCB's drastic run down of the industry. In 1967 this NUM leadership was enmeshed in the NCB's biggest ever closure programme when 34,300 miners were affected by closures and 12,900 were made redundant. Miners who called for resistance had continuously been told by the NCB that strikes would be ruinous to the industry and convinced by their union leadership that militant action would not achieve anything in face of the inevitable. Years of passive acceptance of redundancies had gone a long way to undermining the morale of the workforce reduced from a 1955 level of 700,000 to a late 1960s level of 270,000.

But by the late 1960s economic changes were taking place which gradually undermined the basis of this class collaboration. Unemployment began to increase throughout the economy, thus cutting off a potential avenue of escape for many disaffected miners. This would increasingly mean that these miners would have to look to making improvements within their own industry. Also, what later proved to be most significant was the change in wage bargaining structures between the NUM and the NCB. In 1966 the old piece system was abolished in favour of a nationally negotiated day rate system of pay - the National Power Loading Agreement (NPLA). The immediate effect of this was to depress wages. While in 1956 miners had been among the highest paid workers in Britain, by 1970 they were well down the list, and this despite the fact that productivity had steadily risen. A further factor elevating the importance of the wages issue was the steadily increasing rate of inflation which really began to take off after 1970.

But the abolition of piece-work did, paradoxically have a positive effect. The mining union was traditionally a highly federative body. It had only been formed on a national basis in 1944. The piece-work system made the wages issue a purely regional affair and reinforced old loyalties and old area divisions. The NPLA changed that giving all miners a common interest in the national



Steve Benbow (Network)

wages agreement. The full import of this development became apparent in 1972.

Against the background of these developments a number of left-wing miners came together in 1967 in Sheffield to discuss finding a successor to Will Paynter. Prior to this there had been virtually no unity between the left-wing areas of the NUM. The cold-war had created wide and often bitter divisions between CPers and the Labour Left. Added to that was the existence of local chauvinism, even amongst the left.

In Sheffield this meeting therefore marked the beginning of a more coherent and unified left-wing in the NUM than had hitherto existed. The composition of the meeting prefigured very accurately the political and social character of the left wing from that moment on: a Broad Left amalgam of CP and left Labour Party members, who were predominantly full-time officials of the union.

From the Scottish Area there was General Secretary Lawrence Daly and Vice President Michael McGahey; Daly was on the Labour Left, McGahey a leading CPer. From the Kent area came Jack Dunn, General secretary and CP member. From South Wales Dai Francis, General Secretary and CP, Emlyn Williams, Area Vice President and Labour Left. From Yorkshire, two CP members, Jock Kane, Financial Secretary and Sammy Taylor, Area Compensation Agent, plus two working miners from Doncaster. Kent provided the more moderate Herbert Parkin, Secretary, and Tom Swain MP. (See "The Militancy of the British Miners" - V.L. Allen, p.118-135.)

These men did not set their sights on building an organisation with deep roots in the rank and file which could defeat the right-wingers and their policies. Rather they aimed at two things. First to get Lawrence Daly elected as General Secretary of the whole NUM and secondly to win official control of the right-wing dominated, but militant, Yorkshire region. The mould was set for a Broad Left vote gathering machine which aimed at capturing control of key positions of the union machinery, rather than organising a militant rank and file movement which would have set out to transform the union organisationally and politically to enable it to defeat the bosses plans for the industry.

The campaign around Daly did enable him to capture the General Secretaryship against his then right-wing rival (but later firm colleague) Joe Gormley, in December 1968. The first test for this great hope of the left was quick to develop. In 1969 a spontaneous strike wave exploded in the Yorkshire area.

Not only was Yorkshire one of the biggest NUM areas it was also one of the most militant. Despite the right-wing Area leadership, local 'panels' made up of regularly elected delegates in the localities were responsible for conducting hundreds of local strikes. In 1952, for example, Yorkshire had witnessed over 630 strikes, 28 being held in one pit. The Doncaster Panel was particularly militant and, together with young miners like Arthur Scargill, it was proving to be a thorn in the side of the area leadership.

At that time Scargill, unlike the others in the Broad Left, was involved in a 'rank and file' body, the Barnsley Miners Forum. This met regularly to listen to left-wing lectures and enabled Scargill to organise a base of support. The reasons for his taking this initiative can be seen from his later attitude to the Forum. In the late 60s and early 70s, Scargill was a working miner and an ex-CPer. Unlike the leading Labour left-wingers he did not have a powerful union machine behind him. Nor, like the CPers, did he have the party with its relatively powerful industrial machine and network of

militants. To rise in the NUM Scargill had to base himself on organising the rank and file.

However, once Scargill had secured his leadership of the official machine, then his 'rank and file' group was gradually reduced to nothing. After a long period of desultory existence in 1976, it disappeared altogether.

This was consistent with Scargill's view that the important thing was to control the leading positions in the union. Even here Scargill was at pains to point out that this did not mean building an organisation which would struggle to oust the right wing from its positions. In an interview with Socialist Challenge in 1978 he argued: "I don't want it going into Socialist Challenge that Scargill says 'Erect an alternative leadership which is alternative to that which already exists'. I'm talking about a leadership being created which will be ready to replace the present leadership when that leadership goes."

I'm not talking about a caucus within the union, because that would tend in my opinion to even further fragment the trade union movement and that would be disastrous." (Socialist Challenge No.70, 2nd November 1978).

His rank and file origins have left their stamp on Scargill, but his strategy is clearly not centered on building an organisation of the rank and file.

The 1969 strikes erupted over an issue under dispute throughout the 60s - working hours for surface workers. A demand for reduced hours was lodged together with a pay claim of 27s.6d. South Wales, under pressure from its rank and file, pushed for some sort of action on the issue in 1969. At the same time a campaign for strike action was building up in Doncaster and Barnsley where militants felt that the wage claim was too low. The attitude of the 'left' at that time was very revealing. Daly, who had been elected on a platform of industrial action including 'guerrilla strikes' to win better pay and conditions was dealing with the issue through the conciliation machinery, and the rest of the 'lefts' felt there was insufficient support or determination for strike action. On this they were absolutely wrong! In October 1969 every pit but one in Yorkshire came out on unofficial strike with the Doncaster Panel organising flying picketing of the coalfield. The strike was chaotic and spontaneous and ended with the thin promise of an inquiry, but it had great significance for the miners.

It broke the fatalism and passivity that had existed amongst miners on a national scale. Also it was a straw in the wind for militants. Daly, the blue-eyed boy of the left, had opposed the strike and had even appeared on TV to appeal for a return to work. The signs for the future were clear. The militancy of the miners was being rekindled. Their leaders were out to stifle that militancy.

The 1970 pay claim saw a new mood amongst miners. Conference called for a £5 a week increase, only to be met by a £2.10s offer from the NCB. Daly, keen to keep control of the situation called a ballot and campaigned for a strike. The 55% vote in favour of a rejection was not the two thirds majority required before a strike could be called and the NEC duly refused to make any further moves. The militants, bristling with confidence after 1969 - despite the meagre results of that strike - moved into action once again. In September 1970 50,000 of Yorkshire's 70,000 miners were on strike. In South Wales and Scotland as well, there were wide-spread strikes. During this unofficial strike the rank and file Yorkshire miners, under the leadership of the Doncaster Panel and the rising star Scargill, used the flying picket to bring out the whole coalfield.

As in 1969 once this unofficial action was underway, it met with bitter opposition from both the right and the left. Daly, ever more the responsible bureaucrat announced: "We appeal to those branches on strike to return to normal working."

When the NCB's offer came up to voting at the executive, three leading CP members voted for the offer - in effect a vote against the strikers. The only leading CPer to play a significant role in the strike was Dai Francis from South Wales. The end result was similar to 1969. Faced with right-wing sabotage by the likes of Sydney Schofield in Yorkshire, and no lead from the Broad Left, the strike petered out without achieving a major improvement on the pay offer.

However it did supplement the 'old guard' of the Broad Left with a new layer of militants with closer ties to the rank and file. In particular the strikes in Yorkshire established men like Tait, Miller, Scargill, Rigby and Briscoe as serious contenders for power in the area, and a force to be reckoned with at a national level. Furthermore, the 1969 and 1970 strikes together revealed an unprecedented dissatisfaction with the class-collaborationist policies which the NUM leaders had been pursuing throughout the 1960s. The rank and file miners, however uncoordinated and uneven their actions, were overcoming their past inertia and demobilisation, and this was a crucial stepping stone towards the great struggles of 1972 and 1974.

The pressure of the rank and file was reflected in the claim submitted by the 1971 NUM conference. It called for £5-£9 increases, the largest ever called for, only to be met by an NCB offer of £1.60. The scene was set for the 1972 strike.

The strike began on January 9th amidst a torrent of cocky predictions by the Fleet Street rags, that the miners were waging a doomed battle. The passivity of the official leadership seemed to confirm this view. What had not been taken into account was the determination of a rank and file, bitter about the gradual lowering of its living standards that had preceded the strike.

The miners were solid from the word go. The flying picket, pioneered by the Yorkshire militants in the strikes of 1969 and 1970, and the mass picket came into their own, as miners travelled far from the coalfields to stop coal movements. Because rank and file miners did not sit at home and wait for an outcome to the dispute, the running of the strike became an example for all workers to follow. Rank and file miners ran the strike, picketing where and when they were needed and organising solidarity from other workers. The tactics which brought victory were epitomised by the success of the miners, together with 10,000 striking Birmingham workers, in closing down the Saltley Coke Depot on February 10th 1972. That victory was effectively the signal for the victory of the entire strike, and significantly Scargill was at the head of the Saltley operation. The hastily assembled Wiberforce Enquiry met for three days and recommended rises of £4.50 - £6 for the miners. The Tory government's pay policy was in tatters - the miners were triumphant and their victory heralded a new mood of militancy throughout the whole working class. UCS, the Pentonville dockers, and a host of other struggles had Heath's government on the run throughout 1972.

Following the 1972 strike there was a further swing to the left in the election of full-time officials of the NUM. This was exactly in line with the perspective of the left-wing. Scargill was elected to the NEC in September 1972 and was Yorkshire Area President by Jan. 1973. Briscoe became Area General Secretary by 1973. From being a right-wing dominated area, Yorkshire became a left-wing one by 1973. McGahey was elected Vice President of the NUM in July 1973 and by the end of that year the NEC 'left' was getting within striking distance of commanding a majority on the NEC; it now had 11 out of 26 on that body. Within the apparatus of the NUM the 'left' were numerically in a stronger position than ever before.

This 'left advance' however, was marked by a decline in the organisation of the rank and file. It was from this point on that the Barnsley Miners' Forum was wound down by Scargill. For its part the CP attacked the various 'unofficial' committees that had sprung up in 1972 on the grounds that the official union was now 'open' to the left. The strategy was clear. Capture the official positions, and by this means steer the union left. The other side of this strategy, however, necessarily means collaborating with the right in defence of the 'official' procedures in all instances where the rank and file stepped outside of them. Only by these means could the left 'prove' their loyalty to the union apparatus and their 'responsibility'. The disastrous results of this strategy were first seen in 1974 and were to really take their toll on the militancy of the miners during the years of the Labour Government.

The 1974 strike, the strike that 'brought down the Tories', was very different from 1972. It began as an overtime ban. McGahey had argued for such a tactic in the following terms: "Let us start thinking in terms of various forms of industrial action".

For Gormley this was heaven-sent. He was able to call an overtime ban, with full support from the left in Nov. 1973, and use it as an alternative to strike action. In the meantime he worked overtime himself, trying to negotiate, often in secret, a deal with Heath that could avert a strike. Heath's obduracy was due to the fact that with his pay policy in ruins and his general reputation low, he wanted to use a dispute with the miners to try and cash in on a 'who rules Britain' election. Thus, despite Gormley's efforts, the NUM was rushed towards a strike.

When the strike came in 1974 it was under the tight control of the bureaucracy. Scargill had set the tone by condemning several Yorkshire pits that implemented the overtime ban before the official starting day. McGahey, reeling from a massive anti-communist press campaign, was at pains to prove his respectability. The result was that unlike 1972 there was little or no active large scale picketing and practically no rank and file involvement in the running of the strike. Symbolically at Saltley Coke Depot lorries were able to load up absolutely unimpeded. Despite this, however, the NUM were able to secure the blocking of most coal and related products, by a TUC edict. A deal between the TUC, furious at Heath's introduction of the three-day week - a panic measure rather than an economic necessity - collaborated with the NUM to make the strike solid and defeat Heath. While this sealed the miners' victory and lost Heath the ensuing election, it also contained the seeds of the future demobilisation of the militants. Bureaucratic control of the strike ensured bureaucratic control after the strike and the incomes policy that the miners had fought under Heath was to be successfully foisted upon them in the years of the TUC and Labour Government's Social Contract.

When Labour came to power an 'interim' deal was quickly struck. Despite countless protestations from the left that the full claim had to be met, this deal was £4 short of the claim for underground workers (with the exception of face workers) and £3 short for surface workers.

The 1974 strike was a watershed. It represented the enormous militancy of the miners that had built up since the late 1960s. It earned miners the respect of the whole working class as Heath tumbled from office. But it also revealed the bureaucracy's ability to control that militancy, thanks largely to the strategy of the Broad Left. It marked the end of a stormy era and the beginning of a calm one. For the next six years, despite the presence of Scargill, McGahey and others on the NEC, Gormley was very much in command. To a large extent he had the political strategy of his opponents to thank for this.

*TO BE CONTINUED*

by Mike Rooke

# Communists and the Labour Party

# EXPELLING THE LEFT WING

IN A PERIOD when the leadership of the Labour Party is once again setting out on its well trodden course of "cleansing" the Labour Party of "Marxists and Trotskyists" it is highly appropriate to look at the very first "witch hunt" in the Party's history. During the 1920's the right wing set out to drive the Communists from the Party.

Not only were the Communist members of the Party excluded, but also whole constituency labour parties which refused to carry out these decisions, leading to the formation of a body which finally constituted itself as the "National Left Wing Movement" in September 1926.

An analysis of this period is important for the lessons that can be learnt for today, when militants face a Labour leadership determined to rid itself of its left wing. But it is also important because the victory over the left in the 1920's marked a watershed in the development of the Labour Party through the consolidation of the leadership's bureaucratic stranglehold over the Party. The bans, proscriptions, expulsions and witch-hunts which have punctuated the history of the Labour Party right down to the present indeed flow from the "principles" laid down in the struggle with the Communists.

A further reason for examining this period of the Labour Party's history is that previous attempts by "Trotskyists", most notably Brian Pearce's "The Communist Party and the Labour Left" (Essays in History of Communism in Britain - Woodhouse and Pearce), have been absolutely uncritical of the Communist Party's tactics in pursuing the fight up to the ultra-left turn of 1928. The reason is not hard to find in the case of Pearce. Writing in 1957 for the Socialist Labour League, which had a rotten history of adaption to left reformists such as Bevan and the Braddocks in the Labour Party via "Socialist Outlook" and later "Tribune", Pearce could only view the National Left Wing through the SLL's opportunist spectacles. But there have been no serious attempts to challenge Pearce's account. For far too long the history of the National Left Wing Movement has been mythologised by those who consider themselves to be Trotskyists as a means of legitimising their own particular opportunist practices inside the Labour Party.

#### THE AFFILIATION QUESTION

The whole question of the Communist Party's affiliation to and exclusion from the Labour Party arose out of the peculiar structure and history of that Party. Formed as the Labour Representation Committee only in 1900 the Party was in fact a federation of the affiliated trade unions and socialist groupings. By 1920 when the Communist Party of Great Britain was formed its major component in terms of membership, the British Socialist Party (BSP), was in fact an affiliated group in the Labour Party. The formation of the Communist Party from a fusion of the BSP and the Socialist Labour Party (SLP) and Silvia Pankhurst's Workers Socialist Federation (WSF), (the latter two being both outside and hostile to joining the Labour Party), posed quite sharply the question of affiliation to the Labour Party.

The question was finally settled largely through the intervention and influence of the Communist International and in particular of Lenin. Lenin's position embodied in "Left Wing Communism" and adopted in resolution form at the Second Congress argued for the Communist Party to affiliate to the Labour Party. It was clear to both the CI and the majority of the newly formed Communist Party that the Labour Party, which had only been opened to individual membership in 1917, had been growing apace since the First World War. The war had produced an elemental upheaval in the life of the working class and shaken it out of the old ways and habits which had tied it to Liberalism. Whereas in 1910 Labour candidates received only half a million votes by 1918 the total stood at two and a quarter million. By 1924 this figure was to rise to nearly five and a half million - one third of the total votes.

While this dramatic growth of the reformist party would not alone have justified a tactic of affiliation, it was combined with an exceptional structure which allowed revolutionaries virtual freedom of action. A structure which, as Lenin pointed out,

"...allows the British Socialist Party to remain in its ranks, allows it to have its own organ of the press in which members of this very Labour Party can freely and openly declare that the leaders of the Party are Social Traitors.... This is a very peculiar situation in which a Party which unites an enormous mass of workers, and which is a political party, is nevertheless obliged to allow its members complete liberty." (Speech to Second Congress of CI)

This did not mean for a moment however that the Comintern had revised its political characterisation of this Party of the Second International. In taking to task William McLaine and the BSP, Lenin put forward the classic definition of the British Labour Party, "...the Labour Party is not a political workers' party but a thoroughly bourgeois party, because although it consists of workers, it is led by reactionaries, and the worst reactionaries at that, who lead it in the spirit of the bourgeoisie and with the aid of the British Noskes

and Scheidemanns, they systematically deceive the workers." (Speech to Second Congress)

Neither did it mean that the Comintern was opposed to the existence of an independent revolutionary communist party or that it was advocating that the young CP could succeed in transforming the Labour Party into the party that the working class needed. The Comintern was advancing a tactic to take the fight against Labourism into the heart of the party at a time when the party's bureaucratic structures had not yet gelled and when the real face of Labourism was not yet apparent to millions of workers. Affiliation was not a tactic simply aimed at 'getting inside' the Labour

Party. Neither should the Comintern's advice be taken to mean that revolutionaries should attempt to enter and remain in the Labour Party at any cost and for all time. The affiliation tactic was advanced as a means of exposing the reformists in political battle inside their party as part of the struggle to build a mass working class cadre around the small nucleus of the British Communist Party.

It was armed with this analysis and tactic that the CPGB applied for membership of the Labour Party in August 1920. Although formal affiliation was refused by the Labour NEC, in practice the bulk of Communists Party members were already openly members of the Labour Party, either by virtue of having always been so via the BSP or through being delegated to Labour Party bodies and conferences through their affiliated trade unions. While the decision was effectively endorsed at the 1921 Labour Party conference by 4,115,000 to 224,000 the Executive was initially unwilling to risk any offensive action against the CP.

#### THE RIGHT WING OFFENSIVE

The right wing offensive was launched in 1922 after the defeats of the working class following "Black Friday". At the Edinburgh conference of that year the Executive moved that delegates from affiliated bodies must not come from organisations which stood candidates for parliament or local authorities unless endorsed by the Labour Party. Frank Hodges of the Miners Federation of Great Britain, summed up the Executives "case" against the Communists when he described them as, "the intellectual slaves of Moscow - taking orders from the Asiatic mind".

Such fulminations however were insufficient to stop the "yellow peril" from spreading in the consti-

tencies. In the 1922 general election Shapurji Saklatvala, a Communist, was elected as the official Labour member for North Battersea, while Walton Newbold won Motherwell as a Communist candidate with local Labour Party support. At the 1923 Labour Party conference the Executive was forced to retreat on banning CP members as delegates. This reflected the growing confidence of the working class after the defeats of 1921. And although the call for CP affiliation was again defeated by 2,880,000 to 366,000 this did not reflect the true support for the Communists. The miners and the Railmen had cast their 1.1 million bloc votes only by the narrowest of majorities - itself a tribute to the work of the Red International of Labour Union (precursor to the Minority Movement) in these unions.

#### THE PRESSURE OF LABOURISM

Such successes had its dangers for a young and small CP. The victory for the Labour Party in 1923, (it became the second largest Party in Parliament and formed the first Labour Government) led to what Radék described as a "reformist epidemic" in the British Party. "Workers' Weekly" the CP's newspaper, hailed it as a "victory for the working class" and urged the Labour Party to form a "workers' Government". Palme Dutt, normally an incurable leftist, warned workers, "A Labour Government in a minority cannot be expected to show easy successful action or immediate results straight away. That must be recognised and there will be understanding on the part of the workers". (Quoted in LJ MacFarlane "The British CP" p104)

This right wing lurch in the application of the united front tactic, which undoubtedly reflected the growing pressure of Labourism on the British Party, was quickly corrected by the Communist International in a conference with representatives of the British Party in Moscow in February 1924. However the Communists

International itself at this time was beginning to succumb to opportunist vacillation under the lead of Zinoviev. The formation of the Anglo-Russian Committee (early 1925), reflecting the leftward move of the British Trade unions, led to Zinoviev, already searching for short cuts to build a "mass Communist Party" in Britain, to declare, "We do not know even when the communist mass party of England will be formed" (Zinoviev Speech to 5th Congress of CI).

Zinoviev was openly courting other roads to party in this period. Impatient with the small CP, potential "other doors" included not only the left in the trade unions - Purcell, Swales, Hicks and Co., also the left in the Labour Party itself - for example Kirkwood, Maxton and Lansbury.

We have dealt elsewhere with how the growing strength of the Stalin/Bukharin faction of the CPSU led to the Anglo-Russian Committee developing into a alliance with the British trade union leaders - a factor which disarmed the young British Communist Party and Minority Movement in the build up to the General Strike (See Marxism and the Trade Unions Workers Power Journal 7/8). This tendency was urgently warned against by Trotsky in his writings on Britain. Not surprisingly this policy was to have similar disastrous results on the Party's work in the Labour Party.

#### NO CP CRITICISM OF LEFTS

In March 1925 the "Sunday Worker" was launched at the initiative of the CP and largely financed by the CP. However the Sunday Worker was to be a non-party paper, indeed it set itself the task of becoming, "the organ of the left wing of the Labour movement... not only express the left wing but aid it to consolidate itself." (Sunday Worker No.1 15.3.1925) While pa-



LEFT: MacDonald taking power as the first Labour Prime Minister, January 22nd, 1924

BETWEEN: Left and Right of the Labour Party step out in fraternal harmony.

J. H. Thomas and John Wheatley.



J. T. Murphy speaking at a rally against the Labour Government's prosecution of Workers Weekly Editor J. R. Campbell, 1924.

pation in such a venture would not have been of itself opportunist, had the CP (which had its own independent press as well) put clearly its own positions and its differences and criticism of the "lefts". This was not to be the case.

In the very first issue for instance an unsigned and presumably editorial article on the upcoming Independent Labour Party (ILP) Conference declared the ILP to be, "a really magnificent machine....possesses some of the finest socialist raw material to be found. The ILP has a noble past. The tradition of Keir Hardie is not dead...provided the left fights to keep its end up the ILP might return to the real van of the workers movement." (Sunday Worker No.1)

Leaving aside the fact that this "magnificent machine" was under the control of the likes of Ramsay MacDonald and Snowden and was being used to hound the Communists, the implication that a return to the politics of Keir Hardie would provide a real leadership for the working class was astounding. Keir Hardie had always been at pains to point out that, "The propaganda of class hatred is not one which can ever take root in this country", after the "Marxist" Social Democratic SDF had left Labour Representation Committee, and again in 1904, "That socialism is revolutionary is not in dispute, but that it can only be won by a violent outbreak is no sense true. I can imagine one reform after another being won until in the end socialism itself causes no more excitement than did the extinction of landlordism in Ireland a year ago!" This was the "noble tradition" that the CP was suggesting the ILP could be rearmed with!

The Sunday Worker provided a platform for the "Left Wing". Long articles by Cook, Purcell, Swales on International Trade Union Unity and by Ellen Wilkinson MP, Wheatley, Lansbury etc, were published virtually without criticism from the CP. Indeed the columns were declared open to anyone, who is on the side of the workers in the class struggle and is prepared to stay on that side to the bitter end." (Sunday Worker No.1)

#### THE SUNDAY WORKER SOWS ILLUSIONS

What the CP failed to warn the working class, both in the Sunday Worker, its own press and in the press of the Minority Movement, was that these 'Left' leaders had to be watched precisely because they would not necessarily stay on the side of the workers to the "bitter end". The Sunday Worker in fact sowed illusions in these leaders instead of mobilising the rank and file militants of the Left Wing to prepare to rely on their own strength. The rank and file was to pay dearly for this when these same leaders sold out the General Strike.

The real mettle of the CP's "Left Wing" allies in the Labour Party and Trade Unions was in fact apparent well before the General Strike. At the Liverpool Conference of the Labour Party in 1925 the Executive again went on the offensive. The CP's new found confidence based on a series of articles in Sunday Worker by leading 'Lefts' in favour of CP affiliation was quickly dashed. As the Executive proposals to declare members of the CP ineligible to remain members of a local Labour Party and the reimposition of a ban on Communist delegates was pushed through the conference the 'Lefts' remained silent. The ILP stars of the Sunday Workers were struck dumb, as were nearly all the 'Left' trade union leaders. This debacle led even the CP to break its silence on the Left Wing's weakness. Harry Pollitt, a leading CP member declared in hurt surprise, "But where was the Left Wing?..Not a single left winger on the E.C. dared to burn his boats and warn the 'hero worshippers' where MacDonaldism was leading to." (Sunday Worker 4.10.25) The 'Left'

was quick to reply. Lansbury blamed the CP for criticising MacDonald and thus producing "such a reaction in favour of the Executive that even reasonable criticism had no chance. I do not believe the British Labour movement will ever give up its autonomy and allow itself to be instructed as to tactics and policy on internal affairs by any international, Moscow or Amsterdam" (Sunday Worker 4.10.15) Frank Horrabin for the Plebs League called on the Communists to disband the Communist Party and join the Labour Party so as to change it from within.

Others drew a different conclusion from the Liverpool events. The Sunday Worker had to reply Editorially to a number of letters it had received calling for a new Socialist Party to be formed. This was not the conclusion of the Sunday Worker (ie the CP). According to the Sunday Worker the problem was that the Left, "have not come to a working agreement on a few big points...Once that agreement has been reached and a left wing bloc is formed the Liberals can be shifted...our duty to the workers demands that we must renew our efforts and transform the Labour Party into a Labour Party" (Sunday Worker 11.10.1925 Emphasis in original)

#### TACTIC OF AFFILIATION DISTORTED

Already in 1925 it is possible to see the beginning of the distortion of the tactic of affiliation as worked out by the Second Congress under Lenin's guidance. Lenin had been quite clear that the condition for the tactic was that the Labour Party allowed its members "complete liberty". The resolutions passed by the Executive, with the acquiescence of the 'Left', laid the basis for the ending of that liberty. The question was could they carry out the expulsions and could the rank and file of the Labour Party be rallied to defeat them? Lenin was quite clear that such a tactic was unlikely to last for long, given the nature and tactics of the reformist leaders. While making every effort to fight expulsion, the struggle in itself would be important in exposing the reformist leaders as the splitters, "Let Messrs Thomas and the other social-traitors, whom you call social-traitors, expel you. This will have an excellent effect upon the mass of the British workers." Indeed, "If the British Communist Party starts out by acting in a revolutionary manner in the Labour Party and if Messrs Henderson are obliged to expel this party, it will be a great victory for the Communist and Labour movement in England." (Speech to Second Congress of CI). The task was to build a revolutionary Communist Party not to "transform the Labour Party into a Labour Party" a formulation designed not to scare off the 'Lefts'.

A debate on these questions was already taking place within the Communist Party before the Liverpool conference. It was left to the sectarian Palme Dutt, who was to come into his own during the ultra-left third period of the Comintern, to raise some of the problems of the CPGB's tactics in the Labour Party. Dutt's major criticism was that the Communist Party was not putting itself forward sufficiently as an independent leadership of the working class, and that consequently it was in danger of sinking into the left wing of the Labour Party. Jumping from the "objective conditions" of the crisis of British imperialism, and impossibility of a reformist party being able to fulfill even the minimal demands of the workers, Dutt declares the Labour Party to have "proved itself a broken instrument" to be in a process of "decomposition". Indeed the "epitaph of the Labour Party as the leader of the workers was written in the election campaign" ("The British Working Class after the Election" Communist International No.8 1925)

policies, publicly inviting any "scab" party that may have been established by the reactionaries to form a united front with it on a real socialist programme. When the "scab" party refuses - as it surely will - the workers can judge of its value to themselves." (The Left Wing and Its Programme 1925)

However such a tactic could not last forever. A large number of parties had been effectively expelled along with the bulk of the Communists. The right in the Trade Unions had been strengthened after the defeat of the General Strike, a defeat which they had engineered, and they were now launching a vicious witch-hunt in the unions against the Minority Movement

At the time that the affiliation tactic had been initiated members of the CP had liberty within the Party to argue for the Party's programme and strategy. These conditions no longer existed. In these circumstances a revolutionary Communist Party would have seized the opportunity to cast the blame for the split in the Labour Party where it lay - with the Labour leaders and immediately proceeded to fight to win the Left Wing and its rank and file to a mass Communist Party affiliated to the Third International. This was the tactic that the revolutionary Comintern had operated in 1920 when they won the mass base of the USPD in Germany to form the United Communist Party.

But the British CP was no longer led by a revolutionary International. Stalin and Bukharin were now firmly in control and still pursuing their bloc with the British 'left' trade union leaders, despite their role in the General Strike. This was only to be broken by the British trade union leaders themselves in September 1927. To split from the Labour Party and the 'Left' leaders who would surely denounce such a step was unthinkable. And so the National Left Wing Movement continued to exist, its dynamic central force being the Communist Party, as neither a political Party nor really a united front.

Its programme was largely the CP's action programme for the Labour Party - including opposition to capitalist war credits, in favour of assistance to Workers Governments against imperialist aggression, for the dismantling of the British Empire, for the nationalisation of all basic industries under workers control without compensation, for a workers defence corps etc. Yet this "revolutionary" programme had nothing to say on the question of Government - above all on a Labour Government. Formally the movement was committed by resolution to the CP's line, "That this conference considers that future Labour Prime Ministers and cabinets should be elected and controlled by the Labour Party Executive Committee."

An Executive Committee which by 1928 had disaffiliated 26 Labour Parties (16 in London) and 10 women's sections for opposing bans and proscriptions

The increasing confusion evident in the CP as to what it was doing with the National Left Wing Movement was "solved" by the sudden lurch to the left in the Comintern in 1928. By the end of 1928 the supporters of the "new line" in the CPGB were in full cry against the danger from the right as represented in the "mistakes" of the old Central Committee in relation to the Labour Party. The supporters of the new line Dutt, Pollitt etc couldn't wait to rid themselves of the National Left Wing Movement. On the 3rd March 1929 the National Committee of the Left Wing dissolved itself without consulting the membership, the decision being announced in the Sunday Worker. Muted appeals through the columns of the Sunday Worker from the Birmingham Left Wing and Bethnal Green for a conference to be called fell on deaf ears. In November 1929 the Sunday Worker itself was shut down.

#### THE IMPORTANT LESSONS

For all its opportunist errors the National Left Wing Movement holds important lessons for the present struggle inside the Labour Party. It rallied the largest number of forces against the class collaborationist leadership of the Labour Party yet seen, and demonstrated the chronic weakness of the 'Left' leaders when it came to really challenging the right wing. For Communists it showed both the potential of winning reformist workers from the Labour Party through a joint struggle and the dangers of tying such a movement to the coat tails of the lefts in the hope of "transforming" the Labour Party.

However the most important lesson for modern revolutionaries is that the precondition of tactical flexibility in pursuit of a united front with reformist workers is absolute programmatic clarity and independence on the part of revolutionaries in the Labour Party. We fetishise no particular tactical avenue to reach workers who look to the Labour Party. As long as the Labour leaders hold that their party "represents" the whole working class we demand the right of all working class organisations to affiliate to the party and fight to exercise that right and defend others who do so. To that extent the affiliation struggles of the CPGB still have enormous relevance even though the conditions inside the Labour Party have changed considerably from those that prevailed in the 1920's. But even in the fight for affiliation the CPGB was, at all times, presented with the need to raise its independent party banner and seek to recruit to it, while finding the means of organising the supporters of the CP who remained in the party as a revolutionary tendency fighting the reformist leaders in their own party. The squandered opportunities of the CPGB flow not simply from the Party's tactical inflexibility or sectarianism as latter Trotskyists insist, but rather from the programmatic weaknesses of the CPGB during each of its series of turns. It was the programmatic opportunism of the CPGB towards the Labour Lefts, compounded in its mirror reflection in the third period, that sealed the isolation of the CPGB from the mass of reformist workers by the early 1930's.

by STUART KING

# Poland SOLIDAROSC LEADERSHIP IN CRISIS

WITH COLD AND ruthless efficiency the Jaruzelski regime has drowned yet more workers' demonstrations in blood. At least 3 workers were shot and countless others injured when the Polish military authorities unleashed their crack Zomo thug squads against demonstrations marking the second anniversary of Polish stalinism's 'recognition' of Solidarnosc.

Around 4000 were arrested and a dawn to dusk curfew was reimposed in at least four provinces. In the copper mining town of Lublin demonstrations and street fighting continued after the 'anniversary' was celebrated by Zomo shooting at least two of the town's workers. To follow up this physical repression, the blood-soaked regime has declared that it is preparing a show trial of 4 KOR internees and two exiles 'in absentia'.

There is ample evidence that the Polish working class hates the military regime and continues to identify with the traditions represented by the Solidarnosc union. Thousands took to the streets on August 31st despite clear and unequivocal warnings from the regime that they were preparing a decisive show of force to break up demonstrations. Jaruzelski had announced in advance that 'brawlers have no chances'. Earlier in the month ten thousand took to the streets of Gdansk and braved the tear gas and riot police to mark the second anniversary of the foundation of the MKS - the inter-factory committee. In May in Szczecin and June in Wroclaw demonstrators waged pitch battles with the heavily armed Zomo squads, that are maintained in pampered seclusion to do the bidding of the Stalinist regime.

While the desire of the Polish workers to destroy this regime can be in no doubt, the fighting strength of the Polish working class has been seriously sapped since Jaruzelski's coup. Not only does the Polish working class find itself confronted by the technically superior armed force of the military regime and the knowledge that the regime can turn to the reserve battalions of the Warsaw Pact should its own armed force begin to crumble. But the working class has also suffered from a series of crippling illusions on the part of its leadership that have served to divide and demoralise significant sections of workers. The present round of struggles against the regime is characterised by an acute crisis of leadership within the ranks of the Polish working class.

At the time of Jaruzelski's coup there were serious divisions opening within the ranks of the Solidarnosc leadership. While these differences were often expressed in tactical terms they were, in essence, political. As can be seen from the programme submitted to the last part of the Solidarnosc conference the dominant tendency among Solidarnosc's leaders and advisors was set on a utopian social-democratic project. It intended to reform the existing system - in partnership with the regime and the church - in the direction of a capitalist market economy. The central planning mechanisms were to be severely weakened. Plants were to be given virtual autonomy and relations between them were to be regulated by the laws of the market. The programme explicitly advocated self-management of the enterprises by managers, workers and experts as a means of decentralising the economy and strengthening market forces: "The central organs of economic administration should not limit enterprise activity or prescribe

suppliers or buyers for its output. Enterprises shall be able to operate freely on the internal market, except in fields where a license is compulsory. International trade must be made accessible to all enterprises." (Labour Focus vol 5, nos.1-2) and: "It is necessary to use surplus stocks of materials, machinery and plant making it easier for them to be sold abroad and selling them to private enterprises within Poland. Present restrictions on the activity of such enterprises must be lifted." (ibid.)

In tendency, this programme - which was linked with the creation of a sovereign Polish parliament - was aimed at dismantling the planned economy, opening the road to the accumulation of private capital in Poland and, through the destruction of the monopoly of foreign trade, opening the floodgates to foreign capital.

In order to smooth the way for the gradual implementation of this programme its architects - for example Jacek Kuron - counselled caution and that the workers should not take actions that could lead to breaking the agreements struck between the Stalinists, Solidarnosc and the Catholic hierarchy.

Ranged against this were not only those forces who shared broadly similar aims but wished to adopt more militant tactics - Bujak in Warsaw and Rulewski from Bydgoszcz for example. There were also significant tendencies based particularly in Lodz around Kowalewski and also around 'the Lublin group' that were opposed to plans for the reintroduction of untrammelled market mechanisms and voiced some opposition at the last part of the Solidarnosc pre-coup conference to the parliamentary programme of the predominant tendencies in the Solidarnosc leadership. It was Lodz Solidarnosc and 'the Lublin group' that were attempting to organise a 'national Congress of Workers Councils' at the time of the coup despite opposition from the Solidarnosc leadership.

It was among these forces that the potential for developing a left-wing within Solidarnosc was strongest. Solidarnosc's mass working class base ensured that any left in the union would gain an increased hearing should the logic of Solidarnosc's political programme have ever been realised in practice with all that this would have implied for the jobs and living standards of Polish workers.

The crystallisation of these crucial differences was brutally interrupted by General Jaruzelski's coup d'état. But major differences have continued to be discussed both within the internment camps of the Polish Stalinists and within the illegal underground leadership of Solidarnosc. Ostensibly these differences still remain centered on tactical questions. The principal underground leader - Zbigniew Bujak - once renowned for his advocacy of workers' defence squads in Warsaw - swung to a perspective of 'positional struggle.' He initially opposed the formation of a centralised underground: "I support a decidedly decentralised movement, adopting different methods of action. Only such a diffuse and varied movement will be elusive and difficult to suppress. Its unity will be guaranteed by the common objectives: lifting of martial law, release of the interned and the arrested, restoration of the rights of unions and associations" (Labour Focus vol 5 nos. 3-4). Even this movement to recreate the status quo prior to Jaruzelski's coup was envisaged as a long process of pressure and protest. "It is not the path of fast and spectacular success but of long and strenuous work, demanding the participation of a large section of society". As late as the early summer Bujak was calling for caution - in the aftermath of fighting in Gdansk and Wroclaw - so as to give the authorities the opportunity to liberalise their regime and recomment negotiations with Solidarnosc.



Zbigniew Bujak

Jacek Kuron, in material that will doubtless be trumpeted by some latterday Vyshinsky when the show trial gets underway, argued for more militant tactics. With stark inconsistency Kuron argued that decisive action was necessary for forcing the authorities to compromise - "we have to acknowledge that violence only retreats in front of violence." (Tygodnik Mazowsze no. 13, 12.5.82, in International Viewpoint no.9). He has called for agitation amongst the soldiers and police. But the purpose of decisive and even violent action remains, for Kuron, to force the authorities to compromise.

"Everything is significant since it adds morale to the nation as well as exerting continuous pressure on those in power who might possibly support moves towards compromise. The final means of such pressure, and the final chance for compromise, will be a general strike." (Labour Focus vol 5 nos.3-4)

The time scale presented by Kuron was extremely short: "But if we stay put with such activities and the government compromisers keep silent, we then face a disaster....That is why the movement's leaders must prepare the nation for the most extreme concessions in seeking to compromise with the rulers, and for the rapid cessation of the occupation through a common demonstration against it. I think such a demonstration may take the form of a simultaneous attack against all ruling and information centres in the country. It is necessary to make the authorities understand that they have a limited time to reach a settlement." (ibid.)

Kuron, then, has been advocating militant working class action and organisation, but as a means of forcing the 'liberals' and compromisers within the Stalinist bureaucracy to strike a new deal with Solidarnosc.

Both strategies can only serve to demoralise and divert the militant Polish workers. The Stalinist bureaucracy cannot co-exist permanently with independent organisations of the working class. Ruling in the name of 'socialism', and resting on property relations that are no longer primarily governed by the laws of capitalism, the bureaucracies of all such states can only hold onto power through repression and force. They have to keep the scale of their privileges and the workings of their economy and political machinery well away from the scrutiny of the working class. The bureaucracy knows of no way to legitimise its parasitism and corruption in the eyes of the mass of workers. Its 'liberal' spokesman - Polish deputy prime minister Rakowski for example - are themselves tied root and branch to the preservation of the power and privileges of the central bureaucracy. Events in Poland have repeatedly shown that a Stalinist bureaucracy will only make concessions to the workers' right to organise to the extent that it is forced to, and then only until it can regroup its forces sufficiently to be able to destroy the workers' gains. Both Bujak and Kuron therefore - despite their tactical differences - are set on a bankrupt perspective of compromise with forces that can brook no compromise.

Similarly bankrupt is the end for which Kuron issues his call for mass working class action. The purpose of working class action against the Stalinist bureaucracy must be to take power directly into the hands of the workers organised in workers' councils and to place the planned economy under the democratic management of the working class. While revolutionaries advocate a General Strike and insurrection as the means of achieving this goal, we oppose the use of these tactics as a means of securing Kuron's programme of a decentralised market

economy and a Parliament in the degenerate workers' states. The task of the working class is to use the non-capitalist property relations in such states as the means to construct socialism, not to lend itself and its organisations to those working to strengthen the forces of capitalism once again.

Jaruzelski's coup was clear evidence that the bureaucracy itself was aware of the irreformability of its own system even if the Solidarnosc leadership was not. This was further underlined on July 21st when Jaruzelski addressed the Polish parliament. The concessions that Bujak had counselled caution to secure failed to materialise. Two thirds of the internees were released but over 2,000 have been jailed for martial law offences. Over 600 internees remained in Jaruzelski's camps. Military law was to remain in force at least until the end of this year. In addition the authorities began to brace themselves for a savage display of force against Solidarnosc's supporters.

Jaruzelski's speech seems to have provoked a serious crisis in the ranks of Solidarnosc's underground leadership. On 2nd August a temporary co-ordinating committee comprised of Bujak, Frasynik, Hardek, Bogdan Lis and Szumiejko issued a call for demonstrations up to and on August 31st. Declaring that Jaruzelski's speech showed that he had 'discarded hope of social accord' they called for the formation of a resistance movement aimed at ending military rule, releasing all internees and political prisoners, reviving Solidarnosc and achieving a self-governing republic as a long-term goal. In the underground bulletin Tygodnik Mazowsze Bujak issued a call for demonstrations on August 31st even if this meant that there would be 'victims' as a result. He called for the formation of 'organised groups of demonstrators' whose task was to be the prevention of police dispersal units. He claimed that such offensive tactics had enabled a Wroclaw demonstration on June 13th to force a Zomo unit into retreat. But the perspective offered by Bujak was one that reflected a serious crisis of direction on the part of the underground leaders: "The course of the marches on the August anniversary will, to a significant extent, decide the strategy which we adopt in the forthcoming period. If it turns out that the people are not afraid and organise themselves so as to prevent any attempts to break up the demonstrations, that will mean the continuation of a radical policy of pressure on the authorities. In a relatively short time, the government will be forced to talk with the church and the union."

If, on the other hand, the authorities succeed in dealing with the demonstrations, that would mean that we are not capable of undertaking any radical form of resistance and that we must abandon our actions. Then all that would remain for us would be long-term resistance." (International Herald Tribune)

In other words either the August demonstrations would serve to win recognition or the perspective was a bleak one of long-term work in anticipation of later concessions.

It is the latter perspective that the Catholic hierarchy has been using its sermons and pastoral letters to propagate. Cardinal Glemp openly declared against the August demonstrations. The Solidarnosc leader closest to the hierarchy - Lech Walesa - is reported to have told his wife that he was *against* workers taking to the street and *for* peaceful protest. As the bureaucracy prepared to physically smash the August demonstrations Cardinal Glemp was sermonising about "the normalization being gradually introduced in our country" and calling for the authorities to show their goodwill by announcing their 'intention' to release the internees and end martial law.

According to the International Herald Tribune of August 20th, the underground Solidarnosc leadership even sent a delegation to the Polish bishops complaining of the Church's role in deterring its faithful from backing Solidarnosc's call to action.

The events of August 31st will doubtless provoke serious debate not only amongst the leaders of Solidarnosc but also amongst its mass working class base. The sheer brutality of the Zomo operation will serve to strengthen the voice of those elements who counsel caution and compromise. That is the logic, at least, of Bujak's position for example. But amongst young workers in particular there is growing evidence that the dashed hopes of reform and the evident disarray amongst the Solidarnosc leaders are pushing sections towards terrorism and towards the right wing nationalism of the Confederation for an Independent Poland (KPN). Kuron highlighted this danger when he argued: "No appeals for calm can divert the young and hot-headed. They can only force them into terrorism if they are prevented from other forms of struggle".

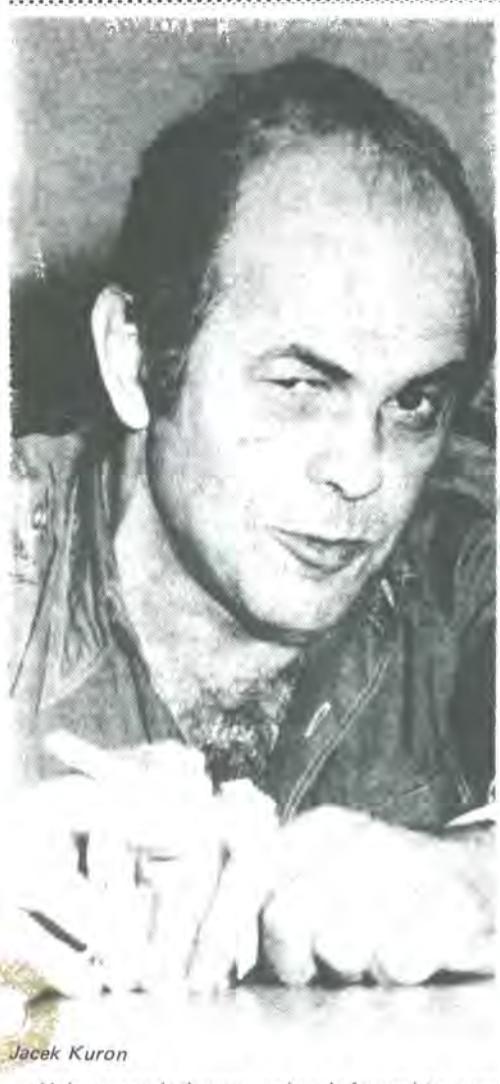
In Gdansk and Szczecin in the last months, it has been young workers in particular who have been prepared to confront the armed might of the Polish Stalinists. They have nothing to lose. The "insurrectionism" of the KPN which calls for action to smash the Stalinists stands as a positive pole of attraction to these layers.

Only the programme of political revolution, which calls for the smashing of the bureaucracy but also for intransigent opposition to the restoration of capitalism, can counter this tendency amongst the youth. Only such a movement can orient such layers towards mobilising the mass of the Polish working class, not merely a few heroic individuals, in opposition to the bureaucracy.



Tear gas used to disperse pro-Solidarity demonstrators

# Zionism scores a bloody victory



Jacek Kuron

Unless a revolutionary nucleus is formed to appeal to these young militants, there is a serious danger that a generation of young workers who have learned from bitter experience that the social-democratic intelligentsia is bankrupt will fall prey to the most reactionary and pernicious elements within Solidarnosc.

The crisis and disarray within Solidarnosc is a crisis of political direction and political programme. Whatever tactical gloss is put on it, the present leadership of Solidarnosc, consciously or unconsciously, is locked in a blind alley of seeking compromise with the Stalinists as a means of opening the door for the gradual restoration of capitalism. All their tactical mistakes flow from this. As a result they have seriously misled the Polish working class over the last two years.

We will not leave it to the Stalinist to solve the crisis of leadership that faces the Polish working class. The Stalinists are preparing a grisly re-run of their well-worked show trial routine. Kuron, Michnik, Lytinski and Wujek face charges of planning the pre-emptive overthrow of the Political system. The exiled Lipski and Chojecik will be tried in absentia and doubtless arraigned as agents of 'foreign powers'. Their claim to be defending 'socialism' is a revolting lie, as they prove by gunning down the only force that can guarantee and develop socialism – the working class itself.

The Stalinists will try these dissidents because they constitute a threat to their privileges and power not because they present a threat to socialism. That is why we deny the right of the Jaruzelski regime to try Kuron and Michnik despite our political opposition to the programme that Kuron has fought for. And that is why the Polish workers should continue to fight for their release from Jaruzelski's jails.

Stalinist spokesman Jerzy Urban has confidently declared that the August demonstrations marked "the funeral march of Solidarity extremists". The next period will see whether a revolutionary nucleus can be constructed that can challenge the Solidarnosc leaders, gain the confidence of the Polish workers and lead an organised struggle for workers' power in the face of the nationalist KPN and the reformists. As August's bloodshed showed unless such a party is built, the alternative for the Polish working class is indeed a stark and bleak one at the hands of the Stalinist regime. ■

by Dave Hughes

**A JOINT CONFERENCE** of the Irish Workers Group, the Gruppe Arbeitermacht (West Germany) and Workers Power, held in July passed joint theses on Poland. The discussions were part of a scheduled programme agreed by the three groups which aims at establishing fraternal relations between us as a means of forging an International Tendency committed to building a new revolutionary International standing in the tradition of Marx, Engels, Lenin and Trotsky.

Copies of the theses can be obtained from us for 25p (plus 15p postage) at the following address:

Workers Power  
BCM Box 7750  
London  
WC1N 3XX

**THE DEFIANT AND DIGNIFIED RETREAT** of the Palestinian fighters from Beirut represents a serious defeat for the 4 million Palestinian people. Since June 4th at least 17,825 people have been killed and 30,103 injured as a result of the Israeli invasion. At least 5,515 have been killed in Beirut alone. This is the latest round of human misery inflicted by Zionism to preserve and extend its rule.

Begin and Sharon's Blitzkrieg produced its desired result. Unrelieved genocide gradually lowered the resistance of the heroic Palestinian defence. As of July 1st the PLO were insisting that they would *only* leave Beirut if they kept all their weapons, if they kept an HQ in Beirut, if Israel withdrew 6 miles and if the US recognised the PLO. But Arafat's horizons lowered especially as it became clearer that neither the Kremlin bureaucracy nor the Arab states were prepared to lift a finger to give military aid to the PLO. Even Arafat's eventual de-facto recognition of Israel was insufficient to abate Sharon and Begin's bloodlust.

As the Lebanese go-between in the negotiations, ex-PM Salam recognised, 'They have dropped the conditions. The more they drop, however, the more Sharon asks. Sharon is totally intent on his military plan. He wants to exterminate the PLO and thousands of people in Beirut.'

Eventually surrounded by 85,000 troops the PLO announced a surrender on August 8th in the PLO's paper *Filistin al Thawra*: 'We have taken a decision for military withdrawal from Beirut because the destruction of Beirut over the heads of half a million Moslems is not a mere possibility but has become a reality.'

The strategic goal of Israel was, and remains, the total removal of all Palestinians and Syrian forces from Lebanon and the creation of a Christian Lebanese state under the Falangist Gemayel depending on Israel for support. During the evacuation fortnight Israeli forces moved 20 miles up the coast from Beirut to Jubail from where they can strike at Tripoli and moved east and north to the mountain village of Luglong, which overlooks Syria's Bekaa Valley base, and from where Syria's capital Damascus can be bombed.

At present the Zionists are consolidating their

occupation of South Lebanon just as they did in the occupied Gaza and West Bank after the 1967 war. Two Palestinian camps have been broken up. New roads have been laid to Israeli specifications, signs changed to Hebrew, winter clothing drafted in for the troops. How long will it be before the Jewish settlements begin announcing yet another process of de-facto annexation?

The designation of Gemayel as Lebanese President elect shows just how strong Israel's grip on Lebanon has become. He and his falangist para-militaries can be relied on to fight and destroy the self-defence militias of the West Beirut Muslims and terrorise the 350,000 Palestinians who remain in the Lebanon. As the last PLO fighters left Beirut so the Lebanese army and police commenced their battle to re-occupy West Beirut.

By its very nature Israel is an *expansionist* state. As in 1948, 1967 and 1973 so 1982 proves that the very existence of the Zionist state depends on expansion. That the present events will not be the last of this kind, nor necessarily the worst, can be seen in Sharon's statement of December 1981 in Tel Aviv where he admitted that Israel's strategic interests: 'are not limited to the Arab countries in the Middle East, the Mediterranean, the Red Sea...for reasons of security in the 80s they must be broadened to include countries such as Turkey, Iran, Pakistan; regions such as the Persian Gulf and Africa, particularly the countries of North and Central Africa.'

Israel's current war aims have not been confined to the Lebanon. On the occupied West Bank, a Zionist administrator said on July 17th, 'The army is conducting a military war. We are conducting a political one.'

Under the cover of the invasion Israel has hastened its project of annexing the West Bank and Gaza Strip to add to the Golan Heights annexed last December. The defeats suffered by the PLO in Beirut obviously had a demoralising effect upon the 725,000 Palestinians in the West Bank. For example, the pro-PLO West Bank leaders called a two day General Strike for July 1st which received only patchy support and the demonstrations did not reach the size and militancy of last spring. On the 9th July the pro-PLO Mayor of Gaza was dismissed by Israel, joining those of Dura and Jenin on the West Bank who have been dismissed since the invasion. Six mayors have been dismissed since the spring. Meanwhile Jewish settlements have continued to be planted and Begin budgeted more funds for this expansionism in late August.

Against this background the latest Reagan-Schultz peace plan - dubbed Camp David Plus - is a farce. It



Carrying out Israel's bidding, Lebanese Christian troops move in on a Beirut Moslem militia-man. Zionist military chief Eitan demanded the disbandment of the militias and declared the largest, Morabitoun, to be "no different from any other terrorist organisation as far as Israel is concerned."

## Statement on the Iran/Iraq war

WHEN IRAQ INVADED Iran in September 1980 Workers Power argued that it was the duty of revolutionaries to work for the military defence of Iran. We argued this because it was clear that an Iraqi victory would result in two things:

- a) the crushing of remaining gains of the Iranian revolution by an external counter-revolution, and the probable imposition of a pro-Iraqi reactionary regime in Iran;
  - b) a decisive victory for imperialism in the area. Iran would have been stabilised in a manner that would be to imperialism's advantage. This was why the imperialists backed Iraq (the French directly, the US via Jordan and Saudi Arabia). A victory for Iraq would have opened the way to the successful establishment of a counter-revolutionary and pro-imperialist alliance of Gulf states, with Iraq able to play the role of new gendarme of the Gulf.
- Our opposition to Iraq and our recognition that defence of Iran's borders was a legitimate revolutionary policy was based on the existence of the above threats. We never opposed Iraq because we supported Khomeini, or thought he was a better ruler than Saddam Hussein. While we argued for a military united front

with Khomeini's forces we never offered him, or his regime the slightest political support. We defended the gains of the Iranian revolution despite Khomeini, not because of him. We continued to argue for his overthrow throughout the war, but added that we would not make that a condition of our defence of Iran.

After the fall of Korramshar in May/June 1982 the war began to change its character. The two threats that we had pointed to as reasons for a policy of defencism were receding into the background. When, in June, Iraq announced a ceasefire and withdrew its troops from Iranian territory, it was clear that in these circumstances the main threat to the Iranian masses and their hard won gains of 1978/9 was no longer Saddam; furthermore the direct threat from imperialism together with its ability to execute its reactionary plans for the Gulf had receded. Of course if the war, continued on Iraqi soil, rallied the forces of imperialism to the defence of Iraq, then Iran would once again be under threat and we would support it against imperialism. However in the present circumstances it is clear that Iran is continuing the war into Iraq for reactionary purposes. Its call for indemnities and the possibility that it will try for annexations are reactionary attempts to make the Iraqi people pay

represents no more than an attempt by US imperialism to pacify the Arab bourgeoisie after the event of Israeli aggression. The Pentagon actually stepped up arms sales to Israel in the months leading up to the invasion and has, in practice, blocked any attempts to moderate the carnage. On July 29th the US refused to vote for a UN resolution merely calling on Israel to lift the food and water blockade of West Beirut. On August 2nd - the day after an Israeli tank attack on PLO positions which Reagan criticised - the US vetoed a Security Council resolution calling for arms sanctions against Israel. Habbal's shuttle diplomacy was essentially aimed at negotiating the finer details of the PLO's retreat.

The US desired the military defeat of the PLO as much as Israel and even more than the humiliating blow suffered by the USSR's key Arab ally, Syria. That there were occasional public dressings down of Israel reflected little more than the US's desire to maintain cordial ties with the Arab states. That they were infrequent and muted reflects the pathetic do-nothing stance of the Arab states which put so little pressure on the US administration. It is only now that the Palestinian vanguard has been defeated and divided up into eight manageable portions to be shipped off, disarmed and caged in camps by fearful Arab bourgeoisies, that a 'new' political initiative emerges from the Arab states and is echoed by the White House. Egypt's Mubarak has crawled out of the woodwork to call for 'meaningful autonomy' on the West Bank and Gaza in the 'spirit of the Camp David agreements' of 1978 which called for a five-year transitional administration with negotiations over its final status.

In its turn the US initiative rules out consideration of a Palestinian state, rather, in Shultz's words "the main point is that the Palestinian people have a voice in determining the conditions under which they're governed."

Both Mubarak and Reagan hope that the recent defeat of the PLO will serve to force sections of its leadership to abandon their claims to a state, explicitly recognise Israel and settle for 'meaningful autonomy' on the West Bank. They also hope that dispersal will serve to undermine the fragile unity of the PLO. The pro-Moscow DFLP has been dispatched to South Yemen, and George Habash's PFLP has taken refuge in 'hard-line' Syria. The mainstream El Fatah of Arafat will set up office in the right-wing Arab state of Tunisia. There will be considerable pressure on each of these groups to reflect the specific nationalist interests of their host states.

Despite this wavering and sabotage Israel is refusing to make meaningful concessions to the Arab states. The Camp David accords on autonomy on the West Bank were left deliberately vague. Inevitably, the precise shape that 'autonomy' took would be decided by the fortunes of Israeli power after 1978. Zionism is in a stronger position now, especially after the war. For Begin and Sharon there is now no question of granting Palestinian autonomy. Sharon put it, bluntly in August: "And I tell you we shall never permit another Palestinian state. Never. Because the solution that all of you aim at (ie. autonomy) is a second Palestinian state, a second Palestine. And, according to such a solution, this second Palestine should be placed in Judea and Samaria, what you call the West Bank. To this, I answer, we Israelis answer, it will not happen. Judea and Samaria will not be touched. Nor Gaza. Forget it."

The new round of initiatives is doomed to failure. As before, they will founder on the need for imperialism to continue to underwrite Israel's existence as a buffer against a united Arab world and Kremlin interference. As long as this patronage exists, then permanent reconciliation between Israel and the Arab states and the Palestinians is utopian. The very nature of Israel requires constant revision of the status quo in its favour. No progressive solution is possible except one which unites the Palestinian workers, particularly in the West Bank, in alliance with the poor peasants, behind a revolutionary party set on the destruction of the Zionist state and the creation on its ruins of a secular workers' state of all Palestine. ■

by Keith Hassell

for the crimes of its rulers. Likewise any attempt to export the 'Islamic Revolution' will be reactionary. The mullahs have no interest in exporting the progressive side of that revolution - a real mass struggle against imperialism, the satisfaction of burning material needs of the masses, the involvement of the masses in political life. On the contrary the mullahs merely wish to export their own counter-revolution against those gains in the shape of the Islamic Republic.

For these reasons we now argue that, in the face of Khomeini's invasion of Iraq, revolutionaries should stand for the strictest revolutionary defeatism in both Iran and Iraq. The character of the war on Iran's side has now changed. So must our policy. A victory for either side in the present circumstances would represent a severe defeat for the toiling masses of the whole region. Our new slogans should be:

- IRANIAN TROOPS OUT OF IRAQ - DOWN WITH THE REACTIONARY WAR!
- DOWN WITH SADDAM, DOWN WITH KHOMEINI - THE MAIN ENEMY IS AT HOME!
- WORKERS AND PEASANTS MUST RULE IN IRAN AND IRAQ!

Workers Power National Committee 18.7.82

# workers power

## Health workers

Laurie Sparham (Network)



# Leaders squander militancy

AT A MASS rally in Sheffield on July 21st, striking health workers were informed by COHSE leader Alvert Spanswick that, "some strikes do fail". Many at the meeting, which dwindled from 3,000 at the start of Spanswick's oratory to 100 at the end, must have thought that, with leaders like Spanswick, it is a wonder that any strikes succeed.

Under the leadership of Spanswick, Bickerstaffe of NUPE and other representatives of the 11 unions on the TUC Health Services Committee, the health dispute has been turned into a long drawn out saga. The first action against the government's stringent public sector pay limit took place back in January when 4,000 nurses marched against the 4%. Then, two weeks after the April 1st. settlement date, the first one hour stoppage was called. Since then there have been no less than twelve days of action, with another planned for September 22nd. Most of these days of action have been staged at lengthy intervals.

This, "war of attrition" strategy is the one that the leaders are indissolubly tied to. On COHSE's executive, for example, Spanswick commands 18 of the 26 votes, against any call for all-out action.

The leadership's justifications for this strategy are that the rank and file are, "not ready" for an all-out strike and that such action might alienate public support. Both claims are entirely spurious.

The rank and file have shown time and again that they are willing to take action. By June 17th., 700 hospitals were reduced to emergency admissions only. Three areas, Edinburgh, Rotherham and Leeds, came out on all-out strike after the first one day strike in May. The NUPE conference voted overwhelmingly for an all-out strike. On the 23rd. June, a one day strike hit 1800 hospitals and in August, and since, the signs are that workers are more than ready to come out. The involvement of ambulance men in Scotland, Derbyshire and Leeds provides ample evidence of this willingness.

The leadership's response to these militants, who, unlike the leaders of COHSE, will have lost up to £150 through their participation in the days of action, has been a disgrace. Spanswick instructed his members to cross a NUPE picket line in

Edinburgh. Faced with the offer of solidarity action he refuses to offer a lead, "Unofficial things will happen outside the control of individual unions though we must not organise it."

Conveniently for this gutless wonder this means he will not have to support anyone taking such action either. NUPE has been no better, despite its supposed 'Left' leadership. By refusing strike pay to strikers in Rotherham they acted, deliberately, to deter other areas from taking all-out action.

\* As far as the fear of alienating the public is concerned, the union leaders are playing into the hands of the Tories. The public that counts in terms of supporting the health workers is the rest of the working class. Will they be alienated by the health workers taking determined action? Frank Chapple might be, but his EETPU rank and file members are not and after all, unlike Frank, a defender of a union-financed private health scheme, his members actually use the NHS. Likewise the miners, printers, seamen, council workers and many other sections have shown willing when appealed to take strike action alongside the health workers. In June, Cardiff saw a 20,000 strong demo in support of the strike.

The failure to capitalise upon this support by mobilising it in action is criminal. By dragging out the dispute as they are doing the union leaders are giving succour to the penny-dreadful merchants on the Sun and the Star. These reptiles will work overtime to wear down the support with tales of children's deaths at the hands of indifferent ambulance men and porters. By a determined, all-out fight and a campaign for maximum solidarity working class support could become an active factor in winning the strike.

As in most cases, the tactics of the union leaders are directly related to their strategy. Wars of attrition involve gradual advances — not decisive offensives. The union leaders are using the support for the popular 12% claim as a bargaining counter for an improved offer from the government that may be well short of the 12%. Bickerstaffe signalled that if some improvement in the offer was forthcoming then NUPE would consider discussions about a long term deal with the government, stating in response to Fowler's request for such a deal, "That does not mean (the call

for an improved offer -eds) that he does not have a chance."

Spanswick likewise made clear that a deal for less than 12% was on the cards, "If we halt at all, it will only be when members of this committee (TUC Health Services Committee - eds) are satisfied that there is more money on the table."

More money — not the 12% — is sufficient to send Spanswick and co. scurrying back to the negotiating table with Fowler.

The fact that the dispute has continued for so long is testimony to the determination of the health workers to win. With 40% of them getting wages that put them only slightly above the poverty line, and with most workers having experienced a 9% reduction in their real wages in 1980/81,

12% is the minimum needed for them to regain living standards. The dispute can be won, but the lessons of the last period need to be learnt.

The existing leadership is bankrupt, it is not set on winning. It must be replaced. Militants must organise nationally, and in every locality, to fight the bureaucratic misleaders. They must embark on a campaign of leaflets and meetings to win the rank and file to their side. By transforming the Joint Shop Stewards' Committees that exist in many areas into active, open strike committees the nucleus of a new rank and file leadership can be built.

Such leadership must avoid isolated action. Rotherham, Edinburgh and Leeds were all picked off by the bureaucrats. The militant areas must

be linked together. They must organise to replace the TUC committee with a democratically elected national delegate strike committee, based on, and accountable to, the local strike committees. This way all-out strike action can be fought for on a national basis.

By building such a movement, pitted against the compromising and cowardly bureaucratic leaders, militants could lay the basis for a successful all-out strike. A strike in which the strike committees themselves would decide whether and when emergency cover should be given. Tied to a campaign to win solidarity action from other workers, such a perspective can win the 12% and turn the tide against the service cutting Tories. ■

Workers Power and the Irish Workers Group  
THE ORIGINS AND NATURE OF THE STALINIST STATES  
**The Degenerated Revolution:**  
OUT IN OCTOBER

This October will see the publication of "The Degenerated Revolution: The Origins and Nature of the Stalinist States" by Workers Power and the Irish Workers Group. This book is an attempt to utilise and develop Leon Trotsky's analysis of the Soviet Union in order to explain the survival of Stalinism after the second world war and the creation of states, with economies identical to that of the USSR, by Stalinist parties.

Against the many developing theories that explain the USSR as a 'new class' or 'state capitalist' society, this book asserts the validity of Trotsky's designation of the USSR as a degenerated workers' state.

The book deals with the degeneration of the Russian Revolution and the Left Opposition's analysis of that process, and goes on to examine the post-war expansion of Stalinism in Eastern Europe, Asia and Cuba. It demonstrates how these bureaucratic revolutions confirm Trotsky's analysis of Stalinism as counter-revolutionary.

As well as dealing with the implications of these revolutions, which prevented the working class from exercising political power, for the Marxist theory of the state, *The Degenerated Revolution* examines the weaknesses

and mistakes of previous attempts to analyse this process from the claimants of Trotsky's heritage - from Ernest Mandel's 'orthodox revisionism' - to Tim Wolfson's theory of 'structural assimilation'.

*The Degenerated Revolution* represents a comprehensive attempt to come to grips with a question which was fundamental to the degeneration and disintegration of the post-war Fourth International. Its publication in a period of heightened cold-war tension provides the basis to arm Marxists with a revolutionary strategy for the defence of the Soviet Union and for the overthrow of the bureaucratic caste which dominates it.

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