

# SOCIALIST VIEWPOINT

No. 12. May 1986. 70p

## HANDS OFF LIBYA!



**Britain out of NATO!**

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# About Socialist Viewpoint

MAY DAY 1986 will find the world an even more obviously dangerous place, with a Reagan in the White House with his finger on the trigger of destruction in the Nevada nuclear tests, in Nicaragua, in Libya, and sponsoring reactionary insurgents in Africa and in Asia.

MAY DAY 1986 will find the international workers' movement under pressure, suffering a painful succession of betrayals and defeats as a result of their reformist and Stalinist leaderships.

In extending our solidarity with the struggles of workers and the oppressed on a world scale, *Socialist Viewpoint* presents a more "international" issue, taking an extended look at the situation of the Sandinista revolution in Nicaragua, the 10-year war of the Polisario guerrillas in the Sahara; the struggle for Irish self-determination; the post-election line up in France; and of course a response to Reagan's terror-bombing of Tripoli and Benghazi.

British coverage looks in more detail at the battle for jobs and union rights in the print industry, focussed on Wapping, and at the acute crisis of leadership which confronts the sacked and militant printworkers.

There is discussion of the various moves to censor nude photographs and pornography, opening what we hope will be a developing debate on the issue.

A follow-up to our series of articles on the crisis in the Workers Revolutionary Party deals with the method of assessing the history of the Trotskyist movement.

*Socialist Viewpoint* is a magazine committed to the fight for a principled, class struggle programme at every level of the workers' movement in Britain and internationally. We see the fight for Trotskyist politics taking shape not through banner-waving ultimatums, introspective sectarian debates in small groups of would-be gurus, or as simply trailing behind this or that "Left" talking trade union or Labour Party dignitary. Rather it must be a patient fight for the independent interests of the working class, and for demands and action which express those interests, in every arena of the class struggle.

With all too little clarity on offer from the various dogmatic left groupings in Britain, we believe that it is possible and necessary to combine debate with policy and programme.

We are sure our readers will welcome the fact that this magazine is the third to be expanded to include more authors and wider coverage. If you feel — as we do — that it offers excellent value, and politics which represent a break from sectarian posturing and a serious contribution to the class struggle, why not help us sustain and improve it further?

Take a few copies to sell in your workplace, trade union, Labour Party or campaign work. Send us your news and information, articles, cartoons, photos, and letters. Ensure your local activities are publicised on our pages. Check with your local seller or drop us a line for further details.

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### Contents

Libya: Editorial .....	p. 1
Wapping: Step up the fight! .....	p. 3
Wapping: Murdoch's "offer" .....	p. 6
NUJ Conference Report .....	p. 7
TGWU lurches to the right .....	p. 7
Miners' solidarity threatened .....	p. 8
Ireland after Hillsborough .....	p. 10
Nicaragua: Cost of Reagan's war .....	p. 12
Polissario: Battle for the Sahara .....	p. 15
France: Mitterrand's plans .....	p. 19
Labour Party: fight the witch-hunt .....	p. 23
"Living Doll" - censorship and porn .....	p. 25
Film Review: "Revolution" .....	p. 26
Letter: Which way for EETPU left? .....	p. 27
WRP: Dust off old treasures! .....	p. 28
Paris Commune - Lessons for today .....	p. 32
Labour Briefing Conference .....	p. 36

COVER PHOTO: John Harris (IFL)

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# The Terrorist in the White House

OF course it was terrorism — and on a grand, global scale. It began with the coolly calculated provocation when the US Sixth Fleet steamed into the Libyan Gulf of Sirte. It culminated in the brutal bombing of Tripoli and Benghazi, slaughtering men, women and children.

The initial exchange of fire at the end of March set the scene for the events which were planned to follow.

In the kind of sick, slick, cynical provocation which the US media loves to retail to its most jingoistic audience, Ronald Reagan's confrontation with Libya in the Gulf of Sirte killed three birds with one stone:

- It helped stampede through a Senate vote for a massive \$100m aid package to the murderous "contra" guerillas attacking Nicaragua, after an initial defeat for the proposal in the House of Representatives;

- It inflicted a bullying blow against Libya's Gaddafi in the eyes of the world;

- And by asserting the US Navy's "right" to invade the coastal waters of a country 3,000 miles away and with a population less than 1% of that of the USA, Reagan struck a new blow for old-fashioned imperialism and its "gunboat diplomacy".

It could have been worse. The move came after setbacks in joint planning with Egypt's President Mubarak for a possible joint US-Egyptian invasion of Libya to topple Gaddafi.

Various options included US bombing runs to back up an Egyptian land assault across the border. Mubarak — no friend of Gaddafi — appears to have been reluctant to act as such an open stooge of imperialism and run into a storm of Arab hostility.

The pretext on which the American Navy provoked the shooting was transparently ridiculous. A massive fleet, including no less than three aircraft carriers, deliberately sailed into Libyan waters, defying Libyan forces to act.

Various comparisons have been made which show what an outrage this intrusion was. It is similar to the Soviet fleet sailing into the Gulf of Mexico; or the Chinese into Cardigan Bay. While Thatcher claims a 200-mile exclusion zone around the Malvinas fortress on behalf of British imperialism, she supports Reagan's refusal to recognise more than a 12-mile limit around the coast of Libya.

Nor is this the first such provocation by the US Navy. The last 5 years of Ronald Rambo's Presidency have seen no less than 35 deliberate



Reagan — pushing through aid for "contras".

incursions into disputed coastal waters around the world. This was the first to meet armed resistance.

When Libya's Soviet-supplied missile batteries eventually fired on the intruding US task force, the predictable rain of fire was unleashed — and then followed up by further airborne attacks. Gaddafi was left with up to 100 dead, holding a bloody nose and making unconvincing claims of "victory". Reagan's cowboys rode off into the sunset, looking for other targets — or an excuse to return.

As a military exploit from vastly superior odds, the Libyan episode is even less glamorous than the squalid invasion of Grenada in 1984.

The incident had to be provoked in this way because for Reagan to be seen to take the offensive would require him to answer first to Congress under the War Powers Act. And he needed



Leader of the Pack: Thatcher

some bloodletting to hit the headlines in order to raise the temperature for forcing through his aid package to the Contras.

For Reagan the hyper-terrorist, with his finger on the button of Armageddon, and daily funnelling arms and cash to pathological murderers (such as Pol Pot on the borders of Kampuchea; the Contras in Nicaragua; CIA-sponsored guerrillas in Afghanistan; and the mercenary UNITA terrorists in Angola) to accuse Gaddafi of "terrorism" is sheer hypocrisy.

The difference is that while Gaddafi supports the struggles of the dispossessed Palestinian people, Reagan backs the brutal Zionist state which robbed them of their land. And while Egypt, Jordan and other reactionary Arab regimes obediently look to deals with US imperialism, Gaddafi is an outspoken ally of the Soviet Union.

Gaddafi is also a substantial focus of anti-imperialist resistance in both the Middle East and in Africa. He has intervened in Chad, formed links with the Sudanese regime and charted a foreign policy course which consistently brings him into conflict with the US warmongers.

Now Reagan has decided to take the gamble of possibly wrecking years of careful US military and diplomatic strategy in the Middle East by frontally attacking Gaddafi.

He has felt confident that the European bourgeoisie — whatever its various whimpers and grumbles — would eventually fall into line behind the US offensive.

Thatcher of course led the pack, volunteering political support and instantly agreeing to the use of US bases in Britain for the launching of the

murderous bombing raids. The right wing French government on the other hand initially took an obstructive line.

But as the dust settles the bodies are buried and the blood congeals, the EEC ministers have swung obediently behind the *fait accompli*, with the ever-helpful Neil Kinnock in Britain even arguing that Thatcher should go much further by imposing economic sanctions and expelling Libyan students from Britain.

The storm of protest in Britain against the US attack has given a new sense of urgency to the peace movement and delivered a timely reminder of the central role of NATO as an anti-communist, anti-working class alliance. The demand for the scrapping of US bases in Britain and withdrawal from NATO must be brought to the fore once again at this year's Labour Party Conference and in every possible forum in the labour movement.

It is no accident that along with Thatcher and the Canadian government, the mainstay of Reagan's support came from the Zionist regime in Israel: they see the crushing of Gaddafi as another blow against the liberation struggle of the dispossessed Palestinian people. Support for the Palestinian cause and opposition to Zionism must be incorporated in the campaigns and demonstrations in defence of Libya against the imperialist offensive.

Socialists, as defenders of the right of nations to self-determination and opponents of imperialism will unconditionally defend Libya against US aggression and provocations. But that does not mean we must politically endorse Gaddafi or his positions on other issues.

Having risen to power in a military coup in 1969, Gaddafi has used the country's oil wealth and a blend of populism and intimidation to preserve his own base among the 2 million population. Despite his links with Moscow he viciously represses all Marxist organisations — and indeed any independent organisations of the working class in Libya. The guerrillaist groupings which Gaddafi is alleged to sponsor around the world, and the style of politics he advocates internationally, do nothing to advance the organisation or mass struggle of the working class or the Palestinian masses.

One thing is clear, however: no puppet regime installed in Tripoli under the guns of the Sixth Fleet or before the bayonets of the Egyptian army will offer any kind of socialist or revolutionary programme for the Libyan people. Finding a political answer to Gaddafi is a problem which the Libyans, together with the international workers' movement, must take the lead in solving.

Meanwhile as Reagan shelters the deposed Marcos and protects the ousted Baby Doc Duvalier; flies "emergency aid" to the Contras and backs up the Pinochet dictatorship in Chile, few class conscious workers will be taken in by this latest display of "combatting terrorism", and the peace movement will take on a new lease of life.

# Wapping

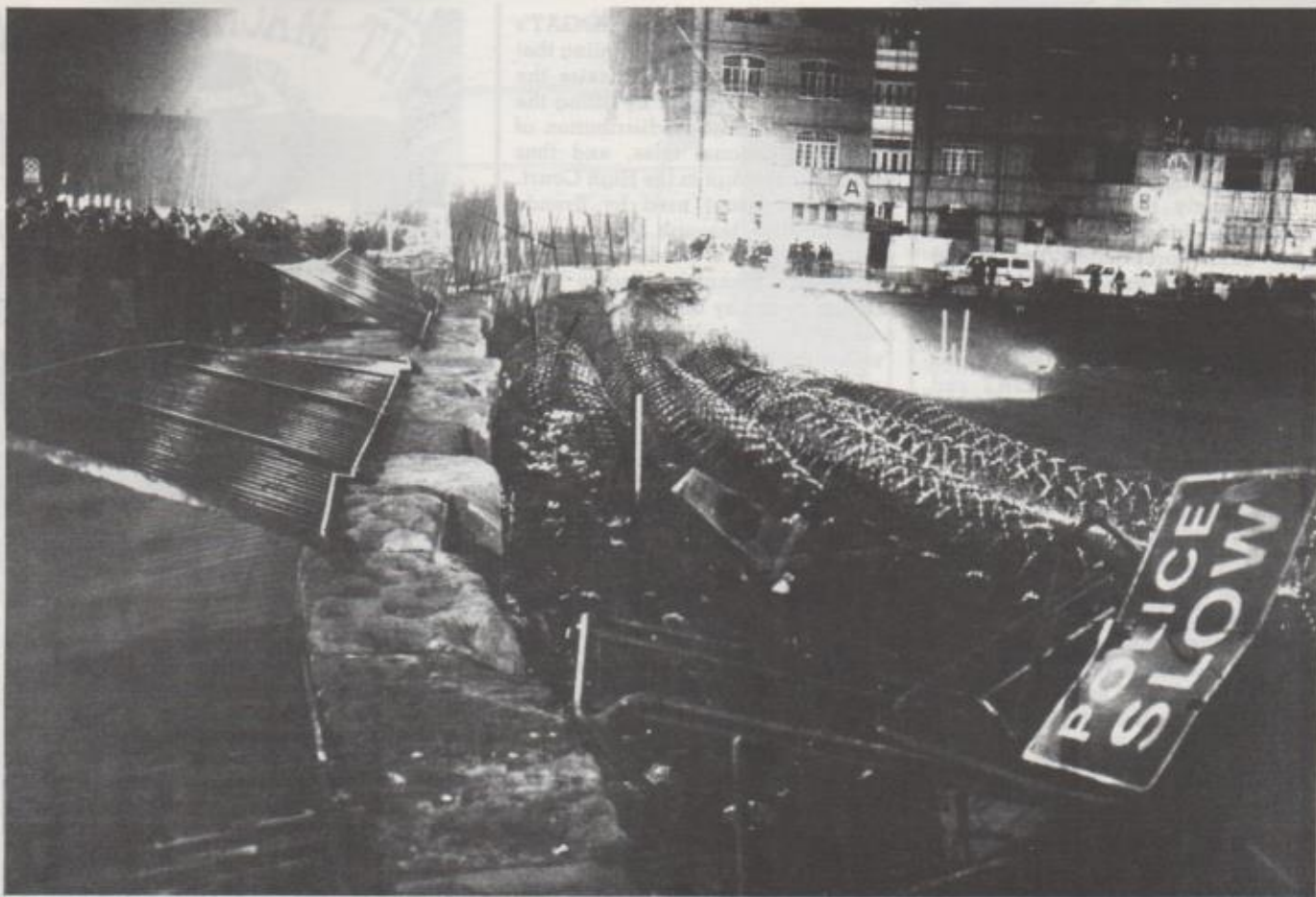


PHOTO: Andrew Wuard (Report)

## STEP UP THE FIGHT FOR UNION RIGHTS!

FROM the crossroads a few weeks ago, print union leaders have driven the Wapping fight into a cul-de-sac.

The life and death battle for union rights in the newspaper industry is perilously close to an ignominious sell-out as we go to press. The NEC of SOGAT did not vote on a proposal by leading officials to lift the blacking of News International titles and thus purge the union's contempt in the High Court.

But in rejecting this abject surrender, the SOGAT NEC, meeting on April 21, adopted no new proposals to step up the fight, whose central tactic — the consumer "boycott"

campaign — has proved an almost total fiasco.

Their swaggering claims of Murdoch's allegedly decimated print run and circulation figures have been exposed as self-deception by Audit Bureau figures which show Murdoch's four titles at, near, or even above their December 1985 levels, and by SOGAT's admission that its membership in provincial distribution and wholesale centres have ignored union instructions and continue handling the scab papers.

Even while striking, sacked printworkers began their mighty march on Wapping from Glasgow and the North East coast, finding the extent of potential labour movement support untapped by the passive "boycott" campaign, SOGAT officials, who had done nothing to build the fight,

were more concerned with the sequestration of their cars and threats to their pay packets — and looking for a way out of the fight.

And while the left in the National Union of Journalists fought a (successful) conference battle culminating in an April 18 decision to demand their NEC step up the fight and take disciplinary action against 500 NUJ scabs at Wapping, SOGAT officials concentrated on preparing the ground for a retreat.

Having rejected an escalation of the fight to Fleet Street, and refused to pursue the fight at the TUC for the expulsion of the scab-herding EET-PU, SOGAT and NGA leaders have turned instead (along with the AUEW) to desperate attempts to rope the EETPU into a joint approach to Rupert Murdoch. They have propos-

# Wapping

ed a joint "solution" at Wapping which would include acceptance of:

- Binding arbitration;
- A single national bargaining unit covering both Glasgow and London, and all four production unions (SOGAT, NGA, AUEW, EETPU!).

Apparently the SOGAT leaders hoped that if Murdoch rejected these new union proposals, they would then be able to bring out the EETPU at Wapping to join the fight!

Murdoch of course was much more confident of his EETPU scabs. His response was to offer SOGAT and NGA an increased buy-off, throwing in another £15m in cash on top of the offer of the disused Grays Inn Road printworks. He confidently expects that SOGAT and NGA leaders will grasp for "compensation" payments long before any stirrings of trade unionism ruffle the surface of Wapping's EETPU.

All of the symptoms so far suggest that Murdoch has read the situation correctly. SOGAT leaders have bottled out of the all-out fight they needed if they were to win.

• Despite strong words against the High Court sequestration of union funds, SOGAT officials have done *nothing* to tighten up the blacking of News International at provincial distributors and wholesalers, or to discipline its members scabbing on the instruction which provoked the court action.

• Even while union assets have been seized, SOGAT members in Fleet Street and throughout the printing industry have been deliberately left to work normally — as if they can protect themselves by ignoring the fight at Wapping!

• By focussing everything on the moralistic "boycott" campaign of "Don't Buy the Sun", SOGAT and the NGA won a degree of public sympathy at the expense of suppressing class action. Audited figures now show that sales of News International titles have now *recovered* after an initial decline: for all but the most conscious sections of workers the dispute now appears to be all but over.

• The same "softly softly" avoidance of class struggle methods — adopted as a conscious alternative to the struggle by Arthur Scargill to drive forward the miners' strike — led to a failure to build official mass picketing of Wapping or of distribution depots across the country. The unofficial movement eventually built weekly pickets — but this kind of support cannot be sustained in the absence of a clear lead at national level, and the numbers involved have now sharply declined.

• Now as we go to press SOGAT's national officials are still arguing that the union should formally raise the white flag of surrender by lifting the instruction to boycott distribution of News International titles, and thus purge its contempt in the High Court. One factor being used by Brenda Dean to force through such a decision is the lack of funds to organise the union's Biennial Delegate Conference or to pay out unemployment and other benefits to members "unless the contempt is purged". She and others argue that the dispute is already lost, and that the key instruction for boycott action should be withdrawn because it has not been implemented. Rank and file militants report that a national gathering of SOGAT representatives the previous week showed 70% support for purging the contempt, though the proposal was voted down by an Executive meeting on April 21.

Any decision to lift the boycotting of News International titles which has remained in force in London would deliver a death-blow to a struggle which has never really been allowed to get off the ground by SOGAT and NGA officials. At each point they have firmly rejected the escalation of the fight into Fleet Street and other sectors of the printing industry even while the press bosses move in with a clear strategy of picking off print workers section by section in a decimation of jobs, conditions and union rights.

During the Wapping fight itself we have seen major concessions by the print unions and the NUJ at the *Daily Express*, the *Daily Telegraph*, the *Financial Times* and the *Scottish Daily Record*. Next in line with an ultimatum is *The Guardian*, demanding a 20% cut in workforce and new legally-binding contracts. Employers in the provincial papers — in Manchester and elsewhere — are not far behind in the rush to exploit the print unions' Wapping retreat.

Murdoch himself, impatient to complete the job at Wapping, dispose of the dispute and screw down the coffin lid on union rights, has attempted to pressure the four NUJ scab chapels at Wapping into signing new legally-binding contracts. So far they have refused to do so.

It is not excluded that Murdoch might even re-employ or reinstate a few of the sacked printers, now that his period of potential legal liability to make redundancy payments has all but expired. Allowing the establishment if a toothless SOGAT chapel in



PHOTO: Stefano Cagnoni (Report)

Wapping might even be a possible sop for a settlement in the hopes of restoring the full print run on Wapping's ageing presses, and returning News International titles to normal rail distribution.

This kind of "union recognition" would be little more than a fig-leaf for a betrayal by the SOGAT leadership. The dispute began most centrally over the issues of jobs and union rights: none of the formulae on offer would give more than a handful of jobs or anything approaching genuine trade union rights in Fort Wapping.

Talk of handing over the disused Grays Inn Road printworks has successfully focussed print union attentions on compensation rather than jobs.

Compensation has also proved a major talking point among the NUJ strikers at Wapping, who insist upon calling themselves not strikers but "refuseniks". One reason for this is that many of them have made it clear that they have no intention of returning to work for Murdoch: many have already found other jobs. Few have been regular attenders on the pickets line: indeed the "refuseniks" proved

## Wapping

instructions to boycott Murdoch's titles, and gear up its Fleet St Chapels for supporting action — perhaps beginning with a mass stoppage to picket Wapping, and building towards all-out action.

● The NGA, too, must prepare its Fleet St Chapels to do battle in solidarity with the sacked Murdoch workforce and in defence of their own union rights.

● The goal must be an all-out strike on Fleet Street, bringing the newspaper distribution networks to a halt, and redoubling the pickets on wholesalers and scab transport firms carrying Murdoch and Shah publications.

● TGWU leaders must take disciplinary action for the expulsion of the TNT drivers who are flouting the official instruction not to cross picket lines — and mobilise TGWU official pickets to the depots.

● The EETPU must be expelled from the TUC for its scab-herding role in recruiting Murdoch's Wapping mobsters, who have not only put printworkers out of a job, but also threaten the jobs of Fleet St electricians. The expulsion of the EETPU must be linked to a campaign to "poach" sections of their members to other appropriate unions.

● Labour Parties and non-print unions can assist in mobilising pickets for Wapping and for local distribution centres, building support groups and raising money to sustain the dispute — offering facilities for the sequestered SOGAT, organising meetings and speaking tours of local labour movement bodies and workplaces.

Kinnock must be forced to reverse his current disastrous stance of opposing the repeal of all Tory anti-union laws: this year's Labour Party conference must see resolutions spelling out a clear line of restoring the trade union rights and immunities crushed under the Thatcher/Tebbit machine.



Printworkers lobby the TUC for support.

to be the most dependable supporters of the NUJ right wing in attempting to block a conference call for disciplinary action against the 500 scabs who for over 12 weeks have been flouting official union instructions.

The fight for this disciplinary action is absolutely vital if the Wapping dispute is not to be allowed to crack up the organisation of the NUJ in other sectors beyond national newspapers. To allow such public, flarant flouting of union policies would create enormous damage in

provincial newspapers, book and magazine houses where small NUJ chapels fight for survival.

Now that SOGAT's Executive has pulled back from the brink and for the moment held firm against calls for surrender, the key issue remains one of stepping up the fight to a level that can win. That means:

● SOGAT must take action against its 150 scabs still working for Murdoch, pinpoint and picket the local distribution centres handling News International titles, take action against SOGAT members defying in-

## SOGAT leaders push for surrender

Brenda Dean.



# Wapping

## Would YOU buy a second hand printworks from this man?

IN the mid 1970s a cranky American left grouping called the Spartacist League developed a bizarre policy for responding to factory closures: the workers should seize the plant — and then sell it off in order to share out the proceeds!

Nobody took much notice at the time: apart from it being impossible to achieve, it was immediately recognised as simply a "sophisticated" way of accepting closure, and a more "radical" means of allocating redundancy pay. But now it seems that Rupert Murdoch may have caught on to the same idea, and decided to use it as a lever to break the print dispute.

By offering to hand over the Grays Inn Road printworks and offices to the unions for the production of a labour movement paper, or to sell off and divide the spoils, he has focussed on the weakness of those print union leaders and rank and filers who have seen the Wapping dispute as one over compensation rather than reinstatement.

The use of the now surplus plant as a cash-free "lump sum" buy off to end the picketing, blacking and boycott action against his four News International titles is more than just a cheap option for Murdoch (the plant and equipment is valued at a maximum of £50m if a buyer could be found; yet estimate of the redundancy payments to which he would be liable in sacking the 6,000 printers are as high as £100m).

*Were the print unions to accept the deal it would signal total defeat on the central issue at stake — unionisation and the right of print unions to organise freely, elect their own leaderships and act to defend their members in Murdoch's Wapping plant.*

*It would also mean acceptance of the loss of thousands of printworkers' jobs, while the "compensation" payment would be*



*... tied up in a building which the printworkers did not ask for, and in which only a portion of them ever worked.*

Assuming Murdoch's challenge were taken up, and a labour movement paper were to begin publishing from Grays Inn Rd, there is no good reason why the main financial contribution to this should come from 6,000 sacked printers — only a small proportion of whom could expect jobs on the new paper.

Murdoch's transparent ploy to enlist the Labour Party leadership as allies in pressing this wretched proposal onto the print unions has so far had little public success. Party spokespersons have poured doubt on Murdoch's sudden and touching concern for the needs of the labour movement: even TUC General Secretary Willis, struggling to make himself heard above shouts of "scab" on the April 6

demonstration, has argued that the deal must not be done at the expense of the printers.

But the print union leaders did not dismiss Murdoch's offer out of hand. As our second Print Strike Special forecast on the eve of Murdoch's offer, the signs have been for some time that SOGAT and NGA officials are looking to do a deal for "compensation", and that Murdoch wants to end the dispute — with his gains intact.

The refusal to fight massive job cuts at the *Daily Express* and escalate the confrontation with the Fleet Street bosses; and the collapse of resistance at the *Daily Record* in Glasgow (where SOGAT and NUJ forces had joined in a welcome united stand against Labourite axeman Robert Maxwell) are both indications that the NUJ and print union bureaucracies have little stomach for a fight.

For their members on Fleet Street and throughout the provincial press, however, it is a question of "do or die". If the fight is not stepped up, the queue for jobs outside the offices of a Dean/Dubbins/Kinnock daily could swell to tens of thousands.

## Murdoch's Grays Inn Road "offer"



## In the shadow of Fort Wapping

By a Special Correspondent

**THE dark shadow of Fort Wapping and a generalised employers' offensive hung over the proceedings of the NUJ's Annual Delegate Meeting in Sheffield.**

The result was a largely low-key conference, passing almost on the nod a whole series of proposals — not least the call for a ballot to establish a political fund — which in previous years would have been hotly disputed.

More controversial, however, and only narrowly defeated, was a call for the regular election of all NUJ officials, following a year in which both General Secretary Harry Conroy and deputy General Secretary Jake Ecclestone had been elected. The increased support for this principle suggests that any amount of serious campaigning for it by the newly-emerging NUJ Broad Left could tip the balance next year and strike an important blow for accountability.

Amid the events at Wapping, and with visits to the conference from a markedly conciliatory NGA General Secretary Tony Dubbins, and a clearly demoralised SOGAT President Danny Sergeant, there was much talk of possible inter-union agreements and even amalgamation.

The Conference voted in favour of seeking to extend the present united front with the NGA over new technology in the provincial newspaper sector to include SOGAT, and urged the NEC to reopen the talks over amalgamation with the NGA which broke down several years ago. But there was no disguising the scepticism of many delegates on this issue, recognising that all these developments will be shaped above all by the outcome of the Wapping battle and the links between the NGA and SOGAT.

The debate over Wapping itself took shape with the NEC significantly putting down no resolutions of its own, and seeking simply to delete various demands from a composite resolution moved by a Brighton delegate and seconded by Oxford.

Key proposals which the NEC majority wished to delete were:

- For the NEC to call the four scab Wapping chapels out on strike;
- For strike action on Fleet Street;
- Condemning the NEC's refusal to institute disciplinary action against

the 500 Wapping scabs who have defied the Union instruction to work normally at their previous place of work;

• "Demanding" that the NEC change its decision, and lay complaints against the scabs.

In a debate which appeared to swing in favour of one side and the other, the right wing lost no chance to underline the implicit dangers of a breakaway scab union emerging from any mass expulsions at News International, while the left insisted upon the need to uphold the union's rulebook if provincial branches and chapels were not to disintegrate. The eventual close vote for action was followed by an NEC meeting that evening which voted to take no action until after the Conference had disbanded.

Next day, after the left had forced an adjournment of Conference, demanding the NEC give a statement

of its intentions, a unanimous declaration agreed that complaints would be laid under the Union's Rule 18. Subsequently the incoming NEC has decided not to begin this process until May 14 — a week after the final deadline set by Murdoch for a settlement, and two weeks after the possible April 30 "strike ballot" by the four scab chapels.

Though many of the Conference decisions appear to indicate a shift leftwards in the Union, and the incoming NEC seems unchanged in overall political complexion, the tone of all but the Wapping debate suggested a sulky right wing largely passive in the face of resolutions it believed would not be implemented, or could not (as on the political fund) plausibly oppose.

There is no doubt that the fight to uphold many of the policies and principles adopted at Sheffield will be a long and hard one in the NUJ, and the development of the embryonic Broad Left into a serious grouping with a real base in the workplaces could prove the key to success.

## TGWU to back wage controls?

## Todd's lurch to the right

By BILL PETERS

**THE swing to the right in the trade union movement since the end of the miners' strike has been dramatic and obvious.**

The TUC has abandoned its "opposition" to the anti-union laws and refused to discipline the yellow EET-PU for its union busting role at Wapping. The AUEW has accepted Government money for ballots, and previously "left" unions like NUPE have played a leading role in the witch-hunt against *Militant*.

What may not have been so obvious, however, is the shift to the



Todd — from "left" to right.

right in Britain's biggest union, the TGWU.

The fact is that since the victory of the "left" candidate, Ron Todd, in the election for General Secretary last year, the union has moved further to the right than any time since the latter years of the Jack Jones era, sending out echoes of the Arthur Deakin regime which ended in the late 1950s.

There was an organised right wing campaign around the elections for the union's National Executive last December, which resulted in a swing to the right. Walt Greendale, the left-wing national chair of the union, was defeated for his own place on the Executive and was replaced by the right-wing nominee Brian Nicholson.

Ron Todd has added his weight to the rightward move, with a lengthy article in the *Daily Mirror* supporting the witch-hunt against *Militant* — in flat contradiction to the policy adopted at last year's TGWU Biennial Delegate Conference. He condemned the seven Labour NEC members who walked out and stopped the disciplinary hearing against *Militant*.

It is no accident therefore that Todd and the National Executive have refused to discipline their scab

members who are crossing print union picket lines and distributing Murdoch newspapers. At its last meeting the Executive instructed the drivers not to go into Wapping, but at the same time made it clear that there would be no disciplinary action even if they did.

Two weeks ago Todd announced that the union had made an important breakthrough and had managed to recruit the *Queen Mother*.

This week Todd has joined with other right wing union leaders to hint at some kind of incomes policy in the event of a future Labour Government. "If you want to see Labour in power there has to be a form of discipline exercised by us."

There could not be a more fundamental shift of the TGWU line than on incomes policy. The TGWU has had a consistent policy of free collective bargaining since Jack Jones was defeated on it at the 1979 Biennial Conference on the Isle of Man. At the 1981, 1983 and 1985 Conferences, free collective bargaining went through on the nod in resolutions moved by the National Executive. That the one-time "left" Ron Todd now challenges the long held and

symbolic policy of the union serves to show the scale of the shift to the right which is taking place.

It is not just a matter, however, of an individual like Ron Todd collapsing to the right under the pressure of the job he has been elected to. His shift to the right is certainly remarkable; but it is linked into the political situation which has existed in the labour movement since the defeat of the miners' strike last year.

Since then a growing section of union leaders have concluded that industrial struggle will not win against the Thatcherites and that the only hope for the trade unions is in the election of a Labour Government at the approaching election.

At the same time the much-strengthened right wing in the Labour Party under Neil Kinnock is spelling out that the only way to win the election is for the Labour Party to shift to the right and the trade unions to present a moderate face.

It is under these political pressures that the "left" speeches of the Todd election campaign have given way to the present situation within a few short months.

# Major new threat to solidarity with victimised miners.

**THE National Justice for Mineworkers Campaign has grown rapidly since it was established at the end of last year. It was established following an initiative from a Trade Union Briefing fringe meeting at last year's Labour Party Conference. It received the backing of the Campaign Group of Labour MPs and was then officially supported by the National Executive of the NUM.**

In giving the Campaign official support the NUM proposed a new structure which involved establishing a NUM nominee (Billy Etherington, secretary of the Durham mechanics) as the chair, retaining the existing secretary (Ed Fredenburgh) and establishing a broad-based Steering Committee. This would comprise 10

By **BILL PETERS**

nominees from the NUM areas, 10 from the Campaign Group of Labour MPs, 10 from Women Against Pit Closures, 10 from the Support Groups, 2 from the Co-ordinating Committee of Support Groups and 10 "others". These would be general labour movement nominations.

It was a good democratic structure reflecting all the main groupings involved in the continuing campaign on behalf of 500 miners who remain victimised. The campaign based itself on the redrafted "Justice for Mineworkers Bill" presented in Parliament by Tony Benn and the Campaign Group of MPs in February. Although the redraft calls for a "judicial review of the cases of the imprisoned miners" rather than a pardon, it is a very important rallying

point for the movement and a marker for a future Labour Government, since it calls for reinstatement of those miners sacked.

The Justice Campaign received a major boost with the highly successful March, Rally and Albert Hall Concert on March 2. All these positive developments, however, threaten to come to a shuddering halt if developments which emerged at the last meeting of the Campaign on April 18 in Nottingham are continued.

The meeting was again well attended with well over 200 people present. For the first time there were officials from some of the NUM areas. Terry Thomas was there from South Wales and a large delegation from the Scottish NUM headed by prominent Euro-Communist Party members Eric Clark and George Bolton.

As soon as the meeting opened it



was clear that the informal open discussion of previous meetings had gone. Billy Etherington welcomed everyone to the meeting with his first sentence, and told them that this would be the last open meeting the Campaign would hold with the second. In future, he said, only the Steering Committee would meet — which would elect a smaller sub-committee to run the Campaign.

Another contentious issue arose when it was realised that a new position of convenor of the campaign had been created since the last meeting and the address of the existing secretary removed from the letterhead. Attempts to leave things as they were until democratically changed were defeated.

Alan Meale, secretary of the Campaign Group of MPs, then challenged the model resolutions to the Labour Party and TUC conferences adopted at the previous meeting claiming that they had not been endorsed by the NUM. The secretary reported that they had in fact met Peter Heathfield and they had been cleared by him. Alan Meale insisted that this was not enough, that they had not been agreed by the NUM National Executive, and that they should be referred back. This was accepted by the Chair.

An attempt was made by one delegate to move that a letter be sent to Neil Kinnock urging him to stand by statements that he had made in Scotland to the effect that victimised miners would be reinstated by a future Labour Government. This was bitterly challenged by Eric Clark and George Bolton who said that it was about time we stopped putting demands on Neil Kinnock and started to build some unity with him. The mover withdrew the resolution.

On the controversial issue of

Regional National Justice for Mineworkers Campaigns the lid was put on just as tightly. They would not be autonomous, but controlled directly by the area offices of the NUM. In reply to a question asking how a campaign be got off the ground in Yorkshire, Billy Etherington said: "Ring Sammy Thompson and ask him".

No decision were taken on future campaigns. These would be decided at a meeting of the steering committee in the near future we were told. Suggestions made would be taken into account. There were proposals for Regional Heroes Concerts. A concert in the Wembley Conference centre in early autumn and a national demonstration in Nottingham in the summer.

At the end of the meeting Billy Etherington relented to some extent on future meetings, saying that the steering committee will decide if future open meetings will take place. If the tenor of that meeting is to be a guide, however, it looks as if the campaign is going to be stifled and demobilised just at a time when its potential was being realised.

Affiliated bodies should try to ensure that this negative development is reversed. The Campaign is very important and well placed to make a major contribution to the campaign for the victimised miners. Proposals for future activities, particularly the demonstration in Nottingham, should be given active support.

#### **Co-ordinating Committee**

The co-ordinating committee of Miners' Support Groups is calling a conference in Sheffield on May 31. The final details are to be announced shortly.

The purpose of the conference will be to boost the work of the support

Groups and map out activity for the rest of this year. Speakers are being invited from the NUM, WAPC. A representative of the victimised miners from each area will be invited to give a report on the latest situation.

#### **NUM**

Inside the pits the NCB is continuing to pile on the pressure. They are trying to force a wage settlement on the NUM by announcing this week that if the claim is not settled by April 30, miners will lose their entitlement to back pay to November 1.

At the same time production targets have been increased by one third nationally with a shrinking labour force. There have been disputes over these levels of speed up in some of the areas, particularly Yorkshire, but many of the lodges and branches now see making the pit profitable as a way of avoiding closure. The NCB is getting what it wanted in the first place — a competition for productivity between the pits.

Kinsley Drift in Yorkshire, which is less than 10 years old — is still on the closure list after losing in the national review procedure. It now goes to "independent review".

Thurcroft, in Yorkshire, has struck for a week refusing to work with a scab from the strike. The scab has now been moved to Nottingham.

There is militancy amongst the rank and file miners despite the defeat they have had and the success of the NCB since the strike. The problem remains one of shaping that willingness to continue the fight into a co-ordinated rank and file movement in the NUM which can develop it on a national level. It is that rank and file struggle which represents the spirit of the 1984/5 strike, not Regional full time officials, many of whom had a very poor record in it.

# Ireland after Hillsborough

**WHATEVER inter-governmental conferences of British and Irish ministers might agree, politics in the six counties are still fought out on the streets. Within months the Hillsborough Agreement has foundered against this reality.**

Its objective of stabilising partition by projecting the Dublin government and the SDLP as custodians of the Nationalist interest and obtaining increased Free State collaboration in security in order to defeat the Republican Movement, has been thwarted by Loyalist intransigence, the inherent sectarianism of the six county state and the continuing military effectiveness of the IRA.

## Loyalist Referendum

The by-elections of January 23 held few surprises. Fifteen Unionist candidates standing on a platform of "Ulster says No" to the agreement polled 428,230 votes between them, a "victory" which was tarnished by the loss of Newry/Armagh to the SDLP.

Here Sinn Fein's vote fell by 3,319 and in the other 3 seats contested by 7.62%, 2.6% and 2.2% on a reduced poll as some Republican voters stayed at home. Others transferred votes to the SDLP either for tactical reasons or in the belief that the Agreement should be given a chance.

In this respect SF's claim that the agreement did indeed contain some concessions wrung from the British by the success of the Republican Movement may have backfired on them. Also the proposed electoral pact with the SDLP (intended to expose the latter's greater desire to defeat SF and uphold the Agreement rather than join united opposition to the Unionists) confused Nationalist voters.

A call for abstention against what was, after all, merely a Unionist tactic to legitimise their resistance to the agreement would have expressed Republican electoral support in a more unequivocal, albeit negative, way. Nevertheless, although the SF vote was down 18,231 and the SDLP picked up 11,371 votes (not all of them Republican) this hardly represents a massive endorsement of either the Agreement or the SDLP by the Nationalist population.

By DAVID MOSS

## Withdrawing Consent

Any illusion the constitutional Loyalists may have held that the election results would sway the British government was dispelled by Paisley and Molyneux's fruitless meeting with Thatcher on February 25. The next phase of resistance intended to "withdraw the consent of the people of Northern Ireland from the government" strengthened the hand of the militant Loyalists.

The March 3 strike showed that it was not "the politicians" who were in control, as pickets of the Ulster Clubs and UDA brought the province to a virtual standstill, attacking Nationalist workers and throwing up road blocks.



At Lurgan, 250 women textile workers were stoned and their factory eventually set on fire. Another factory was besieged at Moira and a bus burnt while the nationalist areas of Portadown were virtually cut off by

# A trip to Dublin

By DAVE MILES

**TWO things made me feel as though I was in a foreign country as I arrived in Dublin on the morning of Saturday April 5.**

One was the presence of large numbers of palm trees in the prosperous neighbourhoods alongside the road from the port to the city. The other was to go to the General Post Office for stamps and find a monument to an attempted insurrection against British imperialism.

Three supporters of *Socialist Viewpoint* had joined a group going over for the demonstration marking the 70th Anniversary of the 1916 Easter Rising. It was the Post Office building on O'Connell Street which was seized as the headquarters of the Rising, and where this year's demonstration ended with a rally.

Between five and ten thousand people came on the march, organised by Irish Republicans. Fife and drum bands and colour parties made up of young people were a strong part of the march, and came from all over Ireland.

Although the Easter Rising was one of the landmarks in the history of Irish nationalism and the eventual founding of an Irish state, this was no official state occasion. The event was organised by Sinn Fein and the great majority of the banners belonged to their branches. Meanwhile the "republican" parties which alternate in government were presumably skulking at home, hoping that the commemoration would pass off as quietly as possible.

Speeches at the rally reflected the divergent attitudes within Sinn Fein, with some contributions proudly reiterating the history of armed struggle both against the British and the Irish state, and others raising the issues of exploitation, oppression and poverty which the party has increasingly organised around in recent years.

The trip also gave us a chance to talk to members of Sinn Fein and organisations of the Irish left in informal circumstances both about the struggle in Ireland and our own experiences.



roadblocks.

Across the province, nationalists were stopped by tractor and muckspreader barricades across the roads and workplaces and businesses forced to close by mobs. Meanwhile the RUC did not show the same enthusiasm for "allowing those to work who wanted to work" as their British counterparts did in the miners' strike.

RUC officers stood by as intimidation occurred at Loyalist roadblocks and even where confrontations could not be avoided, as in Derry where a Nationalist mobilisation forced the RUC to reroute a Loyalist march, the RUC response exhibited the same kid-glove approach against Loyalists as they used last year at Portadown.

### The Sectarian Statelet

The strike re-emphasised that the Agreement has done nothing to alter the sectarian bias of the RUC and the "alienation of the Nationalist population" which results from daily harassment, raids and beatings as in the case of Edward McFadden in Derry or Martin Sweeney in Armagh.

Nor, despite the complaints of the SDLP and Dublin, has anything been done to curb the UDR. They have continued with their shoot-to-kill policy against unarmed nationalists who are not even involved in the Republican movement. Two men were wounded near Cookstown on January 27 when their car was fired on. The UDR men concerned were merely relieved of patrol duties.

The British army also claimed a victim in similar circumstances when Francis Bradley was shot dead at

Toomebridge on February 18. An intimidatory mass RUC presence at his funeral, despite the fact the IRA disclaimed him as a member, served as a reminder that even in death, Nationalists are treated as enemies of the state. At the funeral of IRA volunteer Tony Gough, killed in action in Derry on February 22, not only were the security forces present but some sported white ribbons showing their satisfaction at the killing, although at the parents' request no Republican ceremony was to be held.

However the total inability of Dublin to in any way protect the minority trapped within the sectarian statelet, is most brutally demonstrated by the revival of sectarian killings. This year three victims have fallen to loyalist paramilitaries in Nationalist enclaves in North Belfast while a failed attempt was made in Short Strand. An Agreement which cannot guarantee the physical safety of the Nationalists rings hollow when it talks of safeguarding human rights and cultural identity.

### Armed Struggle

While the British government comes under pressure from supporters of the Agreement to make it appear to work and from Loyalists to scrap it altogether, the IRA has continued to demonstrate, almost daily, that there has been no improvement in the "security" situation. The state forces have sustained casualties at the average of three a week since the beginning of the year.

RUC, UDR and British soldiers have come under regular attacks

from automatic fire, mines, bombs and mortars. Operations include a 20 minute gun battle with an undercover SAS unit at Minogue, the shooting of a soldier by a sniper in the Divis Flats, a car bomb attack on a RUC/Army checkpoint at Clady, and a daring attack on an Army base in Derry in which IRA Volunteer Tony Gough was shot. In County Fermanagh a UDR man was killed by a mine on February 3 and an RUC detective shot dead in a bar on February 11.

The success of IRA attacks has shaken RUC morale and led to a clash between RUC Chief John Hermon and the head of the Police Federation Alan Wright who made public the condition of the RUC and called for an end of the policy of "Ulsterisation", whereby the RUC is meant to take over the security role of the British Army. In fact already this year a further 1,000 troops have been stationed in the 6 counties — ostensibly to guard RUC barracks.

Clashes with Loyalists over the re-routing of marches at Easter and in July will only further undermine RUC morale. The question is how far the British are prepared to use the Army in this role.

In the past the Army has clashed with Loyalists in riots and gun battles but, more significantly, during the Ulster Workers Council strike against power sharing in 1974 it did not intervene. It would be very dangerous politically for the government to attempt to use troops against large scale Unionist resistance, only serving to further alienate and unite the Unionists.

### Irish Neutrality

Even confronted with these problems the British government has offered little in return for Dublin's co-operation. It was soon made clear that the Free State government would have no say in the security or judicial system in the six counties. Even limited reforms like the ending of exclusion orders under the Prevention of Terrorism Act or the policy of strip searching of former Armagh women prisoners transferred to Maghaberry gaol have been ruled out.

The release of Evelyn Glenholmes showed that Dublin is also unable to deliver the goods, even after signing the European Convention on Terrorism. A future government not committed to the agreement may prove unwilling as well as unable.

In order to avert this, a down payment has been made on Irish neutrality in the form of a proposed US aid package. Pressure had already been placed on Dublin to stop trading with Libya even before the Gulf of Sirte provocation. The growing economic crisis in the Free State will throw its government deeper into the grip of Anglo-American imperialism.

The Hillsborough Agreement is only partly about resolving the situation in the occupied six counties. It is more concerned with drawing the 26 counties into NATO, ensuring that Ireland's opposition to Britain in the Falklands/Malvinas war is not repeated in some graver crisis in the future.

As the British government used the Pro-Treaty, Free State forces to defeat radical Republicanism in 1922-23, it seeks again to police the 26 counties via Dublin in order to defeat not only the Republican Movement but also resistance from the Irish working class.

### An Accord for Discord

Far from providing a basis for stability in the 6 counties the Anglo-Irish Agreement has, in the space of

four months, sharpened all the open and latent conflicts within Irish politics.

None of its objectives have been achieved in the short time. Indeed rather than allowing Dublin even a voice in the running of the six counties it has re-emphasised the unreformability and utter sectarianism of the statelet.

The Loyalists refuse to accept the slightest cosmetic revision of the Treaty of 1921, while the British government cannot be seen to coerce them, after successive pronouncements that the will of the majority is paramount and through fear of alienating the sectarian forces of the UDR and RUC.

Dublin and its vehicle in the six counties — the SDLP — are denied their role as the custodians of the

Nationalist interests which the agreement was supposed to give them; and Dublin cannot deliver their side of the bargain — the military and political defeat of SF and the IRA.

The continuing struggle of the Republican Movement and the growing economic crisis, which will increasingly thrust the Irish working class into the arena, will inevitably drive the Hillsborough Agreement further onto the rocks.



## Nicaraguan economy flags as contras get increased aid

# Cruel cost of Reagan's war

WHEN they voted in the US House of Representatives last month against sending \$100m of military aid to Reagan's contras, the Democratic Party leaders made it clear that the President would get his "yes" vote — but only after a decent interval to show that peaceful diplomacy would not get the Nicaraguan government to share power with contra murderers nominated by Reagan.

Impatient at this delay, Reagan embarked on a frenzy of warmongering. In only a few days he had:

- launched warplanes against Libya;
- announced a Nicaraguan army "invasion" of Honduras and the dispatch of \$20m worth of military equipment to areas bordering Nicaragua;
- and got his "yes" vote in the Senate.

A second article by BILL MACKETH following his visit to Nicaragua as part of a labour movement delegation.

No one in Honduras seemed ready to confirm the CIA-reported invasion, but Democrat leader Tip O'Neill accepted the lie with alacrity and declared Nicaragua's President Daniel Ortega to be a "bungling, Marxist-Leninist communist". Of course Republican and Democrat leaders alike fear a "red tide" rising from Nicaragua to lap around New Mexico and Texas.

Neither the Nicaraguan government nor its leaders are Marxist-Leninist (nor for that matter is Nicaragua the "workers' state" discerned by some Trotskyists), but the overthrow of Somoza in 1979 and the determination of the Nicaraguans

to defend their national independence are indeed historic blows against US imperialism.

As an inspiration to all oppressed peoples they prove a real threat to continual US domination of the countries of Central America and the Caribbean.

The costs of fighting the war against the contras are high, and increasing. These costs are heaped on top of the exploitation faced by the mass of people in all underdeveloped countries, as a result of the collapse of food and commodity export prices in the past 10 years.

Among the major achievements in Nicaragua between 1979 and 1984-5 were those in the fields of health and education, symbolised by the campaign that increased literacy from 44% to 88%, the dramatic reduction in malaria cases, and eradication of polio. All these gains — and others (for example in higher education and rural health service provision) are currently being whittled away direct-



Defending Nicaragua's northern borders against "contra" raids.

ly or indirectly by the war. The present "survival economy" of Nicaragua allows for no state funding for new health or education building in the more heavily-populated "rearguard" pacific coast regions.

Nearly half the government budget (and a quarter of the country's known production) goes towards military defence, which mobilises 1 in 5 men over 16 years old. To the military casualties, attacks on civilian targets — teachers, medics, peasants as well as schools, health facilities, bridges, etc., must be added 250,000 war refugees.

The diversion of resources to military expenditure, the US economic blockade and blocking by the US, UK and others of credits from international agencies, the *contra* disruption of agricultural production and shortage of foreign currency to finance imports — all contribute to high inflation (figures range from 30% to 200% for 1984-5 inclusive), and shortages and a 20% decline (1982-84) in basic consumption (food, clothing) per head.

The above figures are from the government's claim against the US government presented to the World Court at the Hague. They should be set beside, for example, the view of the secretary of the Sandinista Trade Union Federation (CST) in León, that with this January's 40-90% national wage increases, wage rates are maintaining their value. Organised workers also benefit from distribution of basic goods through their trade union branches.



Nicaraguan President Ortega.

With the authority of having led the overthrow of the Somoza dictatorship in 1979, the FSLN (Sandinista National Liberation Front) and the government it forms clearly still command considerable support, consolidated in the 65% of votes cast which it received in the 1984 elections.

The government prioritises military defence and maintenance of production in the face of severe difficulties. While recruitment into the regular army, reserve battalions and militias is constantly pushed, on the production front the Government has a policy of incentives (bonuses, house-building materials, study opportunities) for the most productive groups or individual workers in an enterprise. There is also propaganda around production achievements (for example press photos of the "outstan-

ding coffee harvester of the week at La Estrella state farm"), and in favour of good time-keeping, and care of equipment, etc.

The various trade union federations that support these policies range from the overwhelmingly dominant CST in the towns, and the farmworkers (ATC), to small affiliates of the Socialist, Communist and Maoist parties.

The CST and separate unions such as the health workers explicitly recognise the FSLN in their constitution as the unquestioned political leaderships of the Nicaraguan revolution.

Similar in size to the small "left" federations are the Nicaraguan affiliates of the anti-communist World Confederation of Labour and the TUC's fellow anti-communist ICFTU affiliate, the CUS.

The majority of unions, despite the constitutional "incorporation" into the FSLN, exercise some real influence over Government policy at present, notably over the national pay scales and price controls which are negotiated at the Trade Union Co-ordinating Council from which only the Social Democratic Party-linked CUS and the CTN abstain.

Price control is one of a number of functions carried out by the town, neighbourhood and village Sandinista Defence Committees (CDS). The government's current "iron hand" campaign against profiteering encourages the CDS to inspect shop prices and report unauthorised high prices to government officials. A

1,000-strong demonstration organised by the NDS in León in January resulted in several shops being closed down and their stocks being seized.

The Defence Committees, which arose in the year before Somoza's overthrow, mobilise local people in the continuing literacy and health efforts; they distribute weekly government supplies of basic foods, and other vital goods, organise child care, and press local demands on local officials.

The CDS will represent a woman who, under the Family Laws, is claiming financial support from the father of her children.

The majority of elected representatives in most Defence Committees are women. Women are active in their trade unions and in the FSLN-sponsored women's organisation AMNLAE. Women have won equality in law, access to free contraception (though only for mothers, in one health centre I visited, and sometimes in short supply), and much improved access to health and education provision. Since 1979 the proportion of women among those in paid employment has doubled in the cities and trebled in the country, to 42 and 48% respectively.

But the pressure on social provision caused by the war, the ending of women's active duty in the regular army (women were active in the armed overthrow of Somoza), and the failure of the FSLN to accept the right to safe abortion are pointers to many battles to come.

### "Non-alignment, Mixed economy, Political Pluralism"

The FSLN's "non-alignment" policy involves support for the "contadora peace process" backed now by eight Latin American countries but excluding all Nicaragua's neighbours. This diplomacy, advocating the "end of foreign intervention in Central America" (meaning Cuban and Soviet arms for the Nicaraguans, as well as US intervention) is at best idealistic and without further successes in national liberation in Central America can only lead to the disarming of Nicaragua, since the US government is clearly not interested.

Realistically low though their expectations are, the FSLN attach great importance to support, political and material, from capitalist European states and non-governmental support from all organisations in west Europe.

The "mixed economy", second of three often-quoted policies of the FSLN government, is very much a reality. Over 60% of the land is privately owned and includes a fair proportion of large properties. Co-ops and state farms each account for just under 20% of the land.

Industry, which is little developed, has a much higher percentage of private ownership, with foreign capital apart from US companies apparently satisfied to bide their time, given the lack of any threat to nationalise. Largest of the British-owned firms, British American Tobacco which employs 700 in a factory on the edge of the capital Managua, will be sending profits to Britain this year for the first time since 1979.

In its claim against the USA at the World Court, the FSLN say that their land reform policies are very conservative; more so than those of Allende's Chile or even Duarte's El Salvador today! Nearly all lands in state ownership were expropriated after the erstwhile landlords — Somoza and his allies — left the country for good in 1979. Government policy is to support "patriotic" capitalists who make full use of land or industrial capacity. The Agrarian Laws, which provide for expropriation of land that is left derelict or underused, were amended last January to give the President powers to make any purchase necessary to provide land needed by people displaced by the war.

In practice the deficiencies in political pluralism stem from abstention by the Social Christian and two other parties of the right wing "Coordinadora", and by the Independent Liberal Party (PLI).

A more serious consideration is the state of emergency reimposed last October. This bans official strikes, permits media censorship and requires advance permission before meetings or demonstrations take place in public places.

A CUS representative failed to mention these restrictions (I forgot to ask) but alleged persecution by the FSLN. CST and ATC members welcomed the measures as a tool to fight the *contras*. The journalists' union UPN objects in principle to censorship, but said it was restricted to military and "sensitive" economic reports. Young Liberals (PLI) claimed the 1984 elections were "rigged" because of the FSLN control of the media (so did the CUS).

The recent mealy-mouthed Amnesty International report, timed to coincide with Reagan's play for *contra* aid, failed to uncover more than I heard of in Nicaragua, and conceded that Nicaragua's human rights record was among the best in the Americas.

It is the Catholic Church hierarchy that provides the most important political opposition (from right or left) to the Sandinistas at present. Archbishop Obando of Managua, returning from Rome where he was created cardinal by the pope, stopped off in Miami to celebrate mass with *contra* leaders.

The "dialogue" demanded by the

church hierarchy and Reagan in reality means acceptance of the *contra* leaders at the very least into the internal political life of the country, if not into government.

The gap between the church hierarchy and the *contras* on one hand, and the government on the other is illustrated by the Bishop of León suggesting (unlike for example the London *Daily Telegraph*) that the ports of Nicaragua were mined in 1983 not by the CIA but by the FSLN!

Nor was this bishop able to substantiate, to the delegation of which I was a member, allegations of people being "shot in the streets" by the FSLN, or of thousands of political prisoners, or of the much trumpeted "persecution of the church".

The 35% vote for parties other than the FSLN in 1984 was divided between the Liberals (PLI, 9.4%), Social Democrats, Popular Social Christian Party, Socialist, Communist, Maoist and Morenist parties. The Social Christian and two other parties abstained. Thus the FSLN vote represented electoral devastation for opposition parties.

The 30,000-strong FSLN has an elected local and regional organisation. Membership of the ruling FSLN's national assembly is ultimately approved by the nine-man directorate which has remained unchanged in its composition since 1979 (information from Region II FSLN and a UK journalist).

This apparently hermetically-sealed closed circle is nevertheless kept well informed by reports from *militants* active in the unions, neighbourhood committees, women's, youth and other organisations. Differences between the three main pre-1980 tendencies within the FSLN — insurrectionary *tercerista*, proletarian, prolonged people's war — were not evident to me from my visit.

The FSLN's public programme and statements refer to a "regionalisation" of the conflict if the US invades directly, and also they confirm that there will be increasing difficulties if the US government pursues the alternative longer-term pressure — economic and political harassment backed by targeting of civilians by the *contras*.

It appears to me that there are big reserves of active support for the FSLN. However, the at best tiny increases in production in the next few years cannot meet present levels of standards of living in the country, even though the government may extend controls over prices and distribution to favour the poorer Nicaraguans.

Government diplomacy notwithstanding, the FSLN will be obliged to seek further resources from the private sector — industrial or more likely agricultural. This seems also to be indicated by the recent Land Law amendments. An



alternative (which should be taking place anyway) is an increase in support from the Soviet Union and Cuba.

Neither path is certain for the people of Nicaragua whose future social and economic liberation will depend primarily on the course of national democratic struggles in the neighbouring countries of El Salvador, Honduras, Costa Rica and Guatemala.

Meanwhile, the recent actions of Reagan's government and its Democrat and Republican poodles in Congress show there is urgent and vital solidarity work to be done:

- making sure the threat by Reagan is discussed in trade union and Labour Party branches;

- setting up and strengthening local solidarity groups;

- affiliating to the Nicaragua Solidarity Campaign (20 Compton Terrace, London N1, 01-359 8982);

- carrying out solidary actions that express the enormous hostility of people in Britain to Reagan's plans for Nicaragua and Central America;

- through national union motions and delegates to the TUC ensuring that the General Council is forced to carry out 1984-5 Congress policy to establish contact with the CST, ATC and all trade union federations in Nicaragua, and to send a delegation to Nicaragua;

- to challenge TUC support for the minuscule and reactionary CUS as the ICFTU affiliate in Nicaragua.

This last question is an important opener we can use to reveal the can of worms that is the TUC's International Department, especially as Ron Todd now chairs the TUC's International Committee.

# The Battle for the Sahara

**JACK GOLDBERG** looks at the bitter struggle of the Saharan people for self determination.

**IN November 1975, as the old dictator Franco lay dying, Spain in a tripartite secret deal handed over the sovereignty of its colonies of Western Sahara to both Morocco and Mauritania.**

Days later, King Hassan ordered his henchmen to start executing his plans for the conquest of the Western Sahara and the subjugation and assimilation of the Sahraouis.

Under the cover of a "spontaneous invasion" by tens of thousands of Moroccan civilians — the infamous "green march", meticulously and lavishly masterminded from the Palace — the Moroccan Royal Army swiftly moved in on the steps of the departing Spanish troops. The elite battalions — some of the best trained in Africa — rose to the occasion: their shiny armour and sharp morale were deemed enough to make the

whole operation a quick pushover. King Hassan's overture was a triumph.

Not content with simply occupying strategic positions, the Moroccan army set out to crush any potential threat to its colonizing plans. Mirage and F5 fighters soon roamed the skies, systematically bombing the defenceless camps where thousands of Sahraouis took refuge from the advancing army.

King Hassan wanted a thoroughly-planned and well executed genocide, and ordered no quarter to be given: napalm and phosphorus bombs turned the camps of Tifarit, Amgala, El Guelta and Oum Dreigua into vast cemeteries.

But as the Moroccan strategists unfolded their genocidal plans, little did they know that a few miles away at Bir Lahlou, an event of momentous importance was taking place. On February 27, 1976, the President of

## Denial





the Sahraouis' Provisional National Council and the Secretary General of the Polisario Front declared the independence of the Saharan Arab Democratic Republic.

This was no mere paper exercise. It was the crowning act of decades of resistance to colonialism and the most direct challenge to the newly-signed Madrid tripartite agreement primarily designed to deprive the Sahraoui people of their right to self determination.

Today the Polisario Front (Popular Front for the Liberation of Saguia el Hamra and Rio de Oro) celebrates with pride the tenth anniversary of the Republic. And looking at the impressive balance sheet of their achievements they have every reason to display such confidence.

The birth of the SADR was a direct reaction to the Moroccan invasion; but the fight for self-determination began a century ago in 1885 when Spain incorporated the area into its Empire.

As early as 1910, Spain appointed by royal decree a governor to the provinces, who, for the next twenty years, tried to consolidate the Spanish presence on the coast and prepared plans for expansion inside the territories. This consolidation was achieved with little difficulty as the Sahraouis were busy elsewhere resisting French penetration from their bases in Southern Morocco.

But it was not until after the victory of Franco in Spain that a colonial state in the classic sense was established in the whole of the province. Franco, like his allies, dreamt of an empire.

Between 1939 and 1944, Western Sahara became the subject of attention. Plans were made for towns, airports, harbours, communication lines, military bases and minerals' ex-



ploration — a blueprint for a thriving and lucrative colony. But the outcome of World War II brought to an end such ambitious schemas and the plans were scrapped.

It was not until 1957 that the colonial administration was awakened from its slumber by serious waves of insurrection by the Sahraoui people. This came at a time where the whole continent was shaken by the rapid growth of a nascent nationalism and, as in in Western Sahara, the new political and social changes created conditions for the growth of a new political consciousness that rejected colonial domination and demanded national independence and self determination.

Historically there were two phases: the first lasted for thirty years where a slow but progressive implantation of a colonial state replaced a moribund precolonial state, creating an embryonic infrastructure for a modern state. This reached its peak in the 1960s, where the second phase started with the birth of nationalism. This last stage saw the creation of the Saharan Liberation Movement in



1968 which became the conscious expression of that nationalism. The movement organised a generalised insurrection in June 1970 and later on gave way to the formation of the Polisario Front.

In May 1975, the UN commission of enquiry reported "Inside the territories, the whole population is categorically in favour of independence and against the claims of Morocco and Mauritania (...). The Polisario Front appears to be the dominant political force."

The conspirators, in an attempt to circumvent any UN declaration favourable to self determination, brought their plans forward; and the Madrid agreement was concluded between Spain, Morocco and Mauritania. For Spain it achieved two objectives: on the one hand, it ensured protection of its economic and strategic interests in the area; on the other, during the delicate transition from Franco's dictatorship to the Juan Carlos monarchy, it was paramount that the Spanish armed forces were not seen to be humiliated, and handing over sovereignty to Morocco was deemed more "dignified" than giving way to guerrillas they had battled with for decades.

Mauritania played a subordinate role to Morocco. Being itself under consistent claim by Morocco since the early sixties, it was too weak and too unstable to resist any initiative proposed by its powerful neighbour.

The third conspirator, King Hassan, couldn't have dreamt of a grander plan. After two attempted military coups, and facing vigorous opposition by a powerful and well organised proletariat, the King was looking desperately for a "Falkland factor" to revive his flagging



popularity and distract a combative proletariat from the ravages of a worsening economic crisis.

But most importantly he needed to neutralise his political opposition. A foreign adventure, a national cause proved the perfect motive around which he could unite everybody. And everyone fell for it! Every single component of the political spectrum — including the Communist Party (PPS) supported and applauded every of the King's rantings.

Having nothing to fear from inside his country, the King then proceeded with his plans for colonisation and genocide. At the same time, he masterminded a disinformation campaign, giving legitimacy to his claim. He even took his case to the International Court in the Hague hoping that UN jurists would accept the authenticity of his "proof".

The relevance of his campaigning, besides winning supporters, was to trivialise the nature of the conflict, which he purported to be a simple conflict about borders. What he attempted to blur was the weight of imperialism behind him and the importance of the conflict in global and strategic terms.

But his efforts did not fool anybody, least of all the Sahraouis themselves. They, very soon, realised the titanic task that was needed to check a mighty army of 120,000 soldiers equipped by French and US imperialism.

For the last ten years, the young republic has set out, with the help of its Algerian protectors, to build a modern army capable of taking up the challenge and reversing the early pushover of the Moroccan troops.

The tenacity and determination of the Sahraoui fighters made up for



*Sahraoui women have joined the armed struggle.*

their inexperience and their inferior hardware — in the early years of the war most of the equipment used was in fact captured from the invaders. Soon the young army grew in strength and confidence, and the Mauritanian army was the first to be put out of action.

This was shortly followed by the decision of President Ould Dadda to renounce his claim and pull out of the war. In fact his regime never recovered from his short involvement in the occupation and was soon toppled by a military coup led by Khouna Ould Haidafila, who later recognised the Saharan Republic.

Boosted by this unexpected turn of events, the Sahraouis were in a better position to rebuff the French airforce intervention that ensued. From then on, they squared up to the Moroccan army. Their hit-and-run tactics and ambushes inflicted severe blows on demoralised troops, which hastily retreated back to the coast.

Today the ALPS (Saharan Army) controls some two thirds of the Western Sahara, and the beleaguered Moroccan army cowers behind a stretch of 1,200 miles made of 5 defence sand "walls". These "walls" — one of the latest inventions of US strategists — stuffed with listening devices and radar, are the only means left for the Moroccans to stabilise the line of confrontation with the ALPS.

In this, the "walls" have more or less succeeded. The Sahraouis have proved in several instances that the walls are not invulnerable and several operations they mounted inflicted heavy casualties: but they only remain psychological victories and the war is at a standstill.

But a stalemate on the military terrain doesn't mean a breathing space for King Hassan. His elite troops took a good hiding, something he couldn't afford.

Firstly the whole adventure has become horribly expensive. One hundred and twenty thousand troops tied up for ten years at a cost of \$3 million a day was a tremendous

burden on an economy already facing collapse — if it was not for the generosity of his Saudi bankmasters.

Secondly the war has become terribly unpopular. What started as a perfect cause to unite the Moroccan people behind him, has become an embarrassment. Besides a rapid loss of credibility, King Hassan has now to face up to an angry proletariat fed up with the costs of the war. In two instances he had to order troops into the streets to quell massive insurrections in blood.

And finally, the open lavish support by Imperialism has exposed the role played by King Hassan in the imperialist plans for the Arab world. King Hassan would be foolhardy if he went on pretending that this was a more local skirmish over borders. The involvement of France, Israel and the US in propping up the tottering Hassan's regime and supporting his war, shows the extent to which they value his survival as a cast iron guarantee for the continuation of their domination of the area.

Any threat to his throne will seriously endanger their plans, and it is in fact this least predictable outcome that is becoming a serious possibility.

This is the single most important achievement of the 10-year old republic. Against all odds, the Polisario military strategists have put in serious difficulty a strong and trusted friend of the West. His departure would not only expose NATO southern flanks but would also undermine the reactionary axis in the Arab world and shift decisively the current balance of forces.

These military successes have been complemented by equally significant diplomatic gains. From the day it declared its independence, the Saharan Republic used every means possible to win recognition.

From the corridors of the United Nations to the stormy meetings of the Organisation of African Unity, the Sahraoui diplomats argued relentlessly for their right to exist as a recognised independent state.

Here again King Hassan's strategy was blown apart. After initially using the long arm of imperialism to maintain support for his claim, he soon got rattled by the swelling support for the Republic. And in losing patience, he lost many friends and made several tactical blunders, walking in and out of meetings and reneging on agreements.

Today, the Saharan Republic is recognised by 63 countries, and is a full member of the OAU while Morocco has opted out. However, Yugoslavia is the only European country to have recognised the SADR and the Soviet Union is a notable absentee.

For ten years, the Polisario fought tenaciously to isolate King Hassan. Every recognition was seen as a nail in his coffin. But winning recognition is one thing, and putting too much faith in the UN is another. Now that the war is at a stalemate and although in a strong position, the SADR seems to be looking to UN resolution-mongering as a means to unlock the situation. Resolution AHG 104(XIX) passed by the OAU has now been bandied about by the Sahraouis as an acceptable basis for negotiating with King Hassan.

If negotiating means mutual recognition, it would seem a step forward for the SADR. But what terms would they deem acceptable? A shareout of the territories? A Confederation? At present this is still unclear and entering any negotiation with ill-defined objectives may lose them all the gains they have accumulated for the last decade.

Blind faith in diplomatic processes is a characteristic feature of many nationalist movements. This stems from the inadequacies of their programmes for power. While in most instances, they reflect the anti-imperialist consciousness of the masses, they invariably avoid dealing with the class question.

And the Polisario front is no exception. When winning recognition is generally perceived as a priority, it



makes sense to create a state — even an artificial one — in order for it to be recognised. And that is what the Polisario leadership set out to do. Out of the 165,000 Sahraouis that fled to the liberated areas a people's army was created, and this has proved crucial in the success of the guerilla war. Schools were built and illiteracy was eradicated after four summer campaigns (!). Education for youth has become free and compulsory.

But the desire to create a state with all its trappings has also serious drawbacks. A state machinery is created with a permanent bureaucracy that will, in the long term, differentiate into a specific stratum. Islamic laws are encoded and provide the framework for the judicial system. Women, despite the enormous impact of the war on their lives, are still expected to play a

traditional role. The fact that they now run the rear bases makes little difference to their gender role.

The ambiguities and omissions are equally serious in the political programme, where there is little mention of socialism although egalitarianism seems a much vaunted traditional Sahraoui value.

Also while the Polisario makes no bones about its hatred for King Hassan's regime and exposes at every opportunity its imperialist masters, the SADR defines itself as "non-aligned". Rather than throw its lot with the oppressed Moroccan masses, and look upon the international working class as its natural ally, the Polisario leadership is increasingly adopting the inescapable gobbledegook of the "third world" fraternity devoid of class content and even devoid of anti-imperialist rhetoric.

## Irish solidarity



Labour Committee on Ireland:  
BM Box 5355,  
London WC1N 3XX.

Labour Movement  
Campaign for Palestine  
AGM

Islington Town Hall  
Saturday May 31st  
10.00 - 5.00

For further details  
please contact Secretary

Deadline for resolutions  
May 17th



*Mitterrand: thumbs up for the future?*

## Topsy-turvy world of social democracy

By JIM ROBERTS

# WHY MITTERRAND STILL THINKS HE IS WINNING

MAY 10, 1981 went down in French labour history as a day to remember. Workers, in their thousands, filled the streets to celebrate the election of a socialist government — "their" victory and "their" government.

But for the next 5 years, the French working class saw their hopes gradually dashed, and soon discovered that the government of the left was far from prepared to start shifting the balance of power away from the bosses, let alone challenge capitalism and create a new "social order". Euphoria quickly gave way to bitter disappointment.

The slide towards demoralisation finally came home to roost last March 16. Then the legislative elections for the National Assembly produced a new rearrangement of the French political map. They painted a picture that had already started emerging in the course of every election since 1981: the partial legislative elections

in January 1982, the "cantons" elections in March 1982, the municipal elections in March 1983, the "senate" elections in September 1983, the European elections in June 1984 and the "cantons" elections again in March 1985.

Throughout these elections, two distinct electoral trends gradually took shape. One was very visible, even seemingly irreversible, and concerned the progress of the Communist Party (PCF, Parti Communiste Francais) and the National Front (FN, Front National). The PCF has been on a steady downcurve since 1981 losing votes by the hundreds of thousands, while the National Front was broadly on an upward trajectory, displacing the PCF as the third main political force.

The second trend was more confused and concerned the changing balance of the Socialist Party (PSI, Parti Socialiste) and the forces of the Right. Their evolution throughout the

5 years has been more difficult to predict. The basic characteristics that usually point towards a certain trajectory were in themselves shaky and uncertain.

For example, it became widely accepted that if the forces of the Right were united, they would have enough of a majority to form a government. But while leaders of its main components buried their differences and agreed a hastily-assembled political programme, the coalition that emerged remained fragile and sailed precariously throughout the election campaign risking disintegration even before polling day.

As for the Socialist Party, while disillusioned workers have no confidence in Mitterrand, it still remained to be seen how many of them would vote for him as an instinctual class reaction to block the Right from coming to power.

It is important to recognise and follow through these trends not as a purely academic exercise, but because Mitterrand in his endeavour to change the French political landscape has created conditions for some of these trends and, in some in-

stances, has manipulated them to suit his long-term strategic objectives.

The broad results of the elections had long been predicted, but the final precise allocation of seats was of a paramount importance to the main protagonists. How many points the socialists were able to score above 30% proved a nationwide cliffhanger throughout the evening until the last result came in.

So it is not simply a case of a pendulum motion where Right replaces left as a consequence of Mitterrand's betrayals, although there is some truth in that. The new political landscape is quite different from the last elections where two coalitions faced each other — the union of the left comprising PS and PCF, and the forces of the Right which was also equally divided into RPR and UDF.

Today's fragmented picture is the result of more complex processes — some of them of a distortive nature such as proportional representation (which may eventually be scrapped by the new government).

But the results in themselves were not surprising. Mitterrand's brand of socialism has left millions of workers demoralised, and this was best illustrated in the percentage of abstention, some 21.7%.

The largest section of those voting went for the parties of the Right (UDF & RPR) which took some 42% of the vote with 275 seats between them. With the help of 14 non-aligned right wingers and 2 independents, the new majority stands at 291 seats.

The coalition of the PS and MRG (Mouvement des Radicaux de Gauche) polled some 31.48% which will give them 215 seats. The PCF and the FN obtained 9.81% and 9.72% respectively, which will give them an equal number of seats — 35 each, while the defeat of the PS was plain to see, the festive scenes at the party HQ where faithfuls popped champagne corks hardly made sense. Later, on television, Lionel Hospin, secretary of the PS, explained their exuberant mood:

"Today the Socialist Party has confirmed its steady historical progression. After being an intelligent and imaginative party of opposition from 1971 to 1981, it has become after the 1981 victory a party of government. After 5 years and facing a very hard fight, it has realised the highest poll since its foundation in 1905 — with the exception of the 1981 vote which was more of a referendum to confirm Mitterrand's presidency. (...) The PS is now the first political force in this country, its parliamentary



Right wing leaders Lecannet and D'Estaing

group the biggest in the National Assembly. The coalition of the Right has not achieved its objective. Its majority remains fragile and its leaders divided. The PCF is in decline, victim of its divisive policies. The FN is not doing as well as in the last European elections.

For 5 years, we have served the country well (...) The economy is in progress, social peace is back again. French people have already recognised this and we must prepare for the future..."

This speech was no meaningless demagogic swagger of a defeated politician. What Hospin emphasised constituted the main lines of the Socialists' central strategy since the abandonment of the "Union of the Left" programme in 1982 and the U-turn to austerity policies.

The elections of the PS-PCF government in 1981 was the culmination of a long process of radicalisation which started in May 1968. A few years later, Mitterrand undertook to build a mass Socialist Party. Central to his project was a tactical alliance with the Communist Party (PCF)

which until then had paraded as the mass party of the working class.

The alliance suffered ups and downs as the two partners bickered on questions of programme, and political differences, culminating in a formal break in 1977. Mitterrand cleverly used the partnership to beef up his credibility and poach members and voters from the PCF. Workers rightly saw the "Union of the Left" as the only way to break 20 years of rightwing governments, and they cautiously pressed General Secretary Georges Marchais and other leaders of the PCF to form a united front of workers' organisations against the capitalist class. Marchais was definitely compromised. He became the junior partner in a non-existent alliance dominated by Mitterrand, and they ended up supporting each other in the 1981 elections.

Soon after, Marchais was further ensnared by Mitterrand who made him a partner in government by appointing four Communist ministers. As soon as Mitterrand came to power, it became clear that he had no intention of carrying out his full programme. Despite a comfortable working majority, he started to soft-pedal even before the weak and divided parties of the capitalist class began to reconstruct their forces.

The cornerstone of Mitterrand's programme was his handling of the economy. And it was here that the expectation of the working class was at its highest. His approach seemed simple and achievable even in capitalist terms. Reflate the economy and satisfy the basic economic demands of workers. For this he proposed firstly to increase consumption in order to stimulate production; once this was done it would naturally reduce unemployment. Finally as the economy reached full productive capacity, developing the nationalised sector would ensure a bigger share of state control on the economy as a whole.

While the theories looked neat, the reality was something completely different. In fact Mitterrand stumbled at the first hurdle. Despite promises to increase the minimum legal wage (SMIC) by 30%, as part of his efforts to stimulate the economy and to make up the workers' loss of purchasing power since 1968, he could only manage a 10% increase. His plans for a strong public sector were modified. Subsidiaries of some of the giant enterprises listed for nationalisation were left in private hands. Generous over-compensation was paid to small shareholders in those state takeovers. Managing directors of the newly na-



French unions under the hammer from Mitterrand's austerity measures.

tionalised giants (Rhone-Poulenc, PUK, CGE, St Gobain, Thomson) were picked from the ranks of the CNPF (equivalent of the CBI) and asked to draw up production plans "working towards maximum economic efficiency through the continual improvement of competitiveness".

While the public sector grew in size, workers' conditions and their relationship with their management were no different from before. Rather than using the nationalised sector to reorganise the economy for the benefit of the working class and achieve full employment Mitterrand chose other means to tinker with the system. Despite hand outs of billions of francs to capitalists through rebates, direct grants and tax exemptions, only 17,000 jobs were created in one year. Unemployment climbed to 2 million, an increase of 350,000 in 1981. By the end of the 5-year term it topped the 3 million mark.

The few measures in favour of workers, such as the 39 hour week, were not decisively imposed by the government. It was left to workers to fight it out with their bosses: more than 650 firms were affected, and several hundred thousand workers struck at one time or another.

After one year in office, the

economic strategy was in tatters. Stuck between a combative working class demanding more concessions and a ruling class still divided but unwilling to participate in the economic plans, Mitterrand and his prime minister Mauroy soon faced a huge deficit in the balance of payments and a jump in inflation.

Their response was predictable: deflation, salary freeze, contraction of the economy, and redundancies in the state sector. "Austerity" became a key word in every speech. For workers it meant hardship and misery. For the capitalist class, it meant bigger profits and a new confidence. In fact the bosses never needed to threaten a frontal attack to defeat Mitterrand. He ran out of steam and reversed without being provoked.

For French workers, there was no way out. The Communist Party was too compromised to offer any alternative. By the time its ministers left the government in 1984, it was too late and besides, the largest trade union confederation, the PCF-led CGT, controlled the most militant sectors and refused to give any lead for a fightback.

Mitterrand understood, when making his U-turn, that he would ultimately lose the confidence of the working class, so he started prepar-

ing for the next elections.

There are some conspiracy theorists who seem fond of painting Mitterrand as a Machiavellian shadowy figure hatching complex plots from dark corners of the Elysée palace. In reality, in the absence of any vigorous opposition within his party (the one time "left" ginger group CERES having shifted to the right and the left faction PSU having lost much of its impact) Mitterrand confidently carried the majority of his party behind him.

His strategy is a well worn panacea of many a cross-class popular front government. Mitterrand realised that an electoral conjuncture similar to the 1981 period was unlikely to occur again. His only chance to keep the PS in power was to break up the bipolarisation of French politics.

His early objective of marginalising the PCF was already reaping substantial dividends as the Communist Party faded away. His next objective was to try and influence the division of the Right. For this, he introduced proportional representation which favoured the rise of the National Front, outflanking the traditional right. This was sufficient to weaken the comeback by the Right on March 16 — in fact their absolute majority is of 2 seats only.

As a result, Mitterrand found

himself in a more powerful position than anticipated. He asked Jacques Chirac, Mayor of Paris and leader of the RPR, to form a government.

As President Mitterrand now feels in a much more comfortable position to use his power of veto — which is part of his presidential prerogative but is still an untested grey area of the constitution of the Fifth Republic — to block any legislation that he deems unacceptable.

No wonder the socialist Party's HQ was in an ebullient mood as significant parts of these objectives were fulfilled.

The PCF was the big loser, having achieved its lowest poll since 1932. Compared to the heyday of the Resistance, when the Communist Party used to poll 5.5 million votes (28.6%) and paraded 166 deputies, the Party has slumped forty years later to become the fourth if not the fifth ranking political force in the country. This poor performance will prove another historical test for the party.

Already several prominent dissenters are calling the leadership to account. Pierre Juquin, Central Committee member, has made a public call similar to Henri Fizeau in 1984. The leadership so far has refused to take up any of the criticism. *L'humanité* has blacked out any reference to the internal turmoil and blindly pressed on with well-worn slogans such as "the socialists have opened the door for the Right."

As the crisis deepens, the PCF leadership does not seem prepared to make the slightest concession. Instead they dismissed the call for a special congress as futile and declared that "the only correct way forward was to implement the slogan of the XXVth Congress, 'let's organise and take action'."

Just to rub salt in the wounds, the PCF ended neck and neck with the National Front, the big newcomers to the French Assembly. From one seat, the FN jumped to 35 and were able for the first time to form a parliamentary group.

While some analysts tend to dismiss these fascists as an inflated phenomenon brought about by the newly-introduced proportional representation, the score they realised in the South of the country is a reminder they are here to stay — 25% in Perpignan, 22.5% in Marseilles. As long ago as the last European elections they put to the test for the first time their shiny new electoral machine covering all constituencies. They have now built a small but significant base and obvious business



*Fascist leader Le Pen, winning business backing.*

backing that will not dissipate overnight even if proportional representation is abolished.

Unlike their British counterparts, they have projected successfully a respectable image and with a judicious programme on law and order and anti-immigration have captured valuable terrain from the traditional Right.

It is for this reason, that Jacques Chirac, leader of the RPR, has repeatedly denounced them as racists and ruled out any co-operation, refusing to include them in his coalition. This may not be a final decision. Jean-Marie Le Pen, leader of the FN, has exposed instances where local RPR candidates have made pacts with the FN. In the Corsican Regional Assembly, the RPR and the FN have emerged as natural allies and have put together a working majority. This is not an isolated case and it is probable that in the long run Chirac will have to reconsider co-operating with the FN if he ever needs to strengthen his majority.

On the whole, the Right is plagued by several problems. Having come back to power with a vengeance, its room for manoeuvre is tighter than its leaders had hoped for.

● Firstly the National Front is squeezing their support on the right. Having exploited to the full the feeling of insecurity of sections of the middle and working class on the question of law and order, and played up to their jingoistic instincts on the question of immigration, the FN has colonised, at least for the time

being, a good proportion of their electorate.

● Secondly, the coalition of the parties of the right is unavoidably unstable, and may not last long. This is due to the diversity of the ideological and historical traditions of its components. Chirac's RPR sees itself as a true inheritor of Gaullism. The leadership of the other big formation, the UDF, is strongly contested by its 3 biggest components, the CDS, the Republican Party and the Radical Party.

To complicate things, strong personalities have their own axes to grind, and among the ex-megastars — Giscard d'Estaing, Raymond Barre, Jean Lecanuet, etc. — it is still too early to predict who will emerge as a winner. What unites them is their hatred of the working class and their determination to reverse any of the gains, however puny, that have been achieved during the last 5 years.

While all the contenders are biding their time, Chirac will use his headstart to put himself in the best possible position to take up Mitterrand at the presidential election in 2 years' time. So, for this reason, it is still unclear how Chirac is going to square up to Mitterrand. What has been coined the "cohabitation" — a unique situation in the history of the fifth Republic — has proved so far smooth and unproblematic.

After five years of "good housekeeping" at the expense of the working class, Mitterrand has served the bourgeoisie all too well — the economy is more stable, profits are not unhealthy and even a beginning of real growth is on the horizon.

Chirac is aware that to implement the economic programme of the platform of the Right would alter what is being achieved and might spoil unnecessarily any chance of him gradually gaining an edge over Mitterrand — his only chance of becoming President in two years' time.

This is what many analysts see as the "success" of Mitterrand. For workers it is far from a success story. It is a feeling of betrayal and demoralisation: 3 million unemployed, decimation of whole industries, reduction in the standard of living, fascists in parliament. This is the France of Mitterrand. It sums up the limitation of social democracy in crisis-ridden capitalism.

Incapable of delivering any more concessions to the working class, it will continue to prey on workers through coalitionism or electoral manoeuvres for the sole purpose of surviving to save the skin of the most wretched capitalism.



# Kinnock's purge comes adrift

## Fight back against the witch-hunt!

By PETE FIRMIN

THE intentions of Kinnock and the Labour right to expel leading *Militant* supporters in Liverpool and ensure a more compliant Labour Group is elected floundered on March 26.

Following a court ruling the previous day that those who had conducted the inquiry into Liverpool District Labour Party could not participate in the National Executive Committee hearing to decide on disciplinary action, 7 NEC members opposed to the witch-hunt walked out, making the meeting inquorate and unable to proceed. The next day, Tony Mulhearn, president of Liverpool DLP and one of the 12 up for expulsion, was elected chair of the "temporary co-ordinating committee" set up by the NEC to conduct selections and the election campaign in place of the suspended DLP. The right's intention of controlling the Party in Liverpool came apart because the left on the NEC refused to sit back and allow the

witch-hunt to go ahead with them making up the numbers.

Whitty and Kinnock then had to set up another NEC to change standing orders so they could get through the expulsions they want, and they may even abolish the "temporary co-ordinating committee" (though it may be too late for this given the local elections on May 8).

Some of the fury of the NEC Right has now turned on the 7 who spoil their plans and they clearly need to be defended against a backlash from those who want expulsions, particularly in the NEC elections at this year's Party Conference. Blunkett and the Tribune Group have now clearly shown their colours in denouncing the 7.

However, though these events have thrown a spanner into the machinery of the witch-hunt, they have certainly not stopped it. Whatever delay may arise, Kinnock is more determined than ever to expel leading *Militant* supporters and the expulsion of socialists (of various different affiliations) is gathering pace around the country. Court injunctions



challenging undemocratic procedure will only make the right more careful to do things properly, and already documents are being circulated outlining the correct procedure for expelling.

For socialists it can only be wrong to involve the courts in the internal life of the labour movement, just as we do not accept the right of the state and the courts to determine how the unions must function. The fact that the NEC's intended procedure was so glaringly undemocratic that even the High Court declared it so is besides the point — what if it had not, would it still be a victory? The fact that consistent socialists have fought for democratic reform in the Unions does not mean we welcome even those few aspects of the Tories' anti-Union laws which do increase democracy. As a principle we oppose the involvement of the capitalist state and its courts in the internal life of the labour movement.

As with Union reform, the witch-



hunt can only ultimately be beaten by a serious and consistent campaign within the movement taking up the arguments and winning support for the right of tendencies to organise. *Militant* have not only by and large substituted court action for such a campaign but what campaigning they have carried out have largely consisted of *Militant* rallies and a refusal to work with other forces opposed to the witch-hunt who may be critical of their policies.

Such a campaign is being built by the left opposed to the witch-hunt through Labour Left Co-ordination and its publication *Witch-hunt News* and around the call by Hackney North and Stoke Newington CLP for a conference against the witch-hunt. This has now been called for June 21 and sponsorship letters are being sent out. Support for this conference and against the witch-hunt needs to be argued and built for in CLPs, Trade Unions and other affiliated organisations around the country. While the conference will be largely CLP-based because at the end of the day CLPs can refuse to carry out expulsions decreed by the NEC (as Islington South has done in the case of Peter Taafe), it is essential to build within the Unions if there is to be a chance of defeating the witch-hunt, remembering also that many expulsions are being carried out by right wing constituencies on their own initiative. The determination of the right is shown by the fact that Stevenage CLP, which has only so far been prevented from expelling 10 *Militant* supporters by a court injunction, recently passed a motion of confidence in its Prospective Parliamentary Candidate, Malcolm Withers, who is crossing the Wapping picket line to work as a journalist on the *Sun* at the same time as beginning fresh expulsion procedures. Obviously a conference alone will not beat back the witch-hunt, and *Socialist Viewpoint* supporters will be arguing for an ongoing campaign from the conference.

To those in doubt about the nature of the enquiry and hearings — supposedly into unconstitutional behaviour, corruption and even criminal offences by the Liverpool DLP — things should now be clearer. Of course, Kinnock and the right declared even before the enquiry had heard any evidence that it would result in expulsions and those who supported the enquiry while supposedly opposing a witch hunt were at best naïve, at worst trying to be too clever by half.



Some of the "charges" brought against the DLP are laughable, such as the complaint that it discussed international issues like South Africa and Nicaragua. These are supposedly not within the remit of a DLP, yet clearly are of concern to Party members and have been discussed by many DLPs around the country. Some charges are of a more fundamental political nature. Liverpool DLP is said to have committed the "crime" of deciding not just on broad policy for the City Labour Group but on detailed tactical questions. This is certainly not within the remit of DLPs as determined by the NEC, but is something that many DLPs (and local Government Committees in London) have spent years fighting for. Clearly the right recognise the danger involved for them if they are made accountable to the Party rather than acting as free agents. Other charges relate mainly to the conduct of DLP meetings. The majority report complains of the executive taking decisions and then bringing them back for ratification and of there being "unconstitutional" aggregate meetings. Yet over the period concerned Liverpool City Council was involved in a major battle with the government over ratecapping and was attempting to build mass support for this. The normal complaint is that the left control small meetings because of general apathy, here the complaint is that meetings were too large. Council Unions' right to nominate for job vacancies is supposed to have led to a high proportion of *Militant* supporters being employed. Unions should have control over recruitment and Thatcher has shown the importance of political appointments. The GLC made hundreds but that was never challenged by the NEC.

It is more than likely that there is some substance to some of the findings, though none would justify expulsion. But although the whole of the DLP Executive is criticised, only *Militant* supporters on the EC are to be disciplined. Other DLP officers are somehow entirely blameless. If "corruption" were the issue (and the enquiry team to their obvious disappointment have not produced any evidence of any) then what of those right wing councils up and down the country where real corruption has been rife for years? If it is a matter of "procedures" then charges cannot be imposed from outside but have to be con democratically.

The only real reason for the enquiry was as a tool for Kinnock to con sections of the "cuddly left" who formally oppose witch-hunts into believing that *Militant* supporters were to be expelled not for their political views but for certain crimes. Their real crime as far as Kinnock was concerned was that they, unlike him, were prepared to do battle with this government in the class struggle and criticised him for refusing to support them. He sees any left opposition to his watering-down of Labour's policies as a threat and hoped to use the confusion sown by their disastrous issuing of redundancy notices as cover for carrying out a purge.

For Kinnock it never mattered that his assault on Liverpool Labour Party almost certainly means loss of control of the council in one of Britain's most deprived cities (remember how he accuses the left of not wanting to win the election?). What matters to him is selling the image of a respectable alternative party of capitalism to the media.

# "Living Doll": By Winston Churchill & the Straight Ones

THE vultures of the "popular press" cast around for front page copy:

**VICARAGE RAPE HORROR!  
SCANDAL OF OUR ABUSED CHILDREN!  
INCREASE IN VIOLENT CRIME!  
GAY PLAGUE HITS EDINBURGH!**

It all makes money for the proprietors, puts fear into readers' hearts and sensationalises problems without bothering to educate about the real extent of the problem or ways of preventing them. Because, of course, the interest is in the shock horror, is salacious, sexist and hypocritical.

You turn the page and there's your friendly page three girl to brighten and reassure you that most of us are normal, heterosexual and cuddly (as Douglas Hogg said of page 3 nudes in Parliament recently).

But behind the lurid headlines are real problems, which originate in our society, however complex the process is, and which do have something to do with the media. The major issue is in fact that of violence against women.

No one knows the true incidence of violent assaults. Victims often fear to tell anyone, let alone report to the police. Police fail to record many incidents that are reported and then fail to arrest. So it is not possible to claim, as many do, that there is a rising tide of violence.

It may be that as a result of the work of Rape Crisis centres, Women's Aid refuges and incest survivors groups we are making it possible for women and children to talk of their experiences and consider officially reporting them to the police. In terms of figures currently available, we know that wife assault is the second most common form of violent crime (25% of crimes noted by the police) after that of violence between men. Since many women never report domestic violence (and when they do are not taken seriously), it is in fact likely that male violence against women in their home is the most common violent crime. This type of abuse is also likely to persist rather than be a one-off attack, like an attack in the street.

If you then look at domestic assaults as a whole, 75% are violent

assaults by men against their female partner, with 10% being those of parent against child.

Where sexual offences are concerned, offenders are overwhelmingly male (99:1) and victims overwhelmingly female (85:15). Sexual abuse often begins very early in a child's life and is almost always by a trusted male member of the family. Kinsey (1953) found that 25% of their sample of American women were sexually assaulted as children.

In this country the figures for incest are not known but are likely to be about 6% — and yet only a minute fraction of offenders are prosecuted. Recent NSPCC publicity has drawn attention to an issue which Rape Crisis workers were acutely aware of for many years, and may have opened up the issue for more help to be made available in schools so that children know they can admit the problem and assert their rights to control of their bodies.

The issue which the popular press ignores, however, is the serious and persistent, overwhelming fact that violence is male/female, and that the vast majority of victims are women.

Rape cases receive more salacious publicity, but even then the size of the problem is hidden. Recent



**SUE ARNALL takes a critical look at the Clare Short proposals to outlaw Page 3 nudes, and the Winston Churchill Bill, and questions whether state censorship can curb violence against women.**

research suggests that 75% of rape victims do not go to the police (London Rape Crisis Centre 1982) and those who do experience interviews and medical examinations which serve to increase the trauma. Publicity of such cases seems to pronounce a guilty verdict on the victim rather than the rapist, and the cumulative effect on other women is to increase our fear of being out at night and so to further humiliate all women.

So this gets me to the current spate of dramatic stories, to their significance for us, and their use by the politicians. Tebbit said this week that freedom came through ownership, security, established by law and order and family stability. The inner city crisis is the "poisoned legacy of the permissive society". Legislation on capital punishment, homosexuality, abortion and censorship and divorce... "suggest there is no need for restraint at all."

The Tory answer to violence against women and children, then, is to get back in your houses (where the vast amount of abuse occurs) and wait. We must uphold the traditional roles of men and women, and the power relationships that go with them.

Women in the women's movement

maintain that this is precisely where the problem lies. That the sex-role conditioning experienced from childhood produces women who feel powerless, who must be beautiful, submissive and caring if they are to succeed as women. That boys are conversely to be brave, assertive, dominant, and control their domestic sphere if nothing else.

We consider these stereotyped behaviours to be convenient for a capitalist society (so do the Tories!) in that they produce a docile workforce and domestic servicing of that workforce. We also see the media as contributing to this traditional set-up, and we use the Page 3 pin-ups as examples of the everyday degradation of women into commodities to be used to sell papers and other goods. "Cuddly" they may be to some MPs, but offensive to us and dangerous in their impact on the consciousness of girls, boys, men and women.

Clare Short made all these points when she introduced her ten minute bill which would ban nude pictures from newspapers if they degraded women.

The effect of Churchill's Obscene Publications (Protection of Children, Amendment) Act would be quite different. He originally intended it to be a simple measure to remove pornographic magazines from easily accessible racks in newsagents premises. Most of us would probably like to see that achieved, although not necessarily by law. But what then happened was that Churchill changed the Bill to include "Broadcasting", and a "laundry list" of items which would definitely be banned.

It seems that this list has since been withdrawn, but it is in fact a giveaway of the real intentions of Churchill and his mates. The images of vicious cruelty which he seeks to ban are not, it seems, the everyday screening of "The A-team", or "The Professionals", which probably do a lot to create in boys the idea that "real men" treat women rough: the programmes which would suffer are such as the Horizon programme to go out on Channel 4 which tried specifically to explain what were safe sexual practices if you want to avoid AIDS.

As with other such censorship, there is a serious probability that the sexual acts which would be banned from the screen are not gang rapes by heterosexuals, but serious plays and documentaries which present gay sexuality as a valid expression of human feelings. In the Parliamentary debate, two plays in particular were singled out by Tories as examples of "depravity": both were of gay love.

The Churchill laundry list contained no mention of women or rape, but concentrated on genitalia, the anus and masturbation. So the Bill's intention is to attack Gay men and Lesbians (as if they weren't already invisible in the media) and return us to

the safe haven of monogamous heterosexual sex. Tell that to the women in the women's aid refuges! They fear not gay men, but those macho rambos who think they have some right to control their lives.

In the end the answer has been to rely on the self-activity of women, in setting up our refuges and rape crisis groups, in harassing the porno merchants on the street and in their shops, and in asking that our fellow trade union members will support us in banning pin-ups at work and in union publications. How is the Yorkshire Miner these days on pin-ups? Women have to refuse to feel powerless and to act to change the way we are portrayed in the media too.

Clare Short has done a good job in raising the consciousness of parliament about the real sexism in the media, but I doubt if censorship is the answer. We have to be active in our refusal to be portrayed as passive objects.

The campaign for Press and Broadcasting Freedom meets on the third Wednesday of each month, c/o NALGO, 1 Mabledon Place, London WC1. The Society for Education in Film and Television can be contacted at 29 Old Compton Street, London W1.

The statistics came mostly from the Open University Second Level Course 'The Changing Experience of Women'.

Review By TONY RICHARDS

# 'REVOLUTION'

Directed by Hugh Hudson

**THIS is a film that starts off with a good idea and from there goes completely wrong.**

It was one of the three big budget films made by Goldcrest (the main centre of the British film industry) and on which it risked everything.

The idea was to look at the lives of one man and his son and show the effects on them of the American War of Independence.

Through the microcosm of these two characters was to be displayed the meaning of that revolution.

Al Pacino plays Tom, who starts off wanting to keep out of things, and runs into conflict with his revolutionary son.

But one of the problems is the stars. In order to get big box office it has big stars. Al Pacino performs all right as Tom; his acting of his relationship with his son would bring tears to anyone's eyes.

But Nastassia Kinski comes over as a completely unbelievable person playing a completely unbelievable part. Having glimpsed Tom once, she acts from thereon in as though she is a long lost friend. The basis of their relationship, which is central to the film, is never built up.

In a way, part of this is not her fault. Part of it is what I can only assume is the attempted realism. The sets are good, as are the battle scenes, but there seems to be an attempt to reproduce the method of speaking of the period.

This is always difficult with period films. Do you do it à la "Flintstones", or if otherwise do you use subtitles? This film does not solve the problem.

Much of it is incomprehensible, using an accent which seems to be a cross between a Gorilla and Edward

G. Robinson. Other parts are quite clear.

The film shows very well the brutality of the British army — one example being the use of Patriots as substitute "foxes" in the hunt. This part has been condemned by the capitalist media, but should go down well on the Falls Road.

The role of businessmen selling food to the British, and profiting from the war, is also well shown. Tom ends up fighting the war but not even getting the land he was promised — because speculators have bought it all up.

The cry of the blacks at the end, that they want their freedom too, shows the director was trying to make serious points.

Women are treated weakly, probably mainly because of the flatness of the Kinski character. The one woman who seems interesting (played by Annie Lennox) is on screen for only a few minutes.

Young people are shown to be well to the fore, as they are in all revolutions. "Boy soldiers" criticised by today's US imperialism for their role in revolutions all over the world were a major factor in the struggle for American independence.

*Revolution* was panned by the critics, many of them attacking it for the wrong reasons, such as its exposure of the role of British imperialism. The film doesn't show the political or military leaders. It is not a detailed history.

What is good about the film is finally completely ruined by the ending. The speech at the end is so ludicrously presented that it sounds like something out of Rambo. Everybody in the cinema I was in just laughed.

What a pity!

## Which way for EETPU militants?

THE possibility of the EETPU being expelled from the TUC provoked a debate among activists about our attitude towards the Union if this happened. This debate has now been rendered academic by the weakness of the TUC, but it did reveal fundamental differences in priorities and attitudes towards the EETPU.

It also revealed a basic political mistake made by the majority of "left" Trade Unionists, a refusal to learn from experience, and a possible cause of the chronic weakness of British Trade Unions today.

Many activists supported staying in the EETPU in the belief that it was important to change that individual Union, or that it was important to keep together the activists who had worked together in the Union. The first was the usual idea of getting a "left" General Secretary elected and a few "left" officials and expecting the membership to tag along behind.

The fact that this was exactly the sort of policy that put the Union in the control of a group of Stalinists before (and the fact that Eric Hammond himself was originally elected to the Executive on a "left" ticket) is ignored.

Supporters of this idea also refuse to look in a critical manner at Unions where this approach has led to a "left" executive; they prefer the rhetoric to the reality. They applaud Ron Todd's fighting speeches at the TUC conference, and forget it was TGWU members who broke the Miners' picket lines, and are now doing the same to the print workers. They even refuse to criticise the Press branch of the EETPU for crossing News International picket lines in Bouverie St and Grays Inn Road because the Press branch leadership have "left" credentials.

The time when reformist tactics could work in the Trade Union movement was probably over long before 1926. People who persist in devoting time and energy to these tactics are ignoring the whole history of capitulation and sell outs by Trade Union bureaucracies.

The British working class has lost all faith in its trade unions' ability to deliver even their immediate demands, let alone secure a better



TUC sold out miners.

future. This is demonstrated in attitudes all too familiar to stewards; attitudes that say at best "Unions aren't much good but they are better than nothing" and at worst "I won't join — they have never done anything for me".

The workers' distrust of union bureaucracies is now so rooted in the experience of the class that it is insurmountable. The futility of taking positions in the bureaucracy, for anything other than propaganda motives, was clearly demonstrated during the Miners' strike.

Scargill and his few real allies were forced into fatal concessions early on, such as the ending of mass picketing, that destroyed any real hope of victory. To make absolutely sure that the core of fighting leadership in the NUM were smashed as an effective force, the rest of the union bureaucracies combined with the state to defeat them, or in the case of a few "left" unions stood by and did nothing.

The purpose of working in Trade Unions is not to take over and adapt the existing structures but to smash them and free workers from their control.

Every activist should be working to create an independent rank and file organisations, under the direct control of the workers, an organisation capable of expressing their demands and showing it is prepared to fight with them to achieve those demands.

Which Union individuals in that organisations nominally belong to should, in most cases, be immaterial.

The trade based nature of British Trade Unions demands an organisation that can function independently, across trade and union boundaries. Any attempt to restrict an organisation to one Union

or Craft, except where there is only one Union in an industry, a very rare thing in this country, effectively ties the organisation to that Union's bureaucracy.

Any organisation that is not capable of functioning independently of any Union Bureaucracy, or is not being built for that express purpose, is already hopelessly reformist and virtually useless.

The attitude of the SWP to this question was very strange; they supported staying in the EETPU on the grounds that there were a lot of "good socialists" in the Union and they should not be abandoned. It didn't matter to them that those in favour of staying in were taking a reformist line; we were all encouraged to stay in and work with them to "save the EETPU".

It seems to me a very strange perspective that writes off the whole Labour Party as reformist and beyond redemption, and at the same time supports reformist elements within the most reactionary trade union. It's a bit like dumping the Labour Party as useless and joining the SDP.

**EETPU member  
South London**

● Socialist Viewpoint does not share this reader's approach to the fight for leadership inside the existing trade union movement. While we favour the regroupment and organisation of rank and file shop floor militants on a class struggle basis in opposition to the bureaucratic leaderships, it is vital that this fight is also taken into the branches and other official structures of the unions.

If this is not done, then the whole official machinery remains at the unchallenged disposal of the right wing and their hangers-on for the crushing of militant struggles, while rank and file workers fail to learn ways of fighting the various layers of bureaucracy, and cut themselves off from the fight to mobilise the broader membership.

Our proposal is for the EETPU to be expelled from the TUC and stripped of the protection of the Bridlington agreements, while other unions be urged to mount "poaching" exercises in each industrial sector.

We welcome further debate on these issues and urge our readers in the unions to let us know their views.

Editor

# WRP: time to dust off the treasures!

SIX months after the trauma of expelling their former General Secretary for a horrendous record of violence, rape and corruption, the members of the Workers Revolutionary Party have yet to adopt a fresh perspective on the British and international class struggle — though debate flourishes on a range of issues.

This is one of a series of discussion articles submitted by *Socialist Viewpoint* supporters who were expelled from the WRP by Healy in 1974, seeking to draw out lessons of the latest split, and suggesting a political agenda for the way ahead.

"TREASURES coated in dust." That was how WRP Central Committee member Richard Goldstein referred to the history of the Trotskyist movement as he introduced a Conway Hall meeting entitled "Tasks of the Fourth International".

Many militants in the WRP and elsewhere would query whether the coating is not in fact rather thicker, stickier, and more foul-smelling than "dust". But there is no doubt that one of the key tasks of the WRP — and other forces seeking a way forward in the fight for Trotskyist politics — is to take a serious and constructive attitude to the experiences of the past.

Until recently most WRP thinking on the history of the Trotskyist movement had been reduced to the arrogant presumption that they alone (and particularly their now expelled and disgraced leader Gerry Healy) represented the "continuity" of the

By JOHN LISTER

fight for Trotskyist orthodoxy against "Pabloism".

Under the code word "Pabloism" were summed up the politics of tail-ending "left" Stalinist currents, opportunist dissolution of Trotskyist forces into mass Communist Parties, and, later, political adaptation to petty bourgeois nationalist leaderships, most significantly in Cuba and Algeria.

Now, of course, WRP members have to face up to the bureaucratic political degeneration of their own leadership which led them ever further and faster down the road of political capitulation to anti-communist bourgeois and petty bourgeois leaderships in the Middle East, the Stalinist bureaucracy in Vietnam, and even sections of the labour bureaucracy in Britain. The political record of the WRP under Healy exhibits all of the opportunism of Pablo who in the early 1950s openly boasted of "Junking the old Trotskyism".

The struggle of WRP members now to find their bearings after the expulsion of Healy has been complicated by the divided nature of the world Trotskyist movement. Since the major split of 1951-53 left a string of unanswered questions on the analysis of post-war Stalinism and set a new, deplorable "norm" of premature splits as a substitute for political struggle in a democratic centralist framework, each major world event has simply added to the prevailing political confusion and fragmentation.

There are no shortages of pretenders to the title of "sole continuity" of Trotskyist orthodoxy. Best known of these is Pierre Lambert's Parti Communiste Internationale in France and its international hangers-on. The PCI offers the most striking echo of Healy's repressive internal regime, swaggering self-

proclamation, theoretical bankruptcy and opportunist adaptation (in Lambert's case to social democracy and the reactionary Force Ouvrière union bureaucracy).

Other, smaller groups have emerged as a result of a succession of splits in the larger organisations: some, like the Spartacists, have evolved in their own curious fashion into bureaucratic cult groupings around their founder gurus.

Others, from outside the Trotskyist tradition altogether, have from time to time emerged and stridently proclaimed themselves to be the sole world arbiters of Trotskyist "orthodoxy". One such grouping is Workers Power in Britain, which breezily writes off the entire history of struggle of the Trotskyist movement since the war, and — from all the authority of a propaganda group with no record of practical work, and



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## Importance of learning from post war struggles

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which itself broke from state capitalism only six years ago, now presumes to brand every current but themselves as "centrist".

To fall into this school of politics would be a disaster for the WRP: it would do nothing to discard the sectarian method of Healy in relating to the British workers' movement or to the international forces which look to the Trotskyist programme.

Unfortunately it is not only Workers Power which has been peddling a wholly negative view on the post-war history of the Trotskyist movement. A similar point of view is contained in the lengthy document by Mike Banda "Twenty Seven Reasons (why the International Committee should be buried forthwith and the Fourth International built)". It is echoed by other WRP members. It is an understandable reaction to the skeletons that have tumbled out of the WRP's cupboards since Healy's expulsion — but it is one which leads nowhere.

Unless we seek to analyse and explore the lessons of history from the standpoint of actively developing a movement in the working class today, it has no value. And while any fool



Lessons of the defeat of failed Russian 1905 revolution helped Lenin and Trotsky prepare for 1917.

with the benefit of hindsight can compile a catalogue of past errors and urge they not be repeated, the task is to develop a leadership and a programme capable of taking forward the struggles of today's labour movement.

From this starting point, the unsuccessful, defeated or betrayed struggles, the false starts and mistaken analysis of various groupings are not simply scrap material for the dustbin of history but part of the living experience which must be the basis to *strengthen and develop the programme and analysis of Marxists today.*

The question which sectarian sceptics such as Workers Power must confront is: given the obvious weakness of failures of the Trotskyist movement, *would the workers' movement now be better off if the various currents had not existed?* If forces regarding themselves as Trotskyists had not made the sacrifices, taken the risks, tried to shape history, fought for influence in the mass movement — and made their mistakes? Would Marxists be wiser now — or more ignorant? Would there be more Marxists — or fewer? Would we be better placed to give leadership in the unions, the labour movement generally or the struggles of the oppressed?

To ask the question is to answer it. Obviously the struggles waged by Trotskyists have been the only way Trotskyism could have stayed alive except in armchair circles of abstract academics and sectarian wranglers.

Nor is it the case that the existence of Trotskyism can be said to have stunted the growth of any more healthy, spontaneous revolutionary currents in the workers' movement. Trotskyist activity may have missed opportunities, tail-ended existing leaderships, adapted to mass moods, or (all too often) stood aside from necessary struggles, but its weaknesses are not by any means all self imposed: they have reflected the

real material problems of developing a mass revolutionary break from existing leaderships under the pressures of imperialist ideology, reformism, Stalinism and nationalism.

We are not the first generation to encounter this kind of problem. Marx and Engels battled much of their political lives as a tiny minority of conscious revolutionaries in the very infancy of any independent labour movement. They were forced to draw their lessons not from unbroken victories but from the mixed and changing fortunes of the Chartist movement, the early British unions, the Fenian struggle, early struggles for bourgeois democracy and national liberation in Europe, and the Paris Commune.

They were forced to polemicise at length with now forgotten political opponents whose unfamiliar names today send readers skipping to the glossary: but from these actual struggles for a grasp of the class struggle, from their limited interventions into the events of the day, and from the experiences of the struggles that failed they developed the basic elements of the politics we fight for today — including the outlines of the theory of permanent revolution; the concept of the dictatorship of the proletariat; the understanding of the bourgeois state; the principle of internationalism.

Lenin, too, developed much of the political strength which enabled the Bolsheviks to take power from a serious appraisal of the experience, and practice of the existing Marxist movement in its various forms — not least the defeats and betrayals it suffered. Lenin's insistence upon the need to *smash* the capitalist state machinery and replace it with a workers' state — a dictatorship of the proletariat — arose from his renewed study of the defeated Paris Commune. The study of the failed Revolution of 1905 brought forward the importance of the soviet as the independent organ of workers' power in challenging the state. It also trig-



Soviet troops raise the Red Flag over the Reichstag at the end of World War 2: the post-war period demands a development of the Trotskyist programme of 1938.

gered Trotsky's reappraisal of the relationship between the democratic and the socialist revolution, which was to develop well beyond Marx's and Engels' early outlines to map out the theory of permanent revolution.

After 1917, the fight against the degeneration of the Russian Communist Party under Stalin quite obviously formed the cornerstone of the Trotskyist struggle to take forward the traditions of methods of Bolshevism. But the lessons of the major world events like the British General Strike of 1926 and the Chinese revolution were also used, not simply to indict the Stalinists but to strengthen the programme and perspective put forward by the Left Opposition. The developing struggles against social democracy and Popular Frontism in the 1930s ran alongside Trotsky's exposure of sectarianism in the fight to win wavering centrist forces over to the side of consistent revolutionary politics and the Fourth International.

The 1938 "Transitional Programme" itself was written as a conscious alternative to the minimum, reformist programme adopted by social democracy and by Communist Parties following the Popular Front line. It is an attempt to draw out and systematise the lessons of the gains and setbacks in the whole period of class struggle from 1917 onwards.

While the basic political premises of that programme have been shown to remain valid in the 48 years since it was written, a whole wealth of new experiences of objective changes mean it is no longer adequate as a guide to action for today's Marxists.

The different responses to the post-war situation by the various sections of the Trotskyist movement — and their political and organisational consequences when implemented — must be a central feature of any serious attempt to analyse the new situation. By analysing their experiences we can come closer to understanding the strengths and weaknesses of their political method — and to elaborating a programme which incorporates the lessons into an active orientation in today's labour movement.

There were two main lines of development: both ran into major problems.

On the one hand those like Pablo who were bowled over by their impressions of the "new reality" of the post-war situation, and adapted to what appeared on the surface to be radical changes in the role of Stalinist currents and leaderships, opted to "junk the old Trotskyism" and embark with never a backward glance on a succession of opportunist adventures.

On the other, the self-styled "orthodox" opposition — epitomised by the post 1953 International Committee — clung tenaciously to a wooden dogmatism which refused to make an objective assessment of what was new

in the situation since 1938, and laboured to "explain" all developments by quotations and references from pre-war analysis. While the Pablo current tended on each occasion to dissolve itself into existing mass movements, the IC wing lurched from opportunism to sectarian abstention.

In the course of this polarisation of the movement, important experiences were almost totally forgotten.

● The Vietnamese Trotskyists, who in 1945 had a prominent role in Saigon and other cities, were brutally crushed by Ho Chi Minh's Stalinists: yet little debate of any substance took place on this in a "world movement" preoccupied with events in Europe and schemas of leftward-moving Stalinist currents.

● In Bolivia in 1952 the Trotskyists of the POR, then in the leadership of the COB trade union federation, proved incapable of leading the necessary struggle to overthrow the petty bourgeois-led government of the MNR as it back-tracked before the imperialist bankers. The government, which had initially implemented radical reforms under pressure of the workers and small farmers, swung to the right and reestablished capitalist rule. The episode and its lessons were again barely discussed by the Fourth International, busy with its split in Europe.

● In Sri Lanka, too, the struggles and experiences of a long-standing and mass-based Trotskyist party, the LSSP, which was the biggest party of the FI in 1950, led the most important unions in the capital and had wide support in the urban areas, have been largely ignored or forgotten. Even the lessons of its eventual degeneration into the Popular Frontist alliance with Bandaranaike in 1964 have not been seriously and objectively discussed because of the factional divisions of the world movement.

These and many other important experiences should offer the opportunity to strengthen and develop the Trotskyist programme, make it more explicit, more adequate as a guide to action.

Similarly a serious evaluation of the role played by the various Trotskyist currents during the Cuban and Algerian revolutions should offer the opportunity to strengthen the movement's understanding of the necessary principled orientation to mass-based anti-imperialist struggles and their leaderships.

The unique evolution of the Castro leadership from petty bourgeois nationalism to Stalinism, and the more commonplace processes of consolidation of the nationalist leadership in post-revolutionary Algeria (the "model" for many subsequent nationalist regimes in Africa) presented serious problems of analysis for the Trotskyists of the day.

A reappraisal now of the actual reality of events is vital to equip Marxists today faced with the need to orientate correctly towards the Nicaraguan FSLN, liberation struggles in Ireland, Namibia and Central America, and the very different nationalist leaderships of the ANC and the PLO.

Re-examining the slavish tail-ending by many Trotskyist currents of Khomeini's reactionary leadership after the overthrow of the Shah in Iran is essential to the development of a consistent revolutionary perspective for the Middle East, just as an independent stance towards Libyan leader Gaddafi who rose to power in a 1969 coup is a vital starting point for a Marxist defence of Libya against imperialist attack.

The dismal failure of Pablo's perspectives for the emergence of centrist or revolutionary elements from the Stalinist leaderships in Eastern Europe has been well proven over the years: nobody now defends those positions. But the post-war experiences of the struggle for political revolution add a whole wealth of new lessons to the optimistic but rudimentary sketch contained in the 1938 Transitional Programme.

The emergence of the Hungarian workers councils, and the independent trade union action reaching near-soviet dimensions which triggered the Solidarnosc movement in Poland both underlined the fact that the most decisive elements in the fight for political revolution would mobilise not through but *against* the ruling Stalinist party structures and their phony "unions".

So consistent and so telling has been the refutation of the notion that "mass pressure" could force Stalinist leaderships into a centrist or even a revolutionary course, that it calls for a fundamental reassessment of *all* the post-war theories of Stalinism which rest upon this concept.

Instead a more coherent analysis is needed, which recognises the proven ability of Stalinist (unlike social democratic) leaderships to take measures in certain circumstances to overturn capitalism, but recognises more fundamentally that *all* Stalinist leaderships — as parasitic bureaucracies — remain at *all* times consistently opposed to *any* independent mobilisation of the working class. To focus on the "revolutionary" overturn of property relations to the exclusion of Stalinism's *counter-revolutionary* repression of the proletariat and its global counter-revolutionary deals with imperialism has been a major weakness of nearly all post-war Trotskyist currents.

On none of these vital questions would Marxists today be any better equipped to find the right answers if there had not been a continuity of struggles — albeit with failures and mistakes. Our history is *not* simply an albatross around the necks of those seeking a healthy way forward: nor is it simply reduced to the experience





1956 Hungarian Revolution brought new concrete life to programme of political revolution.

of the mass movements of the day; with all its particular features, it is the raw material from which a new, more developed, more adequate programme must be developed.

But the history of the movement also has lessons for Marxists in Britain. In particular the failure of the post-war Trotskyist movement to develop a consistent orientation towards the Labour Party and to work in the mass organisations of the labour movement must be examined. In the immediate post-war period there were attempts to build the RCP as a small mass party outside the Labour Party at a time of truly massive illusions in the new Labour government. But the subsequent split, and the Healy group's turn to an opportunist deep-entry into the Bevanite current in the Labour Party, expecting it to evolve in a centrist or revolutionary direction, did not resolve the problem.

In the late 1950s, what was to become the SLL/WRP, having won important forces from the Communist Party after Hungary, turned correctly to building a trade union base and to the youth as a force for change in the Labour Party. But after the successful fight for the leadership of the YS, the mass youth expulsions of 1964 led — despite an initial period of serious campaigning — to the launching of a one-sided "party-building" exercise, abandoning any involvement in the life of the Labour Party.

This switch from agitation and mobilisation to a propaganda orientation became increasingly the norm for work in the unions, too, with a sketchy handful of slogans substituted for any serious programme of action or leadership in struggles.

By the 1974 general election, which returned a Labour government, the WRP lacked (indeed

virulently opposed, and expelled some of us for advocating) any programme of transitional demands which could relate to the new opportunities opened up as the workers' movement embarked on a series of militant struggles. Nor had any section of the Marxist left done any serious work to popularise transitional demands or link up the fight in the unions with the fight inside the Labour Party against the predictable wage-cutting and class collaborationist policies of the Wilson government.

For the most part this remained the case throughout the 1974-79 period of Labour government: when the revolt welled up from the rank and file of the unions and the Labour Party after 1979, most Marxists were left flat-footed, while others panted along, tail-ending events.

A serious reassessment of the WRP's political orientation today must learn these lessons, and recognise the need to prepare now for the struggles which will take shape after the next general election whenever that might be. This means a break from the WRP's sectarian abstention from broad based campaigns — print and miners' support groups, international solidarity work, anti-racist campaigns, campaigns for women's rights — and a turn towards trade union work. It means developing a dialogue with Labour activists, raising all the issues of Kinnock's "new realist" politics, the fight against the witch hunt, and the support of workers in struggle.

In this reassessment, to return to the Richard Goldstein analogy, the problem is not so much to brush the dust off the "treasures" from the past, but to recognise the treasures among the debris, and to have the patience to sift through the jumble rather than angrily hurl the whole lot into the

nearest bin.

It is essential in doing this that WRP members do not restrict the discussion to their own relatively narrow IC tradition, but recognise that the crisis is one of the *whole* post-war Trotskyist movement, in which the problems, failures and strengths have not been the preserve of any one current.

At the Conway Hall meeting, WRP speaker Chris Bailey insisted correctly that "the IC is not the sole continuator of Trotskyism". And Cliff Slaughter went further and suggested some form of international conference with a view to Trotskyist regroupment.

Clearly the disadvantage of such a conference would be that it would be very likely to attract a horde of sectarians not interested in political development (since they believe they already have all the answers) but hoping simply to score a few cheap points and rip off a couple of extra members.

The most essential progress to be made is on the *political* front, with a deepening and development of the Transitional Programme to meet the needs of the 1980s and 1990s.

Only when clear progress is made on this could organisational initiatives such as conferences produce a clarification of the movement rather than a well-intentioned but chaotic bear-garden for cynics, sceptics and sectarians.

The encouraging aspect of the WRP evolution is that it continues to break from the hidebound sectarian lines of the past: but six months after the expulsion of Healy it is now clearly time to go beyond generalities and begin to sketch out a perspective and a programme that will lay the ghost of Healyism by rooting the organisation firmly in the British and international workers' movement.



# Workers who were "Willing to storm heaven"

IN this article I want to outline two things, firstly the history and actions of the two brief months of the Paris Commune and secondly the assessment of it as the first experience of working class power by Marx and Lenin.

The lessons of the Commune were Lenin's starting point for putting forward his programme for the seizure of power in Russia in 1917 in the book *State and Revolution*. Many of the actions of the Commune have become a part of revolutionary programmes — such as Trotsky's Transitional Programme. It is important to see that revolutionary demands are not plucked from the air but result from living experience. It helps us realise the debt revolutionaries owe to the heroic Parisian working class of 1871. In the words of Marx they were "willing to storm heaven."

The Central Committee of the National Guard, representing 300,000 armed Parisians, took power in Paris on March 18 1871. Immediately they were magnanimous to General Vinoy and his troops who were allowed to leave the city after their unsuccessful attempt to seize the artillery of the National Guard (see Part I, *SV11*).

The second and final part of an article by **MATTHEW JONES** on a revolution which blazed the trail for others to follow.

They went to Versailles where Thiers' Government of Rurals was assembled. The central Committee of the National Guard called elections to the Commune to be convened on March 26. The manifesto of the Central Committee, issued on March 18, stated:

"The proletarians of Paris, amidst the failures and treasons of the ruling classes, have understood that the hour has struck for them to save the situation by taking into their own hands the direction of public affairs... They have understood that it is their imperious duty and their absolute right to render themselves masters of their own destinies, by seizing upon the governmental power."

(Marx, *The Civil War in France*, p. 50.)

The reaction of the Paris bourgeoisie came four days later on

March 22, when a demonstration of reactionaries armed with revolvers, daggers, sword canes and the like attempted to seize the headquarters of the National Guard in the Place Vendôme. On their way they attacked and disarmed National Guard patrols, killing two members and seriously injuring nine others, including a member of the Central Committee.

They were dispersed by a single volley from the National Guard, dropping their weapons as they fled. But the Central Committee did not follow up their success and hunt down the offenders. Only two days later the same crowd were able to muster an armed demonstration which ended with a mass stampede to Versailles. Again the Central Committee did not follow it up, this time committing a cardinal error. Versailles stood virtually undefended and within striking distance of the might of the Paris proletariat. Thiers could have been crushed easily, but the Central Committee did not want to continue the civil war. Tens of thousands of Parisians paid for this mistake with their lives.

The capitalists had no such scruples. Throughout the campaign any members of the National Guard

who fell into their hands were killed, frequently after enduring brutal tortures at the hands of the enraged, vindictive bourgeoisie. Even after these two demonstrations, the "Party of Order" was allowed to stand candidates for the Commune!

The Commune was elected on March 26, and the Central Committee resigned and handed over power to it two days later.

The politics of the members of the Commune were by and large of two camps, the Blanquists and the Proudhonist wing and the International Working Men's Association, the First International set up by Marx and Engels.

The Blanquists, followers of Louis-Auguste Blanqui (1805-1881), believed that mankind would be freed from wage slavery not by means of the class struggle but through a conspiracy by a small minority of intellectuals. They lost sight of the real conditions necessary for a successful uprising and ignored contacts with the working class and peasantry.

The Proudhonists were socialists of the small peasants and self employed master-craftsmen. In keeping with this, they believed in a form of co-operation in which each worker owned his own means of production, his tools. They abhorred mass organisation of the working class against the employers, seeing it as unnatural except in the "exceptional" case of large workplaces.

Even in Paris, long a centre of artistic artisans, by 1871 large enterprises were becoming the rule rather than the exception. Circumstances, and the involvement of the mass of proletarian Paris, turned both these programmes on their heads.

The Commune was majority Blanquist and most of its delegates were of petty bourgeois origin. Twenty-five working class delegates, including 12 members of the International were elected on March 26. Subsequent elections on April 16 brought in more socialist delegates including Marx's son-in-law Lorguet. The members of the International were responsible for most of the economic measures of the Commune. The ministry of Trade and Labour was headed by a German revolutionary, Frankel, the posts and telegraph, the Mint and direct taxation, and (towards the end of the Commune) finance were all directed by socialists.

In keeping with its role at the head of an entirely new form of state, the Commune was an entirely new type of body. All delegates were subject to recall by the constituents at any time. The Commune was no mere Parliamentary talking shop, it was also the executive body, its members had to carry out their own policies, breaking down an important barrier



Street barricade defends the Commune.

between people and state.

In addition, the Commune declared that all judges, magistrates, administrators and teachers would be elected and subject to recall by their constituents. As Marx put it:

"Instead of deciding once in three or six years which member of the ruling class was to represent and repress the people in parliament, universal suffrage was to serve the people constituted in Communes, as individual suffrage serves every other employer in the search for workers, foremen and accountants for his business."

(Quoted in Lenin, *State and Revolution*, Chap III).

And Lenin:

"The Commune substitutes for the venal and rotten parliamentarism of bourgeois society institutions in which freedom of opinion and discussion does not degenerate into deception, for the Parliamentarians themselves have to work, have to execute their own laws, have themselves to test the results achieved in reality, and to account directly to their constituents."

(Lenin, *State and Revolution*, Chap III)

This workers' democracy, developed and tested through the experience of the Commune and the Russian Revolution, is a key element in every genuine revolutionary

socialist programme.

The basis for the establishment of this new workers' state was the destruction of the old fundamentally capitalist one. The last act of the Central Committee of the National Guard was the abolition of the notorious Paris "Morality Police", the first act of the Commune on March 30 was to abolish conscription and the standing army, plus the old state administration.

The army was replaced by the National Guard in which all citizens capable of bearing arms were to be enrolled. The state as the repressive machine of the minority bourgeoisie was replaced by the armed people, i.e. the majority, armed to repress the counter-revolutionary minority.

"It is still necessary to suppress the bourgeoisie and crush their resistance. This was particularly necessary for the Commune, and one of the reasons for its defeat was that it did not do this with sufficient determination. The organ of suppression, however, is here the majority of the population, and not a minority, as was always the case under slavery, serfdom and wage slavery. And since the majority of the people itself suppress its oppressors, a 'special force' for suppression is no longer necessary! In this sense, the state begins to wither away."

(Lenin, *State and Revolution*, Chap III, emphasis in original).

Lenin saw the Commune as a first step towards a classless Communist society in which no repressive state apparatus need exist.

Two additional measures completed the new state. The first was the decision on April 1 that all state employees including the members of the Commune themselves should be paid at most 6,000 francs (i.e. at working men's wages) thus preventing any form of careerism at the expense of the state.

The second was the abolition of all state payments for religious purposes on April 1 and on April 8 the removal of the church from the schools, clearing the way for education free from mysticism.

The Commune was able to manage with roughly a quarter of the number of functionaries employed by the old Second Empire, and moreover it paid them at most a salary barely amounting to one fifth of what Professor Huxley put forwards as a minimum for a secretary to a metropolitan school board:

**"The Commune made that catchword of bourgeois revolutions, 'cheap government', a reality by destroying the two greatest sources of expenditure — the standing army and state functionarism."**

(Marx, *The Civil War in France*, p. 56)

This had its effect. Shortly after the National Guard seized power in Paris there were risings in Marseilles, Lyons, Dijon and elsewhere, attempting to set up Communes along the lines of Paris. The Paris Commune's own programme was for a national federation of urban and rural Communes along the same lines as in Paris with a Federal body made up of representatives from all the communes to be convened in Paris as the central authority.

The risings in the cities were suppressed, but the real fear of Thiers and his Rurals was that the programme of the Commune might reach the French peasantry. The peasants had been ground down by taxation (it was they, the majority, who paid for the excesses of the Second Empire) and the weight of the state bureaucracy. The Commune promised the peasants freedom from the tax burden, from the petty state officials and gendarmes who under Communal rule would be elected by and responsible to the population, and from the superstitions of the priest in the schools.

**"The Rurals — this was in fact their chief apprehension — knew that three months' free communication of Communal Paris with the provinces would bring about a general rising of the peasants, and hence their anxiety to establish a police blockade around Paris, so as to stop the**

**spread of the rinderpest."**

(Marx, *ibid*, p. 61).

Before going on to discuss the economic reforms of the Commune it is necessary to say a word about its internationalism. Despite being surrounded on its Eastern and Northern fronts by a hostile German army, the Commune elected a German socialist Frankel as minister of Labour. In addition, several Polish revolutionaries including Dabrowski, who was a general, served in the National Guard. On March 30 all foreigners elected to the Commune were confirmed in office with the words "the flag of the Commune is the Flag of the World Republic" (quoted in Lenin, *Paris Commune and the tasks of the Democratic Dictatorship*).

The Commune lifted the financial burden imposed by the big bourgeoisie and the Second Empire on the working class and the petty bourgeoisie. It declared on March 30 that no rent would be paid on dwelling houses from October 1870 to April 1871 and all payments already made would be booked as rent in advance for the future.

At the same time it also deferred the debts of the small shopkeepers and the like and proclaimed an end to foreclosures on their mortgages. The

guillotine and publicly burnt it amid great rejoicing. The great victory column on the Place Vendôme, cast from guns captured by Napoleon was ordered to be demolished because it served as a symbol of chauvinism and an incitement to national hatred; this was done on May 12.

The Chapel of Atonement built in memory of the execution of Louis XVI by the French Revolutionaries suffered the same fate. But in their economic measures as in their military and political ones the Commune stopped short.

They remained standing outside the Bank of France, centerpiece of the bourgeois financial order. If they had seized it, they could have reworked the financial system, offering cheap credit to workers and the petty bourgeoisie including the peasantry, and at the same time bought the French bourgeoisie to its knees by refusing to allow them the services of the Bank.

Militarily and politically the Commune lacked the resoluteness of purpose to win an insurrection. After seizing power in Paris on March 18 the leadership went on the defensive, defending Paris against the skirmishes of the Versailles Rurals instead of delivering the deathblow to the crippled bourgeoisie.

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**"Working men's Paris, with its Commune, will be for ever celebrated as the glorious harbinger of a new society. Its martyrs are enshrined in the great heart of the working class."**

**— Karl Marx**

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sale of all articles pledged in the municipal loan office (the state pawnshop) was stopped.

For the workers, the Commune outlawed the fines imposed by employers to claw back a part of the meagre wages they paid. Nightwork for bakers was abolished on April 20, and the employment offices, previously run by agents of the police, were handed over to the mayoralties of the twenty arrondissements (districts) of Paris.

April 30 saw the closure of the pawnshops as private exploitation of the workers and a contradiction of the right of the workers to their instruments of Labour and to credit. A start was made on workers' control of industry when on April 16 the Commune ordered a list to be made of all factories closed down by the employers — and called for the previous employees to form co-operative societies and work out plans to run them.

The demolition of the symbols of the previous power was started by the 137th Battalion of the National Guard, who dragged out the

Even then the problems posed for the "Party of Order" were massive. The municipal elections of April 27 in the 35,000 remaining French communes elected 700,000 councillors — of whom less than 8,000 were supporters of the assorted Royalists and Bonapartist rubbish that made up the majority of the Versailles National Assembly. This deprived the "Rurals" of their last claim to represent France in crushing the Commune.

Bismarck chose his moment to intervene — signing a punitive treaty with the National Assembly in Frankfurt on May 10. The conditions included the release of the Prisoners of War held by the Prussians — for the specific purpose of crushing Paris, and that Prussian troops would stay in France, until Bismarck was satisfied with the state of the country. The Prussians remained occupying the Northern and Eastern forts of Paris to assist in the smashing of the Paris workers. This was signed by the Assembly on May 18.

By May 21, the Versailles troops gained entry to the city and eight



The Commune confirmed for Marx, Engels and Lenin the folly of reformist attempts to use the capitalist state machine

days of slaughter began. Men, women and children fought on the barricades as the bourgeois army forced its way across the city, culminating in the last stand in the cemetery Père la Chaise.

The firing squads used *mitrailleuses* (an early French form of machine gun) to annihilate over 20,000 men, women and children of the Commune. Their monument is the "Wall of the Federals" (so called because of their demand for a Federal Communist state) or "Wall of Communards" in the Père la Chaise cemetery where the last atrocities were carried out.

Some escaped. Fifteen thousands were deported to New Caledonia. Many made their way through the Prussian lines with assistance of the Prussian soldiers. Marx's epitaph for the Commune was:

"Working men's Paris, with its Commune, will be for ever celebrated as the glorious harbinger of a new society. Its martyrs are enshrined in the great heart of the working class. Its exterminators' history has already nailed to that eternal pilory from

which all the prayers of their priests will not avail to redeem them."

(Marx, *The Civil War in France*).

The Commune's political tasks were largely democratic in nature, carrying out the unfinished tasks of the 1789 bourgeois revolution. It freed the system from the fetters of religion, the people from the fetters of usury and crippling taxation, and opened up democracy for the masses.

But its driving force was the working class allied to the petty bourgeoisie and extending the arm of liberation to the peasantry who made up the majority of the French population. In this way it exemplified the fight for what Marx called Permanent (uninterrupted) Revolution, with the working class carrying forward the democratic revolution as a part of the fight for socialism.

The measures carried out by the Paris workers: regulation of employment; abolition of unsocial hours; the workers' takeover of parts of manufacturing industry, were what Lenin called a minimum socialist programme.

The true heirs of the Paris Commune were the Bolsheviks of 1917. Lenin wrote *The State and Revolution* in August and September 1917 using the lessons of the Commune to urge opposition to the bourgeois Provisional Government, a seizure of power in Russia, the smashing of the state machine, and carrying into its full flower the Commune's embryo programme.

In 1891 Engels wrote an introduction to *The Civil War in France* to commemorate the twentieth anniversary of the Commune. He used it to argue against the reformist attitudes then creeping into the Second International (revolutionaries of the time still called themselves Social-Democrats). His closing words were:

"Of late the Social-Democratic philistine has once more been filled with wholesome terror at the words: Dictatorship of the Proletariat. Well and good, gentlemen, do you want to know what this dictatorship looks like? Look at the Paris Commune. That was the Dictatorship of the Proletariat."

# Organise the fightback!

Since the end of the miners' strike, *Socialist Viewpoint* has argued that although a battle has been lost, the working class has not been defeated.

Of course it has mainly been the ruling class that has drawn increased confidence from the miners' strike, and which has gone on the offensive. Nationwide, bosses follow the MacGregor example of sweeping, unprovoked attacks on the workforce, from smaller enterprises such as Silentnight to whole industries, such as print. The Tories continue their onslaught on the public sector, with the working class suffering doubly, as workers and as consumers.

More and more the state takes measures to weaken and the working class, such as increased police power and anti-union laws, and is backed up by the judiciary. Continually, the state exploits the divisions in the working class, with immigration policy, racist propaganda and surveillance, promotion of traditional family values, stifling or even abolishing the thin line of defence of local government.

The working class is unnecessarily at a disadvantage in the class struggle; for not only do we have a powerful enemy to fight in the ruling class, we are continually held back in the struggle by our "leaders" – the men and women who control the organisations of the working class, and who collaborate with capitalism for their own ends.

These people, too, the leaders and bureaucrats of the labour movement, have drawn a lesson from the end of the miners' strike: that now the working class has the example of its traditionally strongest section on strike for a year and still not defeating the Tories, now the conditions are ripe for any further struggles to be stamped out.

The witch-hunt in the Labour Party has hit the news, as Kinnock carves out his own road to No. 10 on the backs of the class whose interests he should be fighting for.

But equally insidious is the degree to which we are seeing victimisations of shopfloor militants going undefended – or

even encouraged – by the top brass of the unions.

In the face of this onslaught, the forces in the working class that are prepared to fight must join forces in our struggle.

On May 10, *Labour Briefing* will be discussing how that task, of uniting class struggle militants and the organised left, can be attempted (see advert). It is a large task, for it involves the left making a real break from its comfortable role of armchair criticism and the

token attendance on demonstrations; and uniting to organise and lead the struggle in a genuinely non-sectarian way.

It also involves recognising the diverse nature of the struggle, and realising both that many sections of the working class who are less obvious in the ranks of labour movement activists – women and black people – are part of the working class and have a role to play in the battle for socialism, and that these sections have their own demands, as do lesbian and gay comrades and the disabled.

The task may be large, but it is necessary. This necessity is the driving force, which will hopefully at last be strong enough to bring about the unity in action in the struggle which is so desperately needed. *Socialist Viewpoint* encourages all our readers to come to the Conference, to contribute their own ideas, and to join in this initiative.

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