

Socialist Worker

FOR WORKERS CONTROL AND INTERNATIONAL SOCIALISM

179 11 JULY 1970 4d

ULSTER: TORY LAW & ORDER

by SEAN TREACY

THE VIOLENCE, LOOTING and abuse involved in the British army's rampage of the Falls Road area of Belfast last weekend is in keeping with the latest turn in British government policy.

Westminster has clearly decided to attempt to smash the defence organisations set up by Catholic workers after the fanatical Orange attacks last August.

In just 48 hours of terror, the British army of occupation revealed its real purpose in Ireland — to defend the Stormont 'status quo' no matter at what price.

In their terror raids on homes in the Falls Road area, troops smashed doors and furniture, beat defenceless householders, laid their hands on all the cash and valuables they could find and abused the people.

ENSURE

The official excuse for this is the need for thoroughness in the search for arms. But it was known to the authorities for many months that the workers in the Falls and elsewhere had taken steps to ensure that they and their families were not defenceless as they were during the Orange pogroms last August.

At the same time the British military has been unwilling — or unable — to disarm the 'Ulster Volunteer Force' (the ex B-Specials) and the Orange gangs in neighbouring areas. In Paisleyite districts, arms are openly carried and the anti-Catholic fanatics have been immensely encouraged by the signs of approval from official quarters.

The decision of the Chichester-Clark government not to ban the big Orange march this weekend — indeed to participate in it — will also encourage those who have talked all along about the need 'to complete' the job they began last August.

BREAK OUT

The right-wing extremists know that in any showdown with the Catholic workers, they can now probably rely on the forces not only of the Orange state but of the 13,000 strong British army of occupation as well.

One reason why the authorities have decided to try and disarm the resistance movement is because they fear that the socialists and socialist republicans would successfully form workers' defence groups and break out of the sectarian religious framework in which so much of the conflict takes place.

Hear Eamonn McCann

Revolutionary socialist from Derry

THURS 16 JULY - Anson Hall, Willesden. Chairman: John Hogan, AEF.
(Organised by Kilburn IS)

FRI 17 JULY - Chiswick Town Hall Turnham Green, with Brian McCabe (ICRSC) and other socialist and trade union speakers

SAT 18 JULY - 'Free Frank Keane' Social at Kings Head pub Fulham.



On Sunday women and children defied the army curfew and marched into a besieged Catholic area with food. They gave the Nazi salute as they passed the troops.

The socialists and republican socialists see the urgent need for workers' defence groups — a step towards a citizens' army — to defend the homes and families of workers against attacks either by sectarian fanatics or the army of occupation.

In leaflets distributed throughout the working-class districts of Belfast this week, the Socialist Action Group, supported by People's Democracy and republican socialists, make it clear that they support the right of workers to defend themselves. They point out that no reliance can be placed on the British forces.

Westminster has decided in favour of repression. They have been encouraged in that by the gutless attitude of Jack Lynch and the Dublin government.

Lynch exercises all his venom on those defending themselves in the North. But he fears that a growing number of workers in the South, also bitterly opposed to his reactionary government, may decide to come to the aid of the workers in the North.

To try and divert the growing wave of solidarity in the South, he has resorted to the pathetic gimmick of sending his External Affairs Minister, Hillery, on a secret whirlwind visit to the Falls Road.

But this will do nothing to save the bitterness which Irish workers on both sides of the border feel at the openly pro-imperialist role of the Dublin government.

ROUNDED UP

The authorities are also resorting to a more open policy of repression in the courts as well. Following the imprisonment of Bernadette Devlin, hundreds of republicans, socialists and other militants have been rounded up.

Space is being cleared in the jails of Northern Ireland to intern them under the dictatorial Special Powers Act. This Act, the envy of the South African government, allows for arrest and indefinite imprisonment without trial or charge.

While 'British justice' is revealed in all its nakedness, Stormont, Westminster and the press are mounting a big propaganda campaign to accuse republicans and the left of 'launching a sectarian war against Protestants'. This is a blatant lie.

Both the socialists and the IRA Army Council in Dublin this week condemned even the slightest sign of Catholic sectarianism and the evidence that Fianna Fail politicians in the South are prepared to mount a demagogic anti-Protestant campaign in the 26 Counties while doing nothing to help the workers in the North.

A Sinn Fein statement said: 'The enemy of the Irish working class is British imperialism and its allies, north and south of the border. Our aim is to lead all sections of the Irish working class against their common enemy.'

In Britain the left must redouble its efforts to expose the policies which lie behind the new offensive of the British armed forces. British workers must be shown that the

Tories intend to preserve the rotten Stormont regime while at the same time patching up a shabby compromise with the Green Tories in Dublin.

We must build a mass solidarity campaign, particularly in the factories and building sites. The demonstration of London building workers last weekend shows the way forward.

Four issues must be raised in all demonstrations, rallies and propaganda activity:

1. Defence of the right of all workers to defend themselves against the attacks of armed religious fascists and the British army of occupation.
2. The immediate release of Bernadette Devlin and all Irish political prisoners.
3. The removal of British imperialism and its armed forces from Ireland.
4. Support for all those fighting for an Irish workers' republic against imperialism and its allies in Ireland.

Orange police state hits out at socialist left

THE REAL FACE of the Orange state in Northern Ireland was revealed in Ardglass, Co Down, last week when People's Democracy held a meeting on the quayside to protest against the importing of cement in a move to break a strike in the 26 counties.

There was nothing disorderly about the meeting, but it was broken up by 50 members of the RUC

Special Patrol Group (the riot squad) 18 people were charged with assault obstruction and disorderly behaviour. Last Thursday, savage sentences totalling 57 months imprisonment and £140 in fines, were meted out to 15 PD members.

These are some of the measures the Unionist police state will take to smash class solidarity and support strike-breakers and scab

employers.

Although the cement strike is now over, the men — who have been living on £5 a week for 22 weeks — are still in need of funds. PD will also require money to pay the fines.

Please send donations to: Cement Strike Fund and PD Fines Fund, PD Treasurer, 88 Ladybrooke Park, Belfast 11.

**ALL OUT
ON SUNDAY**

12 July

Assemble Speakers'

Corner 2pm

march to Trafalgar

Square. All IS

branches to support

Magnificent Mersey!

Strikes of 1911 helped build Britain's most militant area

by ROSS HILL

THE DOCKERS are again preparing to take on the port employers. In Liverpool 59 years ago their fathers and grandfathers were laying the foundations for their present-day militancy. By the end of the strikes that summer, trade unionism was firmly established for the first time in Britain's second port.

But this set of strikes by Liverpool's dock labourers was not an isolated dispute. It was part of a series of stoppages both in Liverpool and in the rest of the country during that year, 1911, including national strikes by seamen and railwaymen.

They were part of the biggest wave of industrial unrest since the Chartists some 70 years before. The average number of man-days lost through disputes during the years 1910 to 1914 never dropped below the 10 million mark.

In 1912 the figure reached 38 million, which has never been surpassed except in the year of the General Strike, 1926.

In 1906 the new Liberal government had reversed the notorious Taff Vale judgment in order that trade unions could no longer be sued for damages after a strike. Trade improved after the slumps of the earlier years of the century. And disillusionment set in about the ability of the Liberal and Labour MPs to better the lot of the working class.

The scene was set for the trade unions to step into the arena.

The trade union leaders, however, were generally a conservative bunch, many of them still ardent supporters of the Liberals. Even those who supported the Labour Party were usually keen to steer clear of those who declared their support for some new-fangled idea called 'socialism'.

Nevertheless, there were notable exceptions, and among them were Tom Mann and Ben Tillett. They had played a leading role in the great dock strike of 1889, at a time when both were members of the Social Democratic Federation, the first marxist organisation in Britain.

Mann and Tillett were the main inspirers of the formation of the Transport Workers' Federation in 1910. The TWF aimed at co-ordinating the efforts of trade unionists to better themselves in the face of growing unity between major employers, such as the formation of the reactionary Shipping Federation. Both men, however, had wider ideas, for they envisaged that 'industrial unions' would play a central role in the running of society in a socialist system, a view generally described as 'syndicalist'.

EAGER

The TWF called a conference in Liverpool at the end of May 1911. On the eve of the conference, Mann, Tillett and other major figures addressed a mass meeting of workers who had marched from every district in Liverpool to hear these great orators.

The seamen were agitating for a 10s a month rise, better conditions and the recognition of their unions. The TWF declared its support for the seamen, and a strike committee was set up under the chairmanship of Tom Mann.

The strike was fixed for 15 June but due to the men's eagerness, it broke out a day early. Liverpool had been chosen by the TWF as the primary battleground because many companies were not affiliated to the



Police march away strikers during a clash in Liverpool in 1911

Shipping Federation. In fact several firms gave way almost at once to the men's demands.

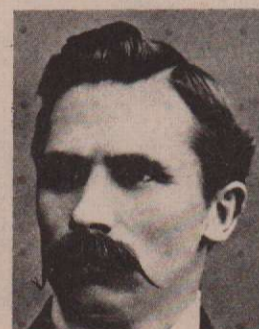
Others held out. But it was not long before they became frightened by the degree of solidarity displayed by both the men and their allies on the dockside. The traditional aloofness between the ships' stewards and the sailors and firemen had vanished.

Roman Catholic dockers and Protestant carters were co-operating closely to ensure the 'blacking' of all companies who were trying to starve the seamen back to work. So solid was the strike throughout the country that the Shipping Federation was forced to recruit would-be scabs in such well-know seafaring towns as Leeds and Birmingham.

The Shipping Federation finally conceded defeat on 27 June. But the very day the seamen went back to work, the dockers walked out with similar demands. . . and the seamen supported them as they had been supported by the dockers.

Within a week the harrassed firms agreed to recognise the National Union of Dock Labourers, but requested time to study the rule book before discussing wages and conditions. The rank and file were in no mood for compromise and they refused to return to work.

With union funds depleted, the strike committee under Mann and Jimmy Sexton, the local NUDL leader, realised the need for a breathing space. They convinced



TOM MANN
Strike committee chairman

the men of their case at mass meetings and the companies were given a month to sort their ideas out.

The effect of the action on the membership figures of the NUDL and the National Sailors' and Firemen's Union had been dramatic. Branches with members numbered in hundreds had swollen to thousands in a matter of days, partly because the NUDL had paid 5s a week strikepay to every member, irrespective of length of membership.

In the seamen's union, however, there were sinister moves behind the scenes. Havelock Wilson, the seamen's leader, negotiated an agreement which paved the way for the union to scab during the 1926 General Strike. In return for the companies ensuring that every crew member carried a union card, he undertook to deal with any 'troublemakers'.

Meanwhile, local strikes broke out in Liverpool of tugmen, lightship men, coopers, cotton porters, brewery workers, oil mill workers, and 250 girls at the Walton Rubber Works.

The girls launched into the fray with great enthusiasm. They were receiving only 1d or 2d for each pair of shoes they made, but were fined 4d for spoiling a pair. One woman had gone home at the end of a week owing 10d!

During the first week in August 1911, railway goods porters came out on strike in Liverpool. They demanded 24s for a 54 hour week and the abolition of the conciliation boards.

SWINDLE

The boards were a swindle brought in by Lloyd George in 1907. The unions had agreed to them and promised no strikes until at least 1914, even though the companies refused to recognise the unions. In such a situation many had dropped out of the unions in disgust.

The Liverpool strike committee supported the railwaymen and soon every goods train in the country stopped running. The port employers who had settled with the dockers just before the rail strike began, threatened to lock them out if they persisted in 'blacking' 75 per cent of the cargoes which would normally be distributed by rail.

Liverpool was rapidly becoming an armed camp. The Lord Mayor at one stage requested Winston Churchill, the Home Secretary, to send an extra battalion, plus another squadron of cavalry.

Churchill proceeded to send

two battalions and a whole regiment of cavalry. There were 5000 troops and 2400 police in the city.

A situation of 'dual power' was beginning to operate in the city. Merchants had the galling experience of having to crawl to Tom Mann to request essential foodstuffs and supplies for hospitals.

'Scab' convoys of wagons were protected by strong detachments of cavalry and when extra police arrived at Lime Street Station the Liverpool Daily Post noted that they were pelted with rotten tomatoes. It was gradually dawning that the role of the authorities was not strictly impartial.

On what was to become known as 'Bloody Sunday', 13 August, the largest crowd ever seen in the town gathered on St George's Plateau. The strike committee put the proposition that there be a city-wide general strike on the following Tuesday in support of the railwaymen.

But the meeting ended abruptly when an obscure incident occurred on the edge of the crowd which was used as an excuse to clear the area. Mounted police baton charged the unarmed crowd time after time.

The Manchester Guardian described it as 'the merciless use of violence, that horrified those who say it'. Hundreds were injured and dozens arrested.

GUNBOATS

At this point 'general disorder' broke out, as far as the ruling class was concerned. Policemen were afraid to venture out except in large groups for fear of getting beaten up and Churchill sent two gunboats up the Mersey with their guns trained on the town centre.

On Tuesday 15 August a convoy of prison vans was proceeding along Vauxhall Road towards Walton prison carrying prisoners arrested on 'Bloody Sunday'. A crowd barred their way and the military opened fire.

Two men, one a Catholic and one a Protestant, were killed. An observer tells how strikers attended both the funerals, regardless of religion.

By the end of the week, Liverpool was in the grip of a general strike and throughout the country 150,000 railwaymen were out in the biggest stoppage in history. Their four union executives were forced to meet and declare it official, for fear of losing their membership.

The government stepped in 'to mediate'. The railwaymen were fobbed off with a Royal Commission on the railways, and they returned to work.

War hysteria against Germany was being whipped up at the time, following the so-called 'Agadir Crisis'. This was used to blackmail the men back to work. Regrettably certain SDF leaders were also affected by this 'patriotism'.

Liverpool went back to work, only to be called out over the attempted victimisation of striking tramwaymen. But the dispute was soon settled and the strike committee was wound up on 24 August.

While it had existed it had held a unique position. Although it was supposed to play second fiddle to the trades council, it had wielded

Socialist Worker

6 Cottons Gardens London E2 8DN

Tel: 01-739 1878 (editorial) 2639 (business)

CAPITALISM has nothing to offer mankind but exploitation, crises and war. The ruling classes of the world - a tiny minority - subordinate the needs of the vast majority to the blind accumulation of capital in the interests of competitive survival.

Imperialism condemns two-thirds of mankind to famine and calls forth movements of national liberation which shake the system and expose its essential barbarism. The constant and mounting preparations for war and the development of weapons of mass destruction place the survival of humanity itself in the balance.

The increasing intensity of international competition between ever-larger units drives the ruling classes to new attacks on workers' living standards and conditions of work, to anti-trade union and anti-strike laws. All of these show capitalism in deepening crises from which it can only hope to escape at the cost of the working class and by the destruction of all its independent organisations.

The only alternative is workers' power - the democratic collective control of the working class over industry and society through a state of workers' councils and workers' control of

WHERE
WE
STAND

production.

Only thus can the transition be ensured to a communist society in which the unprecedented productive forces thrown up by capitalism can be used to assure an economy of abundance. Only the working class, itself the product of capitalism, has the ability to transform society in this way, and has shown its ability to do so in a series of revolutionary struggles unprecedented in the history of all previous exploited classes.

The working class gains the experience necessary to revolutionise society by constant

struggle against the ruling class through the mass organisations thrown up in the course of that struggle.

To overcome the unevenness with which this experience is gained, to draw and preserve the lessons of past struggles and transmit them for the future, to fight against the pressure of bourgeois ideas in the working class, and to bond the fragmentary struggles against capitalism into a conscious and coherent offensive, a revolutionary Marxist party of socialist militants is required, embracing the vanguard of the working class.

The struggle to build such a party is only part of the wider struggle to create a World Revolutionary Socialist International, independent of all oppressors and exploiters of the working class, whether bureaucratic or bourgeois.

International Socialists therefore fight for:

Opposition to all ruling-class policies and organisations.

Workers' control over production and a workers' state.

Opposition to imperialism and support for all movements of national liberation.

Uncompromising opposition to all forms of racialism and to all migration controls.

Signed articles do not necessarily represent the views of the paper.

TURN TO PAGE 5

Dockers face massive

attack on jobs and conditions

by Harold Youd
TGWU, Manchester docks

FIVE YEARS ago the Devlin Commission of Enquiry into the 'problems' of port labour presented a strategy for a combined government and employers' offensive against the dockers. This was seen in two main stages.

Stage One which started in September 1967 had, as its objective, to overcome what Devlin saw and described as the main enemy — the militancy and 'exaggerated sense of solidarity' of dockworkers.

Casual work was to end and the employer was to be given back the right to discipline the docker. Since 1947 discipline had been jointly in the hands of the unions and the employers in the National Dock Labour Board.

The docker was to get a wage increase and, it was hoped, a feeling of job security. This mixture was expected to produce a slackening of the dockworker's combativity and of his loyalty to his mates and at the same time help replace his suspicion and hostility towards the employers by a sense of togetherness, mutual responsibility and even... 'loyalty'.

Stage Two would reap the main fruit that the transformations of Stage One would have produced. Locally negotiated productivity agreements ('modernisation' agreements) would begin, bringing a two-shift system, employers' control of manning and a general intensification of labour for the dockers as the industry became increasingly mechanised and the work force fell.

Stage One was forced through amid bitter strikes in 1967. Now Stage Two is due, with local agreements having been worked out in most big ports.

But there is neither peace nor tranquillity in the ports, and less job security than ever before. The dockers' ingrained suspicion of the bosses remains.

The wage increase that accompanied Stage One succeeded in conning few dockers. Indeed it has helped build a self-confidence that was absent in 1967, when ports like London, Manchester and Hull were deliberately starved of work to soften up the dockers for Devlin by keeping thousands on the miserable fall-back (unemployment) pay of £9.

SUSPICION

The last 30 months have seen a redrawing, deeper than ever, of the lines of suspicion between bosses and men. The main issues are:

1. **Less jobs.** Dockers know that with mechanisation there will be many less jobs for dockers. From an industry dependent on armies of coolies it is becoming an industry based on machines.

The prospect of a cleaner workday with some of the back-breaking labour cut out loses its attraction for men who are increasingly unsure that they will be around to enjoy it. The National Ports Council's estimate of manpower requirements published last year predicts that the number of dockers will fall from 53,000 in 1968 to between 35 and 40,000 in 1972.

In London 4000 jobs will disappear (from 22,791 to 18,750). In Liverpool 5000 (from 11,944 to 6850). And in Manchester, with about 1500 now, it is expected that by December 1972 there will be jobs for only 560. (In 1960 there were 2500 in Manchester.)

2. **Dispersal of the docks industry.** With the increase in the amount of cargo shipped in large pre-packed containers, more and more jobs, which used to be dockers' work, are now outside dockland. Containers are packed and unpacked away from the ports.

This adds to the speed of job loss. For the bosses it is a weapon against the solidarity developed by dockers in generations of struggle.

It allows them to break up the workforce involved in sea transport, and also to by-pass the high wages

they are being forced to give to dockers.

They 'concede' demands on the docks today and tomorrow move the work beyond the jurisdiction of the Port Labour Authority and the docks unions. They hope, in time, to further undermine the conditions, the wages and the job control won by the dockers over the years.

Already kites are being flown to see if the system of registered dock workers can be abolished. Last January the Chairman of the Docks Modernisation Committee issued a special transcript of a speech in which he said: 'Thousands of men who regarded themselves as dockers and enjoyed special protection were going to find during the coming decade that no traditional dock work was available to them... He called for the abolition of traditional definitions of dock work and said the industry's future rested upon the adaptation of the best practices applicable to other modern industries' (Guardian 16 Jan 70).

3. **Speed-up.** Stage One of Devlin abolished such protective practices as 'the welt' in Liverpool and was aimed to jack up labour productivity. Here the bosses are sadly disappointed, for the resistance of the dockers has deprived them of their pound of flesh.

They complain of rising labour costs. But in the 15 or so years before Devlin, productivity in British ports doubled while the work force fell by 10,000 with wages nowhere near keeping pace with the increase. The employers didn't moan then.

At present manning scales (number of men to a gang for a given job) are fixed. Stage Two will allow the employers to determine how many men are needed for a job. Add this to a two shift system, plus mechanisation, and the employers think they have a recipe for getting more and more work out of fewer and fewer dockers.

Recently dockers in many ports struck for a day to force the Labour government to nationalise even the smaller ports it wanted to leave in private hands. Now the Tories are back and the Ports Nationalisation Bill has been dropped, probably for good.

Dockers feel bitter about this and it adds to the intense suspicion and uneasiness which pervades the industry. Many were willing to struggle for workers' control in a nationalised docks industry as the

only way to meet their problems, and the National Shop Stewards Committee called for at least 50 per cent dockers' control.

But now dockers feel they have been cheated and sold out by the Labour politicians who took four years to even get started on nationalisation.

Faced with these and other problems the National Shop Stewards Committee has been thrown up by workers increasingly unsure of the future, but determined not to give an inch.

They don't trust the union leaders even when, as on the present £20 basic claim, they appear to be responding to their pressure.

Many can see that the absence of a national and co-ordinated struggle has led to glaring differences in the guaranteed wage rate (that is consolidated wages, with piecework bonus eliminated) in different ports. These vary from £16 in Manchester and Liverpool to £40 in Hull though the terms of the deals also vary.

The Stewards National Committee is a great step forward. But there is still a long way to go before a coherent national docks policy is worked out and before the sinews of war of a national rank and file movement have knitted together

AT STAKE

The bosses, too, have a great deal at stake in the struggle with the dockers. The technological revolution in the world's ports is the spur under which reorganisation of Britain's ports has been undertaken.

Already, hundreds of millions of pounds have been invested. The employers will not easily be made to turn in their tracks and abandon or seriously modify their plans.

In the mid-1960s the first container ships crossed the Atlantic. By the mid-1970s, all the major trading routes will be served by container ships.

This involves new harbour investments (the reason Labour planned nationalisation was because Britain was lagging behind continental competition) and the building of special ships designed to store the giant tin boxes without waste of space or time.

With proper transport servicing to and from the port, ship turn-around time can be cut from 10/14 days to 48 hours. Costs fall and profits are expected to rise.

In the long term it provides the most feasible way of keeping transport costs down during an era of rapidly rising labour costs and port costs and offers hope to shipping lines and their long-suffering shareholders of a much more acceptable return on capital invested — possibly in the region of 14-15 per cent. Between 1960-1969 it was between 0.6 per cent and 4.8 per cent. (Financial Times 1 June 1970).

Investment already made or planned by the two giant groups whose members control 80 per cent of UK cargo liners (Overseas Containers and Associated Container Transportation) is about £250 million. Only the UK to Australia route has so far been more or less fully containerised.

Nine new-type ships will have replaced 80 or 90 conventional vessels. The Board of Trade estimates that the tonnage of the UK deep sea cargo fleet will be halved in the next decade.

The scale of investment and the scale of the expected returns means that the bosses will fight for their objectives.

They will fight for full control over the workers and the lowest wages they can get away with in the



Containers demand cuts in the docks labour force

circumstances for another reason too: international competition. Capitalism, even on this scale, remains a dog-eat-dog system of chaos without rational planning.

The drive of each international group to cut costs and get the best returns has already led to serious overcapacity in European ports alone which will lead to sharpening competition.

'There has been a large amount of investment in port installations planned on the basis of hope rather than on any rational prediction of the future... and as a result there is serious over-capacity, with a number of container cranes lying completely idle' (Financial Times 1 June 1970).

Against this background the fight

will be bitter. Dockers need a workers' programme and the consolidation of the National Shop Stewards organisation to fight for it, such a programme will have to include demands for:

Immediate nationalisation with workers' control of all discipline, work rules and conditions.

For a foolproof guarantee that all container work is dockers' work at dockers' wages.

For the demands put out by the Liverpool shop stewards: no shift work, £60 a week, a 20 hour week.

For a move to establish closer liaison with the railwaymen and drivers who must increasingly be involved in the struggle to maintain container-loading and unloading as dockers' work.

BOOKS ON OWEN AND 'OWENISM'

ROBERT OWEN:
A New View of Society 7s

A.L. MORTON: Life and ideas of Robert Owen 12s 6d

MORTON and TATE:
The British Labour Movement 15s

add 1s per volume for postage.

IS BOOK SERVICE
6 Cottons Gardens
London E2 8DN

COMING SOON THE PILKINGTON STRIKE

ORDER COPIES NOW

2s6d each including post

12 copies or more post free

SOCIALIST WORKER
6 Cottons Gardens London E2 8DN

Tories' 'freedom of choice' means

no choice at all for working class children



The classroom counter-revolution: 2

by Leni Solinger

NUT, Haringey infant teacher

and Tony Clark

NUT, Southwark secondary teacher

'TO INSIST on compulsory reorganisation of secondary education on rigid lines is contrary to local democracy and contrary to the interests of the children.'

These are the words of the Tory Party in defence of their recent repeal of circular 10/65—the legislation calling for comprehensive reorganisation of secondary schools.

They are not against comprehensive education. They are just out to put every possible obstacle in the way of its development.

It is incredible to hear the Tories putting these arguments forward. They are protecting democracy and free choice — democracy for the local education authority to preserve selective education for an academic elite which comes almost entirely from the middle class and free choice which is limited only to those middle class parents who want their children to get a 'special' education.

The majority of parents, due to the selective nature of the system, do not have any choice at all.

When this line of 'democracy' was being pushed by a Tory councillor from Birmingham in a recent interview, it was pointed out to him that the National Union of Teachers in Birmingham was completely opposed to selection. He said that they would have to follow the rule of their

elected representatives.

What does represent mean to Tories when they take no account of the views of the voters? Neither the National Union of Teachers, Campaign for the Advancement of State Education — a parents' body — nor any other education group was consulted before the Tories withdrew the legislation.

So much for democracy. The 'freedom of choice and democracy' lark of the Tories is really just a cover-up for their opposition to comprehensive education.

To quote Tory MP Angus Maude on secondary education: 'The object of the exercise is not to give every child an equal chance; it is to give every child the best possible chance to develop and make the most of his own special talents.'

In other words, if you give most children the chance of an 'academic' education, they will not come up to the necessary standard. Or put another way, if we give every child even a glimpse of equal opportunity, the academic minority, the ones the Tories are concerned with, will lose out.

Return to selection

They ignore the multitude of evidence which shows this is false. Reports indicate that children are not held back by comprehensive education. In fact more children stay on to pass GCE ordinary level examinations and the number of students getting university qualifications has also risen substantially.

The Tory arguments summarised in the two 'Black Papers' want to see the return to a full, rigorous selection. Angus Maude again: 'In the name of fairness and social justice, sentimentality has gone far



THE TORY EDUCATIONALIST

to weaken the essential toughness on which quality depends.'

In other words a return to the jungle of competition — every one striving for examination results, the reintroduction of streaming, coaching and the eleven plus in the junior schools and a lower number of places in universities as this will enable the 'best to go to university'.

They are completely elitist in their view of education — they see a move towards equality as the 'greatest threat to the education system'.

In their view, it is completely acceptable that more money is spent on grammar school pupils than on other secondary school pupils (13.6%

more per pupil) and that the grammar schools and particularly the direct grant grammar schools essentially cater only for the middle class. In a recent report on Bristol's direct grant grammar school, Caroline Wedgwood Benn points out that 61 per cent of the pupils have professional or managerial parents, only 1.5 per cent have unskilled parents.

The direct grant grammar schools are fully supported by the Tories. When the Labour controlled Inner London Education Authority stated they would not take up places (that is, pay the fees) at the London direct grant grammar schools, Margaret Thatcher, the new Education Minister, indicated that the money would be paid direct by the central authority.

'Able minority'

To give just one example of how much money is spent on direct grant grammar schools, Coventry Education authority pays £116,000 annually to the two schools in its area to 'guarantee an education for an intellectually able minority'.

If this money was withheld for three years, a new comprehensive school could be built. Many education authorities have pointed out a lack of funds as their 'reason' for not going comprehensive. It is blatantly obvious why when so much money is spent on educating a minority of pupils.

So with the return of the Tories the stage is set for a reversal of all policy on education over the last few years. Teachers and parents in London have already had experience of this. In inner London even though the theoretical balance of ability range of 9 above average, 12

average and 9 below average was not possible in practice due to 'creaming' by the grammar schools, when the Tories came to power in Greater London in 1967 they changed the 'balance' to 7 above average 13 average and 10 below so that the grammar schools could get an even better intake.

This will probably be repeated in other areas. The reversal will also be seen in the fact that the Tories are now allowing money to be spent on building new grammar schools. This was prevented under the Labour government.

These are the first steps in a total switchback of education to where it was 50 years ago. The Tories will push their false ideas of elitism, limited academic ability, the need for discipline and toughness, complete rigidity in teaching ideas and methods and other reactionary proposals.

They will try to justify their moves in terms of freedom of choice, the democratic right of local authorities to 'choose what is best', and the preservation of 'good' schools, that is, grammar schools.

We must fight

We, too, believe in freedom of choice — the choice of working-class children to have a full education.

We also believe in democracy — democracy in which the majority control rather than the minority.

The comprehensive system can not realise these aims as full equality can not exist under the capitalist system. But socialists must fight for the implementation of comprehensive education as a progressive step forward.

If only Harold had got the date right...

by Paul Foot

IN THE offices of Tribune in Smithfield, London, a myth has been born. Like many similar myths before it, it is likely to be believed following the shock and disillusionment of the election.

The theme is a simple one: that Harold Wilson and his advisers in the leadership handed the election on a plate to the Tories, and that the decision to go to the country in June, with a low-pitched election campaign were the real reasons for the Tory victory.

The aftermath is equally simple. With an election later in the year, fought with a high-pitched campaign, the Tory disaster would never have come about, and Harold Wilson would be back in Downing Street for most of the seventies.

Richard Clements, Tribune's editor, wrote on 26 June: 'Nothing that the government had done before June would have fully healed some of the wounds which had been opened by the worst of the government's policies. In the event, the rank and file responded magnificently; but there was too little from the leadership to put back into them the fighting spirit which we had seen in 1964 and 1966.'

One question, however, remains unanswered. What evidence is there that if the Labour leadership had held on till October any more of the

'wounds' inflicted by the government would have been 'healed'?

Was it not just as likely that with an Irish crisis, a worsening balance of payments situation, and roaring inflation, a few more 'wounds' would have been inflicted in the intervening months and the 'fighting spirit of 1964 and 1966' (whatever that was) would have been further dampened?

Harold Wilson's basic theme throughout the last six years has been that Labour must run the capitalist system as efficiently and profitably as possible and must engineer an election victory every four or five years.

Made a dash

He played this game brilliantly. As soon as the weather forecast (in the shape of the opinion polls) showed a chink of sunlight, he made a dash for home. The clouds closed just in time to stop him. But those who criticised his tactics before and after his decision (as Tribune did), have to prove that a dash at some other time would have been more successful.

Although Tribune is free in its criticism of the government's record over the past six years, it singles out the 1970 Budget for special attention. It complains that when Jenkins had money to give away he should have given it away to the Labour movement.

It is as though all Jenkins' talk in 1967 and 1968 about 'two years hard slog' had to be taken literally.



WILSON: waiting for the sunlight

As though the priorities of big business are possible when the balance of payments in the red but not when it's in surplus.

The argument used is that a Labour Chancellor is entitled to squeeze the working class when 'Britain is in the red'; but when 'Britain is booming' he should use his powers to enrich the workers.

Tribune argues that if the Chancellor had done this in the 1970 Budget, the workers would have voted Labour with greater enthusiasm and in greater numbers. No doubt this is true. But the point is that big business works under the same laws whether there's a boom or not.

No self-respecting capitalist will waste money on higher wages just because he has higher profits. He needs to invest his profits to

make sure they increase even more. He may feel that directors and shareholders deserve a little reward. But wages are too large a part of the costs to permit substantial increases.

The Labour government accepted these priorities from the start. They accepted them in their manifesto before the 1964 election, which Tribune approved. And cheered on by Tribune, they accepted them in 17 stumbling months before March, 1966 when Tribune called for an early general election.

They accepted them in four cruel and warring years after 1966, in which time the Parliamentary Labour Party became a play-thing of the increasingly vicious machine of big business.

Lost support

Workers and students outside parliament reacted in the most powerful outburst of militancy since the war. None of this was reflected in parliament or in the Labour Party, which, as the tide of militancy rose, lost supporters and influence in the trade union movement.

The Labour Left and Tribune reacted by bitching and sneering at revolutionaries (see Francis Flavius on the International Socialists and Socialist Labour League in Tribune of 5 June). It isolated the struggle for socialism within parliamentary boundaries and by mouthing old slogans and old responses, it must take a share of the blame for the isolation of politics from militancy.

But now, confident as ever, it bounces back from Labour's defeat to declare that it was largely the fault of the leadership in their timing of the election so soon after a disastrous Budget.

The 1970 Budget and the trivial election campaign were the logical conclusion of a reformist strategy which dates back all the way to 1945. This strategy rose to a high point in the mid-1960s — the days when Tribune alternated between praising Harold Wilson and reprinting his speeches.

The lesson of these years is that big business can restrain, contain and make use of the Labour movement while that movement's strength is diverted wholly into parliamentary channels.

If big business is to be challenged and changed, Labour will have to flex its real muscles — in the factories, offices and mines.

The election result is a bad blow for the British working-class movement. But it will have even worse consequences if socialists now believe that the violence and barbarism of capitalist society can be ended or even altered by tinkering around with election dates and framing different policies for Budget Day.

Tories versus the unions — don't miss this article next week

CS - THE LETHAL GAS USED BY THE TROOPS IN ULSTER

by Anna Paczuska

JERRY CRONIN, the Irish defence minister, stated last week: 'CS weapons are viewed as essential military equipment'.

This explanation was offered during a stormy debate in the Irish parliament on why the Republic's police and army were steadily being equipped with the same 'crowd control' weapons as the RUC and the British army had in the north.

Both Britain and Ireland signed the Geneva Protocol in 1925, an agreement to abolish the use of poison gas as a weapon of war. Now, following the examples of America and France, they both find it inconvenient to abide by the terms of the agreement.

Michael Stewart, when he was Labour Foreign Secretary, explained the British attitude to the gas in the Commons last February. 'The gas is technically a smoke, and hence outside the terms of the Geneva protocol' he said.

The Irish government also makes use of such contemptible and inhuman arguments.

Kid us

The term smoke is generally understood as a concentration of small particles whose military purpose is to obscure vision. It was previously achieved by burning crude oil or pitch.

Now these governments try to kid us that CS gas comes into this class, that there are no long term injuries and that it is purely a short-term irritant.

When it was first developed, CS gas seemed to be the answer to a politician's dream. Widely effective in dispersing crowds but apparently not poisonous, it rapidly became a popular weapon with ruling class politicians.

The patent specification filed in 1960 states that no permanent damage is caused and that severe effects pass off in a few minutes. And it is this image of the gas which the governments and manufacturers are trying to push. But despite the official whitewashing, evidence is available that proves that CS gas is poisonous.

The amount of information available is small. Governments appear to have fought shy of investigating the gas too closely. A limited poison and safety study was carried out on CS at Porton in the late 50s. This gave a low poison value to the gas.

Ghastly mistakes

Since the experiments were performed mainly on laboratory species of animals, the results are difficult to apply to human beings. Such conclusions, however, mean very little. Previous attempts to relate results on animals to human beings led to ghastly mistakes as in the thalidomide cases.

Recent independent work in France shows the Porton conclusions to be on the optimistic side. Mice, cats and monkeys exposed to extreme levels of CS all died within half an hour.

Autopsies showed severe damage to the liver, brain and kidneys. And the gas has claimed its human victims, too, despite the assurances of politicians.

The concentration of CS gas in the streets of Paris in May 1968 caused at least one death. Spread from a helicopter over Berkeley, California, in 1969, CS hospitalised



several women and children picnicking not far off.

And in Londonderry last year, a stream of vile side effects were observed. These were serious enough to worry even the British government who, predictably enough, set up one of their everlasting commissions in an attempt to calm the angry protesters. But while the commission sits, the government continues to use the gas.

The initial effects of the gas are unpleasant. Small dosages cause pain in the eyes, tears, spasms in the eyelids, burning pains in the nose and throat which get worse as exposure continues.

Breathing becomes painful, the mouth waters, the nose runs. Coughing occurs and in extreme cases

brings on vomiting.

Stinging occurs on all shaved areas and any exposed cuts and grazes. There may be irritation round the neck and other sweaty places.

Experiencing such discomfort, the average demonstrator will no doubt decide to shove off to some healthier environment. He will therefore only 'take' a small dose.

But the gas which drives him off is accumulating in the surrounding houses. Many of the occupants are old, children and invalids and in times of riot are confined to their homes by curfew.

They have to remain in their houses getting extreme doses long after the crowd has dispersed. So CS gas has its most vicious effects on those not directly involved in disturbances.

Its lasting power is a very worrying aspect. Solidified smears may form on cold surfaces. Containers are contaminated long after use.

It causes severe blistering and scarring on skin. The effects it might have on delicate lung tissue (where conditions of humidity and temperature are just right for the action of CS) are too horrifying to imagine.

Leave scars

But no work has been done on the permanence of damage to the lung tissues. Other lethal gases such as mustard gas leave scars that are in a state of contraction.

This means that sudden increase in blood pressure, a common enough occurrence in any human being, lead to splitting of the scar, further bleeding and further scarring. The scarring therefore increases long after exposure to the gas. It is on the cards that CS causes similar damage to tissues.

Despite protests and possible international repercussions, the British government appears to be firm in its decision to continue to use the gas for riot control. It is certain that the Tory government will never reverse the Labour decision.

The crowds in Northern Ireland must therefore brace themselves for yet another dose of this humanitarian weapon dispensed by the impartial lawmen of the RUC, the revamped Specials and the British army.

And it won't be any use expecting even verbal consolation from the Green Tories over the border. They have got the gas, they are backing the British government and they are getting geared up to use it on their own 'subversives'.

Building workers hit back at bosses and union brass

AN Order of the British Empire for president of the Bricklayers' Union, John Leonard, is not unexpected. A building trade unionist of the 19th century, Sir Randal Cremer, was the labour movement's first-ever knight.

Nor is it surprising that conference militant Dan McGarvey, President of the Boilermakers' Union, gets the CBE, since he was a party to the infamous Lord Cameron Report which witch-hunted stewards involved in the Horseferry Road and Barbican site disputes in London, back in 1967.

For nowhere is divorce between top officials and men so marked as in the building unions and the need for rank and file movements so evident.

Unemployment among building workers is four times the national average and they are four times as likely to be killed at work compared to factory workers.

Only one in four in the industry are organised and union membership is falling as self-employment (the lump) rockets.

BLACKLIST

The industry has a vicious 'black list' with the Economic League supplying photographs of militants to employers. 2000 workers on the Thamesmead site have just been on strike for four days because of blacklisting.

Attacks have been felt at national and local level through the cut-back in public expenditure, especially housing by the last Labour government and the axing of direct labour forces by Tory councils.

Limits on stewards since April 1969 and the February 1970 productivity deal with 'penal' clauses provide the immediate background to present rank and file development.

The new working rule 7 only became known on building sites two weeks before it came into effect in April 1969, although it had been agreed between union leaders and employers in October 1968.

An elected steward is now subject to 'recognition by the employer' and cannot be elected during his first seven days in employment. Previously where a man was on the blacklist he could be elected and, though he could not take up his duties in the first six days, he had then to be recognised. This measure of protection is now lost.

WEED OUT

The works committee now has to supply a 'written report of the proceedings' to the employer within a week of meeting and the convenor or federation steward has now to be employed by the main contractor. The opportunities for employers to weed out militants by the blacklist have been increased and the scope for choice of federation steward decreased since, as the Phelps Brown Report (1968) shows, membership is greatest among specialist firms.

The productivity agreement in

operation since February raises basic rates by 26 per cent over 18 months. Although it is twice as large as an earlier 'final' offer by the employers, the 'strings' are such that even the Department of Employment and Productivity thinks them unworkable at site level.

The agreement aims to absorb plus rates negotiated at site level into the basic rate. Since these rates, in many cases, were in excess of the increases in basic pay, the deal has resulted in workers getting a wage cut.

The guaranteed week is increased from 36 hours (without restrictions) to 40 hours. But workers can now be penalised by receiving only half pay for the guaranteed week for being late one morning, holding site meetings, taking part in disputes or knocking off early.

Since labour costs average about 40 per cent of total costs in building and gross profit per worker is about half that in manufacturing (see PIB Report No 92 'Pay and Conditions in the Building Industry', 1968) the reasons for 'no sugar on the pill' are clear.

The building workers' national conference in Manchester in April, convened by rank and file committees in Liverpool, London and Manchester, attracted 287 delegates. A charter adopted includes demands for:

Withdrawal of the 'penal' clauses
Opposition to flexibility and refusal to allow management to decide the distribution of the bonus.

A minimum basic rate of a £1 an hour and total opposition to the 'lump'.

CONTROL

On democracy in the unions, the charter will fight for delegate conference to be the policy-making bodies, all trade union officials to be elected every year, with branch officials and full recognition of elected stewards and area meetings. Workers' control for the industry not 'state control for the private sector' was advanced.

The Manchester conference decided to set up a rank and file newspaper. The first issue comes out this month.

The paper's value to the charter will be that the lads will see what battles are being fought, know what the issues are and be informed about elections and negotiations. Rank and file committees will have equal representation and space.

The rank and file counter-offensive to union officials and employers represents a real threat to the present building trade union leaderships in this 'cinderella' industry, manipulated by governments on instructions from the overseas bankers to cut back public expenditure.

The Manchester conference leaves no doubt about the ability of the workers to run the industry themselves and the charter and paper show that local and regional initiative is being transformed into a national counter-offensive.

PETER LATHAM

Magnificent Mersey!

FROM PAGE 2

far greater power and at one stage Churchill was sorely tempted to have Mann arrested.

Trade unionism became firmly established in Liverpool. The workers in Birmingham had been on overtime that summer to make 25,000 union badges for 'scousers' alone.

Trade unionism had ceased to be a matter of putting ones head on the chopping block and became part of the natural order of things.

The strength of trade union consciousness on Merseyside today stems in large measure from the efforts of Tom Mann and his contemporaries.

The political situation, however, was little short of tragic. Workers throughout Europe in the years immediately before the First World War were in revolt.

Yet in Britain, the Social Democratic Federation threw away the opportunity to give the growing strike wave political strength. Its membership grew from 6000 in 1907 to 40,000 in 1912. This figure was

might have been if the SDF had adopted the correct attitude to the ferment that was going on all around them. In fact, however, the membership dropped back to 15,000 by 1913.

The reason is not hard to discover. H M Hyndman, the SDF leader, said in 1907: 'We are opposed to strikes on principle. . . Political action is far safer, far better and far less costly.'

His right-hand man, Harry Quelch stated in 1910: 'Is there anyone so foolish as to suppose armed revolt is possible? Or that the workers will organise to fight, or to strike, for that which they will not vote?'

Yet if the SDF had given whole-hearted support to the strike wave and had spread the lessons of the struggles in the leading centres like Liverpool via its 300 branches and its paper Justice, then the outcome might have been very different. Who knows, we might even have been living in a different society today and the dockers would not be

Join the International Socialists

There are branches in the following areas

SCOTLAND

Aberdeen; Clydebank; Dundee; Edinburgh; Glasgow; East Kilbride.

NORTH EAST

Durham; Newcastle upon Tyne; Teesside (Middlesbrough and Redcar)

NORTH

Barnsley; Bradford; Derby; Doncaster; Hull; Leeds; York; Selby; Sheffield.

NORTH WEST

Lancaster; Manchester; Merseyside; Preston; St Helens; Stockport; Wigan.

MIDLANDS

Birmingham; Coventry; Northampton; Leicester; Oxford; Potteries.

WALES and SOUTH WEST

Bath; Bristol; Cardiff; Exeter; Swansea

SOUTH

Ashford; Brighton; Crawley; Folkestone; Portsmouth; Southampton.

EAST

Cambridge; Grays and Tilbury; Harlow; Ipswich; Lowestoft; Norwich; North-east Essex.

GREATER LONDON and HOME COUNTIES

Acton; Angel; Camden; Chertsey; Croydon; Dagenham; Deptford; East London; Enfield; Erith; Fulham; Greenford; Hampstead; Harrow; Hemel Hempstead; Hornsey; Ilford; Kilburn; Kingston; Lambeth; Merton; Reading; Richmond; Stoke Newington; Tottenham; Walthamstow; Wandsworth; Watford; Victoria (SW1).



Please send further details of the meetings and activities of the International Socialists to:

Name _____

Address _____

Socialist Worker

How the British troops brought 'peace' to Ballymacarret

from George Collinson

AS THE traditional sectarian orgy of the Orange Order approaches, the situation in Belfast looks grim for the Catholic population.

On Monday night, the British troops followed up their attack

on the Falls area by sealing off another Catholic district - Ballymacarret.

This action was aimed at seizing more arms and beating the population into submission.

Ballymacarret is a small Catholic enclave of 11 streets, totally surrounded by Unionist areas.

Both troops and RUC refused to

disperse an Orange mob which had gathered at the bottom of Seaford Street. The crowd were directing hostile and provocative slogans at the people of this tiny area.

When the Catholics came onto the streets and protested to the army, they were fired on from the crowd.

The Marine Commandos scattered in an undignified manner. For the next six hours the people of Ballymacarret were forced to defend themselves as no police or troops appeared.

At 12.30am a breathless policeman ran up to a soldier on the corner of Mountpottinger Road and pleaded with him to do something. The soldier said he could do nothing as he was awaiting orders. Another policeman sought refuge among the Catholic population.

The Marines watched as Paisleyites burned the house of a church caretaker, two pubs and six shops.

Ballymacarret and the Lower Falls are now unable to defend themselves and cannot have any faith or depend on the troops to defend them.

Pointed the way

By disarming the population and arresting socialist and republican leaders, the army has pointed the way for the continuation of the pogrom that the McKeague and Paisleyite fascists attempted to start last August.

The troops have placed the Catholics in a position of extreme danger.

Walking around the 'loyalist' areas of Belfast, it is not difficult to pick out the pervading air of buoyancy that has arisen as the result of last weekend's events.

The mean little working-class streets around Sandy Row are decorated with bunting and festooned with Union Jacks. Any class conscious worker living in the area must find it overbearing and sickening.

To see the Protestant working population so taken up with religious and imperialist diversions is frightening. They seem so concerned with beating the Catholics that their own extreme poverty has been pushed into the background. The age-old capitalist tactic of 'divide and rule' can be seen with all its pretensions swept away.

CAMBRIDGE: TORIES TAKE OFF VELVET GLOVE

by THE EDITOR

THE NEW TORY BRITAIN took off the velvet glove and revealed the knuckle-duster last Friday when eight Cambridge students were sentenced to harsh prison and Borstal terms.

Their 'crime' was to have taken part in a protest against a 'Greek Week' in the university town - an expensive slap-up orgy by local businessmen and politicians to boost the image of the colonels' squalid dictatorship in Greece.

The authorities responded in a manner similar to the Greek fascists whom they admire so much. They brought in Britain's toughest judge, Mr Justice Melford Stevenson, the man who sentenced the Krays, who lives in a charming little residence called 'Truncheons'.

Melford Stevenson had more police on duty during the trial than during the Kray case, at which he also presided. He handed out sentences ranging from nine to 18 months for trivial offences such as pushing and shouting, and obstructing a policeman.

And, with a final lick of the chops, he recommended two of the students to be deported to their countries of origins. The countries in question are South Africa and Brazil.

No doubt Mr Justice Melford Stevenson, sipping his hot bedtime chocolate at Truncheons, will get a warm glow thinking of what lies in store for two young men sent to such havens of democracy and tolerance.

TRAVESTY

Only one of the jailed students had any previous convictions. Only six of the 15 brought to trial were charged on the night of the demonstration. Others were charged with offences as long as two months after the protest had taken place.

Highly involved in this travesty of justice were the university proctors who used their knowledge of the student movement to put the finger on left-wingers.

The parents of one of the accused committed suicide shortly before the trial began. The defence privately told the judge that a prison sentence for the student in question would be like writing his death warrant in view of his mental state.

Mr Justice Melford Stevenson sent the student to prison for 15 months.

This was a political trial. It is an attempt to limit the rights of freedom of assembly and dissent.

SCAPEGOATS

The trial is a measure of the shot in the arm which every section of the ruling class felt when the Tories returned to office.

Our rulers are looking for blood in the universities and in industry. As their system totters and creaks around them, they will search for scapegoats with all the ferocity of medieval witch-hunters.

The labour and trade union movement must protest against the Cambridge sentences. But more than that it must redouble its efforts to build a movement to take power away from the frenzied clique who threaten our hard-won rights.

LONDON REGION IS meeting Thurs 16 July, 7.30pm, Conway Hall, Red Lion Sq, WC1. Which way for the Communist Party? Spkrs Jim Higgins and Eric Porter.

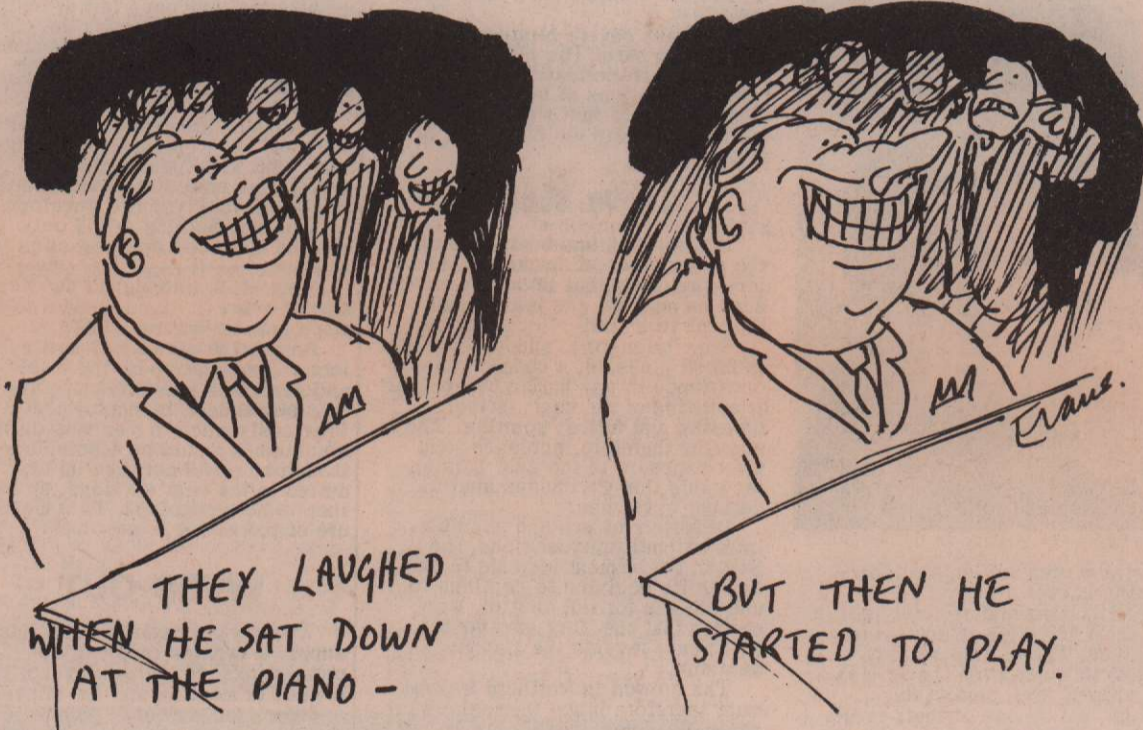
LIVERPOOL: How to fight the Tories. Public meeting at Free Church Centre, Turlington St (opp Woolworths in Church St), 7.30pm Thurs 23 July.

SWANSEA IS summer meetings start Fri 17 July. Talk on 1926 General Strike in South Wales, Red Cow pub, 7.30pm.

WOMEN! - read the newsletter of the IS women's groups. 6d per copy inc post. Money with orders to 355 Lordship Lane, London N17.

HACKNEY IS and CP joint public mtg on How to fight the Tories. Trades Hall, Valette St E9 Weds 15 July 8pm. Spkrs John Palmer IS, Bill Dunne, CP and Lew Smith, ASW.

Published by the International Socialists 6 Cottons Gdns London E2. Printed by S W (Litho) Printers Ltd. (TU all departments) Registered with the Post Office.



Women workers lead fight for more pay

DAGENHAM: - 1800 workers - half of them women - are on official strike at the May and Baker chemical and drugs firm.

Supported by their union, the Chemical Workers, they are demanding a 20 per cent overall pay increase. The highest basic rate for men is £20 a week.

The lowest basic for men is 8s 4d an hour. Women get 5s 8d an hour.

Rejected

Their 20 per cent demand would achieve parity with the firm's Welwyn Garden City works.

On Tuesday a mass meeting of strikers rejected the latest management offer of an increase ranging from 11 - 18 per cent. The management declared that they had reduced their offer after the Tory election victory as the time was now ripe to get tough with the workers.

Builders protest

BUILDING WORKERS at the Edmonton Incinerator Plant construction site in North London staged a token half-day strike on Tuesday in protest at the smell of rubbish on the site. They also want action to stop the Greater London Council from burning human excrement on the site.

They hoped their offer would split the strikers. In particular, they hoped to buy off the women workers. But the women are very militant and all the strikers are determined to stick out for the full 20 per cent.

Donations to: Charlie Redding, 39 Colman Road, Dagenham, Essex.

Sovex out for 7 weeks

THE strike at the Erith (Kent) engineering factory of Sovex Conveyors shows no sign of weakening. After seven weeks the men are still determined to stay out for an all-round rise with no strings.

They describe the latest company offer of 15s as an insult.

Many of the stewards are also angered by reports of a secret meeting of the Engineering Employers Federation. This opposed any settlement of the strike on terms favourable to the men for fear of setting up a wave of demands for parity of wages in local engineering.

Italy: unions call off strike as government goes

by Norah Carlin

WHEN the Italian Centre-Left government announced its resignation on Monday for the third time in two years - the three big trade union federations immediately called off the general strike for social and economic reforms which they had called for Tuesday.

The crisis centred once again on the Socialist Party's policy of local coalitions with the Communist Party, this time in the new regional governments of Tuscany and Umbria. Though the new regions of Italy have no real powers, the elections shook the Centre-Left coalition (Christian Democrats, Social Demo-

crats and Socialists) to its foundations.

For if the Communists are fit partners for the Socialists locally, why not at the centre too? This has been more or less the issue for three summers running.

It might be thought that the Communist Party could have used the general strike to demonstrate their support in the working class. But to achieve the recognition they want, the Communists must show they will use this support only in a 'responsible' way.

They have recently pursued a policy of separation between the party leadership and the leading posts in the CGIL, 'their' trade union federation. They are anxious

to suggest that the federation is not the puppet of the party.

It is also a 'responsible' gesture to respect the scruples of the other two big union federations who were to co-operate in the strike, the CISL and UIL.

So the Italian working class must wait for action while the Communist Party plays the game of parliamentary politics. It is just possible that the party will be invited to join a coalition government of some sort - though that possibility was avoided in 1968 and 1969.

In that case, any action will have to be taken by the Italian workers themselves, without illusions in leaders who have both eyes on the ballot box.

'NO STRINGS' SAY ENGINEERS

by Ted Jones

FIFTY engineering workers - members of the AEF - have been on strike for three weeks as the Highgate, North London, firm of Cambridge Instruments. They are demanding a 3s an hour all-round increase.

They voted at a mass meeting last Thursday not to meet again for a week to show the management their determination to win. The firm is part of the George Kent group and the strikers claim that their wages are among the lowest in the combine.

Determined

The strikers are also determined to win an increase without 'strings'. Previous awards have been tied to productivity concessions, to the workers' detriment.

Workers at Eversheds and Vignoles in Acton, also part of the Kent combine, threatened solidarity action unless Cambridge Instruments stopped using 'contract labour' - non-union, self-employed men, similar to the lump in the building industry. The contract workers were removed last Friday.

Donations to: H Webber, 12 Pages Lane, London N10.