

Socialist Worker

FOR WORKERS' CONTROL AND INTERNATIONAL SOCIALISM 199 12 DECEMBER 1970 6d (2½p)

500,000 strikers



A section of Tuesday's 15,000-strong march in London

say 'no Tory laws'

HALF A MILLION WORKERS throughout Britain stopped work on Tuesday in the biggest political demonstration since the General Strike.

The response was a hearty kick in the teeth for the employers, the Tories and the press, all of whom had predicted that the strike would be a flop.

The confusion and disarray of the press and radio in the coverage of the strike shows how badly rattled they were by the stoppages and demonstrations against the government's attempt to bring in anti-union laws.

200,000 workers went on strike for the day in LONDON.

In MANCHESTER 100,000 were out. 150,000 stopped in LIVERPOOL.

In Scotland, 25,000 were out in PAISLEY, 20,000 in GLASGOW, 8,000 in EDINBURGH and 30,000 in DUNDEE.

In SOUTH WALES 10,000 backed the strike. 8,000 were out in BRISTOL and 3,000 in SOUTHAMPTON.

In Yorkshire, 18,000 struck in SHEFFIELD, 15,000 in LEEDS and 5,000 in HULL.

The most disappointing response came from the NORTH EAST and the MIDLANDS. Car workers from Birmingham, Coventry and the Black Country were out but the total for this vital area was only 25,000.

Industries hit included printing — there were no national newspapers — docks, engineering, motors and building. In the car industry, Ford, Vauxhall, Lucas, Dunlop and Standard Triumph were all hit on Merseyside, Chrysler, Linwood was solidly out in Scotland and in the Midlands SU Carburettor, Tractors and Transmissions, Morris Addeney Park, Birmid Qualcast and Coventry Chrysler were all shut.

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Lively posters and banners on the march

Full support for power workers

BLACKOUT BLACKMAIL —BY THE BOSSSES

THE BASIC WAGE for a labourer in the electrical supply industry is £15 17s 6d a week — and this includes a fixed weekly payment for overtime. Last year the electrical supply industry made £100m profit.

But in the same year they paid out a meagre £800,000 increase to their workers, despite the level of price increases. Simple facts like these explain the power cuts that are inconveniencing people all over Britain.

Power workers, like workers in so many other industries, are fed up. Fed up with productivity deals that continually increase the pace of work. Fed up with taking home wage packets that each week buy less than the week before.

Tory Chancellor Barber has spoken about the 'country being held to ransom'. Newspaper owners have been quick to echo his words.

But it is workers like those in the power industry who are being blackmailed. The government is trying to make them pay the price for solving its economic problems.

It is doing its utmost to stop them winning their struggle for decent wages.

DISCOURAGE

The Tories hope that by defeating the power workers they can discourage other groups of workers. So wages will be held down while prices and rents soar and while the recent welfare cuts and increases in school meals and health service charges bite into our living standards.

If the power workers lose their present struggle it will be a defeat all of us.

That is why press barons and government ministers try to outbid one another in hysterical accusations against the workers that man the power stations.

Ministers talk of the terrible effects the failure of electrical heating can have on old people. They do not

THE FACTS

Profit of the electrical supply industry last year was £100m.

The labour force has fallen by 25,874 workers in the last four years. The total amount paid out on wages only rose by £800,000 last year.

But the amount paid as 'capital charges' (ie as interest to money lenders) rose by £38.1m.

Wages accounted for only 6.5 per cent of total expenditure compared with 6.8 per cent in 1967-8. Capital charges accounted for 37.3 per cent.

say that every year 60,000 old people die of cold because of their miserable pensions.

News reports dwell on the problems of the hospitals. They do not say that if any hospital faces power cuts it is the fault of the Generating Board for not warning of the need to use the emergency generators all hospitals possess.

PARASITES

Every worker who wants to improve his own wages and living conditions in the coming months must give full support to the power workers.

Any hardship to the rest of us is not the fault of those who sweat every day to provide electricity but of parasites like Heath, Barber and Carr who are determined to prosper at our expense.

The paper that fights anti-union laws

We have the power to stop the laws

8 DECEMBER HAS SHOWN the strength of the movement against anti-union laws. In spite of the sneers in the millionaire press, Tuesday saw the biggest and most impressive political strike in Britain since 1926. Hundreds of thousands of workers showed their contempt for the lying propaganda against the strike.

But many workers feel that now that the protests have been made nothing more can be done to stop the laws coming into operation. Many trade union leaders say that we have to accept that the laws will be passed and that we have to learn to live with it. 'Left' leader Hugh Scanlon said at the weekend that 'the Rubicon had been crossed and the laws will be passed'.

The union leaders' arguments are simple. For example, the TUC pamphlet 'Reason' says that the Bill is 'based on party political prejudice'. The implications of this line of reasoning are clear. All we have to do is to wait four years and vote for the Labour Party, which will repeal the laws.

Influential voices within the Labour Party leadership are arguing that the party should seem to move to the left. Richard Crossman in last week's New Statesman called on Harold Wilson to 'throw bridges across the gulf... that now exists between Labour's parliamentary leadership and what has been the bedrock of its national support' so as to 'break or lead... new syndicalist militancy'.

Trade union leaders will tell us to put our faith in the Labour Party and the Labour leadership will mouth left-sounding slogans in order to gain support.

But the present offensive against the unions is not a result of Tory policy alone. It was Barbara Castle who tried to bring in such laws in the first place. The fact is that British big business feels that it can no longer be sure of its future profit levels unless it attacks working-class living conditions and the methods by which workers defend those conditions.

Forget its promises

The last Labour government tried to introduce anti-union laws. It also forced council rents to rise, re-imposed prescription charges, brought in a wage freeze and encouraged the spread of productivity bargaining. There is no likelihood that a future Labour government, once in power, would not forget its pre-election promises and behave in the same way.

Many union leaders hope to avoid putting up a fight against the Bill now by talking of the need to return a Labour government in the future.

But the Bill can and must be fought NOW. On Tuesday SOGAT Division A showed that the law cannot stop strike action by a strong and militant section of workers. In spite of the use of High Court injunctions against the executive of SOGAT, the newspaper proprietors were not able to get their papers printed.

If trade union leaders were to announce now that they would refuse to have anything to do with the various bodies to be set up under the Tory law, and would break the law by ignoring it, the Tories would be as helpless as the newspaper owners. They would not dare put the leaders of major trade unions in prison for refusing to pay fines or accepting cooling-off periods.

But the union leaders are unwilling to make such an announcement. Instead most of them have been arguing against the one-day strike.

Many of them secretly hope that the new law will reinforce their autocratic control over the unions. That is why they will not fight seriously. And that is why the fight against the laws cannot be separated from the struggle for rank and file control over the unions.

The fight back has to be organised from below, by building Councils of Action with a genuine basis among organised trade unionists in each locality. Only in this way can we be sure that every worker understands that the law is a threat to his right to protection against the employers, let alone prepare a movement capable of fighting the laws and defending any workers victimised by them.

THE BRITISH BACKERS OF FRANCO'S REPRESSION

IN RECENT YEARS western press propaganda has attempted to show Spain as a country becoming more liberal. Franco has been presented as a despot growing more benevolent in his old age.

The trial of Basque nationalists in Burgos this week shows the grim reality that underlies the 'liberal' image. People are still hauled before military courts. Torture remains the norm. A show of armed force is still the regime's response to strikes and demonstrations.

In spite of this, up to 800,000 workers have been striking against the trial. Strikes are illegal in Spain. In recent months, hundreds of militants have been arrested for their activities. But the workers' movement is gathering strength. Government measures have not cowed it.

Press pundits in Britain have hastened to express horror at the repression. They want to wash their hands of the regime they were apologising for a short time ago.

But it is worth looking at the list of capitalist concerns who benefit from Franco's anti-strike laws.

Babcock and Wilcox, Metal Box and GKN all have major factories there, as well as many other British and European companies. Employers that boast about their 'concern' for their employees in this country keep quiet when police terror is used against workers in their Spanish plants.

Protests against the Burgos trial are necessary. So is solidarity with those involved in strikes and demonstrations throughout Spain. But let us remember that those who benefit from the torture and repression do not reside only in Madrid. A good many are to be found much nearer home.

Whitehaven disaster:

whitewash for bosses

JOHN CHAMBERS AND DENNIS ORR were buried beneath 6000 tons of concrete steel and chemicals just over four years ago when the silo they were working under collapsed. It took three days to dig their bodies out of the rubble.

The incident wasn't noticed in the press for a 'better' story broke the very next day. Aberfan. It was just a routine industrial accident when the silo came down in Whitehaven, Cumberland. And, just like 286 others in UK construction in 1966, it was fatal.

At the inquest three weeks later, Mr W H T Gough, the West Cumberland Coroner, directed the jury that there was no question of criminal negligence involved. A verdict of accidental death was recorded.

Mr Gough said there would be a separate inquiry into the causes of the collapse. The inquiry has never taken place.

The case was closed, except for the question of how much the widows would get for compensation. Construction had merely taken another two lives into its inevitable toll.

But on 19 November, a trade newspaper blew the lid of the deaths of John Chambers and Dennis Orr, and that so-called accident.

Hush up

Construction News revealed that the contractors, the clients and the designers of the silo had gone to incredible lengths to hush up the true causes of the 'accident'. This was because they had all committed gross errors and mistakes that would have done little for their 'reputations' if they had been publicised.

The details are as follows:

In 1965 Marchon Products placed an order with John Laing Construction for four new silos, three to store anhydrite, and one to store 'raw meal' — key chemicals in the manufacture of sulphuric acid used in making washing powder.

Marchon represented the bulk density of anhydrite to John Laing as 100 - 110 pounds per cubic foot. Tests later showed this to be about 150 pounds per cubic foot.

Marchon stated that the chemical's angle of repose was approximately 25 degrees. Tests established that this varied from 38 degrees to 45 degrees.

A steel hopper was mounted 37 feet above ground to allow the anhydrite to be discharged as needed. The hopper was supported on a reinforced concrete ring beam (corbel), cast on to the wall of the silo.

Marchon's inaccuracies led to a 40 per cent increase in the vertical load on the supporting corbel.

Unsuitable

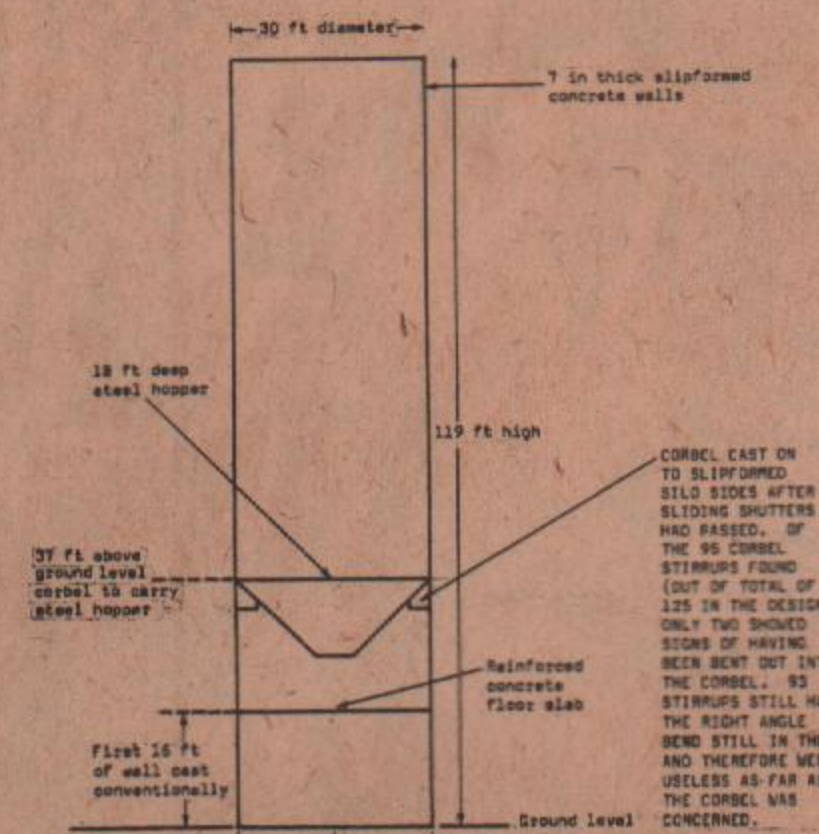
And when Marchon specified a cylindrical shape for the silos, they had not apparently considered the way anhydrite clings together when stored and arches upwards. After the deaths it was argued that this type of silo was unsuitable for the chemical and that collapse of an arch of material could have triggered failure.

John Laing and Son, the designers of the reinforced concrete and foundations, did not allow for the weight of the hopper or its immediate contents in the design of the ring beam to support it. This meant that the Laing design was insufficient to meet even Marchon's inaccurate information.

Further, the building method chosen — casting the corbel on after the silo shell had been slipformed — was less desirable than casting the corbel and shell as one.

And John Laing Construction, who built the silo, only managed to bend out two of the reinforcing stirrups for the corbel out of 95 recovered after the collapse. 125 were shown on the drawings.

Nor did this firm make proper provision for bedding the hopper on a mortar bed or grout layer. This meant that the bearing between steel and concrete was uneven, with local areas of high load. Distinguishing Engineering, contractors for the



supply, design and erection of the steel hopper — mounted inside the silo to permit discharge as required — made an arithmetical error in calculating the pressure on it. As a result the compressive stress on the plate was two and half time greater than the permissible limit.

These are the reasons why silo 17 collapsed killing two workers, why the two other identical silos had to be demolished and why the fourth 'raw meal' silo could not be used until strengthening work — paid for by the Laing Group — had been completed.

All this precise, scientific information was collected after the fatal collapse. The sole reason for collecting it was so that a settlement for loss of production could be reached between Marchon and its contractors.

It was intended to remain private and confidential. The only fact the companies didn't take into account was the resourcefulness and integrity of Construction News.

No checking and cross checking was done before the killer silo was built. The crass errors could only have happened if all normal procedures had been abandoned in the drive to get the silos into use immediately.

Perhaps Laing was working against a penalty clause if the silos were not completed by a mutually agreed date. That might explain why only 2 per cent of the key reinforcements were

completed according to design on silo 17.

But after the silo collapse the companies concerned and their insurance advisors spent vast quantities of time and effort to find out who was responsible — not for truth or progress but merely to see who would pick up what share of the bills.

A vast army of solicitors, consulting engineers, insurance men and testing engineers were set to work to hide the truth and square up the balance sheets.

But it wasn't a walkover for these gentlemen. Dennis Orr's widow and her lawyers issued a writ on 31 October 1967 alleging that her late husband's death was due to Marchon's negligence and/or the negligence of one, two or all of its contractors.

This caused the companies considerable difficulty because they had conflicting interests. Solicitors engaged by John Laing Construction and its insurers canvassed a defence in the Orr action blaming John Laing and Son. This was rejected not out of concern for the truth but because it amounted to an attack on the parent company.

Agreement

But though there were conflicts of interest the appearance of company unity became an attractive proposition in the Orr case. If any one of the firms had contested her claim, documents, drawings and other indications of mistakes in construction would have had to be turned over to Mrs Orr's solicitors.

So by February 1968 they came to a private agreement to admit joint liability for damages in Mrs Orr's case. This excluded any discussion of liability for the collapse in that action. It took them a full year to get round to informing Mrs Orr's solicitors of their decision.

Then the obscene bartering started over how little they could get away with paying for Dennis Orr's death, or rather for his widow's 'loss of earnings'.

According to Construction News, as early as January 1968 Queen's Counsel advising John Laing and Son and its insurance company stated that settlement would be of the order of £9000.



Workers digging desperately for the missing men after the silo collapse

men killed by 6000 tons of concrete and steel

Yet 15 months later on 24 April, 1969 Beddington Hughes and Hobart, solicitors for all defendants, were instructed to offer Mrs Orr an out-of-court settlement of £2000. Many solicitors would have advised her to accept. Desperate need for money might have forced her to. But the offer was refused.

On 22 August last year £3500 was paid into court and refused. On 2 October £5000 was offered and this too was turned down.

Mrs Orr's solicitors took the case to court in the belief that none of the offers was enough. On 13 October last year, at Carlisle Assizes, she was awarded £9106 15s.

So three years but a week from the loss of her husband and 22 months after a QC for one of the defendants had advised settlement would be of the order of £9000, the bartering ceased and Mrs. Orr was compensated.

In order to exclude any discussion of blame for the collapse in the Orr case, all the firms had banded together to admit joint liability for damages.

But even before they let Mrs Orr's solicitors know of their decision, Marchon had issued a writ in another court for more than £250,000 damages for breach of contract and negligence against John Laing Construction and Distington.

Contradiction

Marchon and Solway claimed to be indemnified by Laing and Distington against all claims for damages brought in the Orr case. This complete contradiction between the plea in Mrs Orr's action and Marchon's counter-claim in another court is explained by Construction News as follows:

'The idea was to share Mrs Orr's compensation equally among all the companies pending any liability in the claim Marchon had started, thus allowing an 'innocuous' defence in the Orr case. Simply, it was a device to stop any public discussion of why the silo fell down.'

But the Marchon claim never came to court. Though tabled to begin in the High Court on Monday 9 November this year, an out-of-court settlement for an undisclosed sum was reached by the previous Friday. Public scrutiny was now impossible.

Summarising, Construction News wrote: 'For four long years a catalogue of suspected errors which could have served as a warning to firms engaged on similar works has remained undisclosed. At best, the history of this collapse seems to be a lesson on how to keep company reputations out of court.'

Thus four years after the Whitehaven collapse the sordid story of a hush-up was exposed. Let us look at the main question Construction News poses from its investigation.

'The prevention of death and accidents depends primarily on checking, re-checking and competence, all expensive in a competitive world. One of the strongest motivations to devoting the resources to do this properly, it is argued, is company reputation. If reputation can be fairly easily guarded as this case suggests what drive for safety remains?'

No check

But with the catalogue of errors it has itself exposed, this same paper provides documentation for the argument that competition in industry contains an in-built drive against safe working methods.

John Laing Construction never checked Marchon's data on anhydrite. Nor did they check their own design which was insufficient to meet even Marchon's wrong specifications.

No one checked Distington's construction of the steel hopper. In fact no one checked anything, least of all Marchon, who supervised construction.

Any resident engineer given the chance would have checked to see that more than 2 per cent of the key reinforcing corbel stirrups were bent out as agreed on the design. Probably there was such a rush to get the silos into use that all procedure was abandoned.

This attitude is not rooted in particular individuals, but in the system itself. It is not, as Construction News would have it, a lack of drive for safety, but an in-built drive against it.



Whitehaven: scene of the silo collapse and bosses skulduggery

To survive in this society, businessmen have to do things they do not want to do. But their stake in the system is such that they will do them.

Let us imagine that Laing's had made a clean breast of it. Construction News might have been sober enough to congratulate them on their honesty, but all the contracts the company had been expecting to come their way would have gone elsewhere.

Under this set-up, honesty would most likely have led to bankruptcy. So the cover up is adopted.

It can never be justified, but it can be understood. That is the heart of socialist theory, to make the most appalling acts intelligible with a view to transforming the system that produces them.

But the Whitehaven case contains other lessons. Most construction workers believe that death and maiming is inevitable.

Construction News has proved that this is not so. In its editorial, the paper shows that choices are made which result in death and injury. Contractors chose how much or how little they will spend on safe working methods.

With national and international competition, the genuinely safe firm would price itself out of the market. Competitive tendering ensures that every possible corner is cut. And the first is safety.

So decisions are made which ensure that avoidable injury and death take place. Such decisions were responsible for killing most of the 2087 UK construction workers who died at their work in the last 11 years.

By 1969 the construction worker's chance of dying at work in any one year had narrowed to 1 in 4350. His chances of having an industrial accident which caused three or more

days absence from work had narrowed to 1 in 18.1.

Out of 140 cases where breaches of legal requirements were noticed by the Factory Inspectorate in construction last year, employers were guilty in 135 cases and workers in only five, a ratio of 31 to 1.

Nor are all construction workers caught in the fatal attitude that industrial slaughter happens because 'that's the way the cookie crumbles'.

3000 workers on the massive BP Baglan Bay project in South Wales were out on strike in mid-November for a safety committee that will vet working practices.

Two men have died on that site in one week. There are two serious hospitalisations every single week, and between 8am and 10am in the morning there are around 30 'visitors' to the medical bay.

'Agitators'

The site newspaper admits that the majority of serious accidents take place in the last hour of the day, when men are tired.

BP and their contractors will not shorten the working day. That would interfere with production. Nor will they concede workers' representation on a safety committee.

They see such a committee as a vehicle for 'agitators' to 'disrupt' production.

The workers are united for the moment. It is vital - in the precise, human sense of the word - that they win. A few more of them will, in the process of their struggle, understand that this system disrupts life itself and must be changed.

They have a hard and unremitting task to get that lesson over to all their workmates. They seem to be making a good start.

DUBLIN TO INTERN POLITICAL PRISONERS

by SEAN TREACY

THE TORY GOVERNMENT in Dublin has given notice that it will bring in special laws to permit it to intern political prisoners in special camps without trial. The move will give the Stormont regime in Northern Ireland the go-ahead to use similar powers.

The decision to use open repression against republicans and socialists is an indication of the strength of opposition and frustration in the south.

Previous southern Ireland governments have introduced similar measures against republicans. But on this occasion it is clear that Prime Minister Jack Lynch and the Fianna Fail government intend the legislation as a deterrent not only against republicans and socialists but the wider trade union movement as well.

The southern bosses fear that in the coming months Irish workers will mount a serious campaign against their plans for a wage freeze and anti-trade union legislation.

The proposal to set up concentration camps and give the Dublin Castle political police even greater powers than before is a sign of the weakness not the strength of the Fianna Fail government.

No interest

So far there has been no opposition to the proposed legislation from the group of anti-leadership Fianna Failers around Blaney and Haughey.

It seems that their 'republicanism' does not extend to protesting against the internment of republicans on the mere say-so of Britain's loyal government in Dublin.

There are indications that Lynch's move does not have the united support of the southern ruling class. Important newspapers and politicians in the south already suggest that Lynch is giving way to panic and that the decision to open the concentration camps will let loose a new flood of opposition to the government.

The leadership of the southern Labour Party is particularly embarrassed. With the party facing an open split on the issue of whether to support a coalition with the right wing opposition Fine Gael Party, the leadership does not want to have to take a stand on opposing the new police-state powers for Fianna Fail.

By giving notice that the Dublin government can copy with interest the repressive legislation of Stormont, Lynch has shown again that both governments are there to serve the interests of



British capitalism.

In the coming weeks, socialists and trade union militants in Britain must give support to protest action against the measures of the Dublin government and in particular to the demonstrations being called in London, Birmingham, Oxford and other centres next weekend by the Irish Solidarity Campaign.

TROTSKY

A political biography

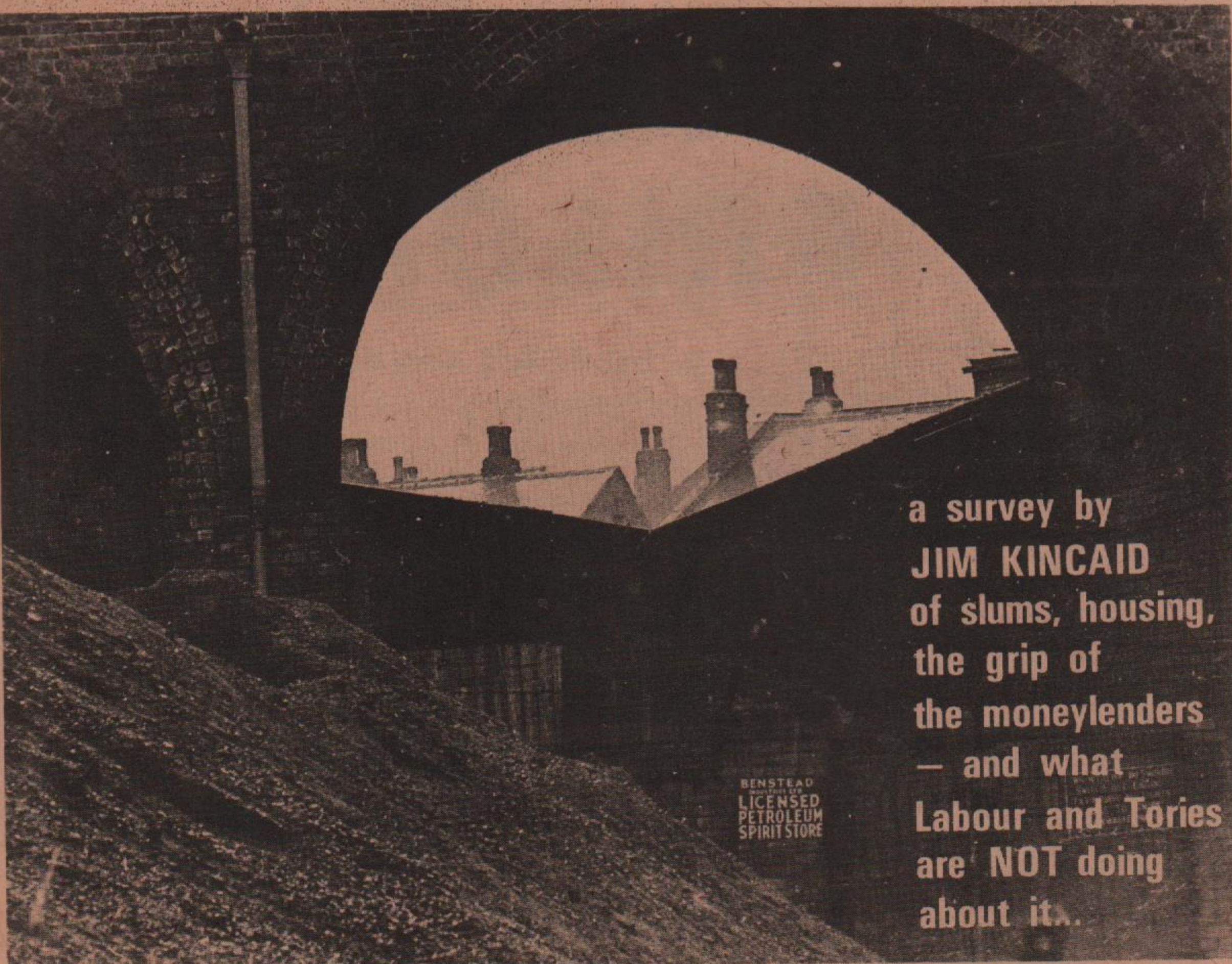
by Isaac Deutscher

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This grim and profitable land



a survey by
JIM KINCAID
of slums, housing,
the grip of
the moneylenders
— and what
Labour and Tories
are NOT doing
about it.

what we stand for



THE International Socialists is a democratic organisation whose membership is open to all who accept its main principles and who are willing to pay contributions and to work in one of its organisations.

We believe in independent working-class action, that we must overthrow capitalism and not tinker with reforms to patch it up.

We work in the mass organisations of the working class and are firmly committed to a policy of internationalism.

Capitalism is international. The giant firms have investments throughout the world and owe no allegiances except to themselves and the economic system they maintain.

In Europe the Common Market has been formed for the sole purpose of increasing the trade and profits of these multi-national firms.

The international power of capitalism can only be overcome by international action by the working class.

A single socialist state cannot indefinitely survive unless workers of other countries actively come to its aid by extending the socialist revolution.

In addition to building a revolutionary socialist organisation in this country we also believe in the necessity of forming a world revolutionary socialist international independent of either Washington or Moscow.

To this end we have close relationships with a number of other socialist organisations throughout the world.

We believe in rank and file control of the trade unions and the

regular election of all full-time officials.

We are firmly opposed to secret negotiations and believe that all settlements should be agreed or rejected by mass meetings.

We are for 100 per cent trade unionism and the defence of shop stewards.

We are against anti-trade union laws and any curbs on the right to strike, whether the strikes are 'official' or 'unofficial'.

We are against productivity deals and job evaluation and are for militant trade union unity and joint shop stewards committees both in the plant and on a combine basis.

We support all demands for equal pay and for a better deal for young workers.

We believe that there should be a minimum wage of at least £25 per week.

We are opposed to unemployment, redundancy and lay offs and support the demand of five days' work or five days' pay.

We support all workers in struggle and seek to build militant groups within industry.

We are opposed to racialism and police victimisation of black workers.

We are opposed to any immigration restrictions and fully support the right of black people to self-defence.

We are opposed to all nuclear weapons and military alliances such as NATO and the Warsaw Pact.

We are opposed to secret diplomacy. Neither Washington nor Moscow but international socialism.

We are opposed to all forms of imperialism and unconditionally give support to and solidarity with all genuine national liberation movements.

We are for the nationalisation of the land, banks and major industries without compensation and under workers' control.

We are for the introduction of a democratic planned economy in which resources can be devoted to social need.

We are opposed to all ruling class policies and organisations. We work to build a revolutionary workers' party in Britain and to this end support the unity of all revolutionary groups.

The struggle for socialism is the central struggle of our time.

Workers' power and a world based on human solidarity, on the increasing of men's power over nature, with the abolition of the power of man over man, is certainly worth fighting for.

It is no use just talking about it. Over a century ago Karl Marx wrote: 'The philosophers have merely interpreted the world. The point is to change it'. If you want to help us change the world and build socialism, join us

THERE ARE 15 BRANCHES IN THE FOLLOWING AREAS:

- SCOTLAND**
Aberdeen/Clydebank/Dundee/Edinburgh/Glasgow N/Glasgow S/Stirling/Fife
- NORTH EAST**
Durham/Newcastle upon Tyne/Teesside (Middlesbrough and Redcar)
- NORTH**
Barnsley/Bradford/Derby/Doncaster/Huddersfield/Hull/Leeds/York/Selby/Sheffield
- NORTH WEST**
Lancaster/Manchester/Oldham/
- Bolton//Merseyside/St Helens/Wigan/Potteries
- MIDLANDS**
Birmingham/Coventry/Northampton/Leicester/Oxford/Nottingham
- WALES and SOUTH WEST**
Bath/Bristol/Cardiff/Exeter/Swansea/Plymouth
- SOUTH**
Ashford/Brighton/Crawley/Folkestone/Portsmouth/Southampton
- EAST**
Cambridge/Harlow/Ipswich/Lowestoft/Norwich/Colchester
- GREATER LONDON and HOME COUNTIES**
Acton/Angel/Bletchley/Camden/Chertsey/Croydon/Dagenham/Enfield/Erith/Fulham/Greenford/Harrow/Hemel Hempstead/Hornsey/Ilford/Kilburn/Kingston/Lambeth/Lewisham/Merton/Newham/Reading/Richmond/Stoke Newington/Slough/South Ealing/Tottenham/Walthamstow/Wandsworth/Watford/Victoria

JOIN THE INTERNATIONAL SOCIALISTS

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FOR THE FIRST TIME in a quarter of a century there is no Minister of Housing in the Cabinet. Instead we have Mr Peter Walker, grandly designated as Minister for the Environment, who will look after housing in the time left over from also being in charge of planning, public works, local government, water, national parks, pollution and historical monuments.

Peter Walker is a millionaire director of the investment firm, Slater Walker Securities, who has made his money through property speculation as one of its many business activities. Mr Walker is no dedicated believer in a social service. 'I hope,' he told the Commons in January 1970, 'that Conservative council house building will be a temptation to go on building council houses for all sorts of seemingly good reasons.' In charge, all councils will be under pressure to avoid such temptations.

Walker has announced his intention to extend Labour's so-called 'fair rent scheme' into council housing. 'I am glad to pay tribute to the Labour Party for introducing this principle,' he told parliament on 3 November.

The effect of this proposal will be that the private market in rented unfurnished accommodation will be used to set the new level of council house rents.

Even the Prices and Incomes Board rejected this approach in 1968, because for one thing, the 'fair rent' includes a generous profit margin, which will now be allowed for in council house rents.

The result will be that, depending on area, a typical council house will cost upwards of £4 a week to rent. In the Budget statement at the end of October, the Tories promised to cut council house subsidies by £100-£200 million a year within the next three years.



WALKER: 'Resist temptation'

Yet at present the annual subsidy for council houses is not more than £227 million, partly from rates, partly from the Exchequer. So it looks as if by about 1974, council housing will have virtually ceased to be even a marginal part of the welfare state.

By comparison, the Tories propose no cut in the subsidy to owner-occupiers in the form of tax relief on mortgage interest — currently costing the taxpayers a cool £214 million a year. As in all tax relief welfare handouts, the lion's share goes to people with the biggest incomes and those who have been able to borrow heavily to buy the more expensive houses.

Ominous

The Tories promise that to protect the poorer council tenants from the steep rise in rents which is in prospect, they will introduce a more effective rents rebate scheme than at present. The government, despite all evidence to the contrary, still clings to the view that the average council tenants are rolling in affluence.

In 1968, the Prices and Incomes Board found that 51 per cent of council tenants had less than £20 a week. And one in four council tenants were old-age pensioners.

Previous experience of rebate schemes is ominous. In 1965, the Greater London Council contacted its 210,000 tenants about a new rebate scheme.

Two years later, only 7000 of them had managed to obtain a rebate. Even in 1970 only 17,000 tenants qualify.

It is usual for rebates to be withdrawn from any tenant who

falls into rent arrears. Since rates rebates were introduced in 1966, each year some 500,000 ratepayers who would qualify miss out on their rights.

As one expert on housing, Audrey Harvey wrote recently, 'Aren't rebates just another handy way, and a well established one, of avoiding higher taxes on the rich, and perhaps, in particular on Britain's 100 or so property millionaires.'

Increases

Londoners look like being the first to feel the impact of the Tory approach to housing. On 26 November, the GLC announced a 30s a week rent increase.

This is to be phased over the

THE HOUSING MESS

Slums

An official survey of housing in 1967 showed 40% of the houses in England and Wales as substandard or lacking in basic amenities. Of these, 1.8 million houses were unfit for human habitation. 5.5 million people living in them. A further 4.5 million homes were overcrowded. 1.5 million people living in them were below standard, and 1.5 old people (i.e. 1 in 5 of all pensioners) live in homes without 2 out of 3 of the basic amenities - kitchen, bath and lavatory. 5 million people living in Scotland, 200,000 have no indoor toilet, 800,000 have no fixed bath in the house. One third of all council houses in Glasgow are classified as slums.

Overcrowding

Officially a household is not overcrowded unless living at a density or more than 1½ persons per room. Actual counts as a room, so that a family of three living in a room is not officially overcrowded. In Scotland, 495,000 people (10% of the whole population). In the Glasgow conurbation, 295,000 people (10% of the population) is overcrowded. In Greater London, 295,000 people (4% of the population). The 1966 Sample Census found 148,400 people in Britain living more than THREE to a room.

Homelessness

The number of totally homeless in England and Wales rose by a third between 1967 and 1969 — from 16,176 to 21,400. There are now over 7,000 children in local authority hostels, for no other reason than that their family is homeless. The cost per child to the local authorities is £9 a week, and any child put into a children's home. Local authorities will not take a family as homeless if it is literally on the street. Local authority hostels for the homeless are the ultimate in despair. Very often the families are broken up, and husbands turned away. The Dartmouth Road Hostel in London is notorious but not untypical. There, in Jan 1970, The Times found: 'five homeless families, comprising five families with fifteen children sleeping crammed together in a room 15

Profiteering

Mainly because of massive increases in interest rates, the cost of buying or renting a house has risen far ahead of the cost of living.

Mortgage Interest Rate.
1964 - 6%
1970 - 8½%

Cost of Average New House to Buy
Jan 1964 - £3,125
Aug 1970 - £5,079

Average Mortgage Repayment per Week (for new house)
1964 - £4 12s
1969 - £8 0s

Between 1964 and 1969, council rents rose by 70%, but council houses being built annually by only 17%. Most council tenants charged went to pay increased interest rates. Local authority rents were 85% higher in 1969 than in 1964.

next three years average rent up 10%. The GLC is waiting lists went up from 1966. The Tories plans to increase council houses, or to snail-pace slum clearance. Their cutting building in the council housing. The basic council housing the profits of the private sector. In 1968, paid in rent 1 million, equal million council. And in the 1968ish construction profit of £20 million, one of the gains of capitalism. The Tories' inability to keep council housing profitable.

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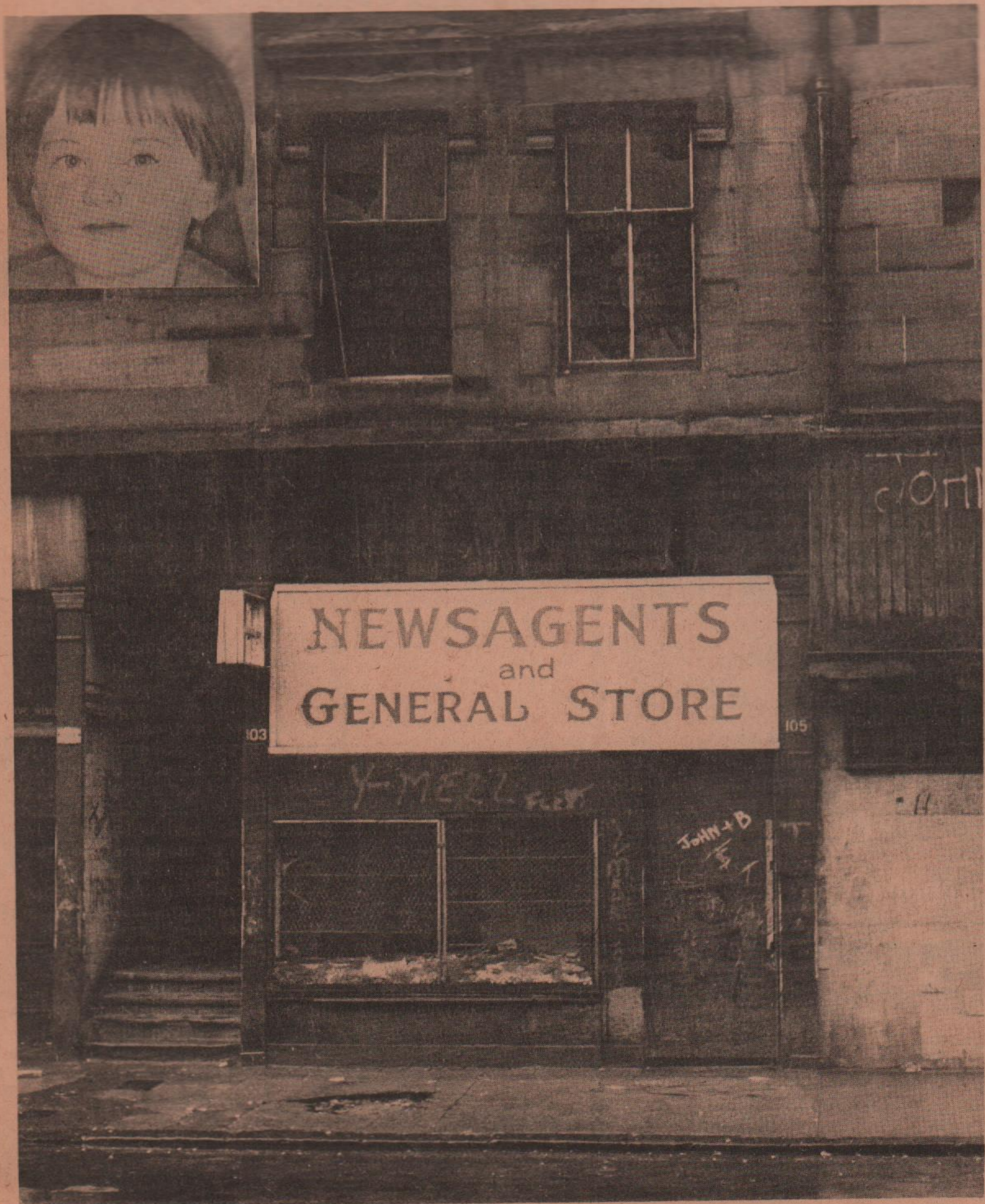
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SIX YEARS OLD REBECCA PATON (inset above) died last month. Her 'home' was the flat above the 'newsagents' shop in Glasgow. She was suffering from gastro-enteritis, brought on by severe malnutrition.

Labour's housing record - from bang to whimper in six wasted years

DURING the 18 months before the general election, there was the biggest drop in housebuilding for a quarter of a century. In 1969 only 380,000 houses were completed.

In 1970 the total is expected to be even fewer, at about 360,000. Less than half of these will be council houses.

By January 1970, one in four of unemployed men were construction workers - and even later in the summer, there were still 100,000 workers in the building trades who could not find a job.

Priorities

Yet Labour had proclaimed housing as a number one priority of their period in office. Harold Wilson boasted in 1966 in a speech in Bradford, that: 'By 1970 ... we shall achieve the target of 500,000 houses a year, and we shall not allow any development, any circumstances, however adverse to deflect us from that aim.'

But fine words butter no property millionaires. Any government that was really determined to solve the housing crisis would have to take on a fight to the death with the powerful interests whose profits depend on the housing shortage - the land owners, the property companies, the landlords, and the moneylenders.

Faced with a real battle, Labour backed down and took the easy way out: a few impressive-looking Acts of parliament, a great many optimistic speeches, and much play with doctored statistics that minimised the real problems.

Behind the public relations facade, rents and land prices were allowed to rocket. Increasingly, high interest rates leached away money that might have been spent on bricks and mortar.

Meanwhile Labour was showing itself remarkably protective towards the wealthier owner occupiers. The Schedule A tax abolished by the Tories in 1963, remained abolished under Labour, at a current cost to the Treasury of about £300 million a year.

When a Capital Gains Tax was introduced in 1965, complete exemption was made for the increase in the value of owner occupied property.

Councils got some help from the subsidy introduced in 1967, which allowed them to borrow at only 4 per cent interest rate. But this relief was very minimal.

The 4 per cent interest rate only applied for new house building, whereas what is strangling local authorities are the interest rates charges on the huge debts accumulated in earlier building.

Decontrolled

Land prices have continued to soar. The ill-fated Land Commission, after operating for three years had only managed to make available enough land to build 337 houses, despite having a staff of more than 1000 civil servants.

The Rent Acts of 1965 and 1969 decontrolled the rents of hundreds of thousands of unfurnished houses and flats. Rent Officers were appointed to decide on what are called 'fair rents'.

In 1969, two-thirds of all assess-

ments by these officers raised rents.

The majority of cases referred to the rent officers come from the property companies seeking to raise rents, rather than from people with average incomes looking for protection against exploitation.

Freshwaters, the biggest company in residential property in London has built up a £100 million empire, much of it acquired since the 1965 Rent Act. The average rent they charge is £8 a week.

Gave whisky

In the Sunday Times of 8 November, the managing director of Freshwater explained that at Christmas the company sent bottles of whisky and sherry to a selection of rent officers.

Commented the Chairman of the Institute of Rent Officers, Lt Col Phillips, 'It would be churlish to misconstrue such an act of basic human decency and friendship.'

In the first three years of Labour rule, expenditure on housing by local authorities rose by £130 million, most of it coming from higher rents. But 82 per cent of this extra cash went on increased interest charges. And even by 1968, before the rot in house production set in, Britain was spending a lower proportion of national income on housing than any other country in Western Europe - Portugal included.

In 1966 the Ministry of Housing carried out a survey of overcrowding. The evidence it produced was so horrifying that publication was banned by Anthony Greenwood, then Labour Housing Minister.

MDW is 'slavery' says boss who brought it in

MEASURED DAY WORK is 'a modern form of slavery'. This was the admission of George Cattell, who as personnel director of Rootes Motors introduced MDW at the company's Coventry factories. He told a conference of managers on 23 November that when he first came to Rootes (now Chrysler), there was 'a happy atmosphere'. A piecework system operated, and shop stewards were able to exercise considerable control of labour loading and the pace of work.

Under MDW, workers were forced to operate to pre-determined standards and received a fixed wage.

Output per man-hour was doubled, 'but no one could claim that the people who work on that line have much interest now in their work, the way it is organised, or in the end product or end rewards' Cattell says.

Reduce control

Despite this, Cattell argues that MDW is 'an inevitable step in the process of changing management techniques'.

This is nothing new to readers of Socialist Worker. We have often shown how MDW and productivity dealing are designed to reduce the control which workers have over their working conditions and to increase the rate of profitability and exploitation.

What is surprising is that Cattell should admit openly that his system is nothing more than slavery. He makes clear that cap-



CATTELL: 'Inevitable step'

italism leads to ever greater exploitation and degradation of working people.

For this reason, successful resistance to these attacks must go beyond mere defensive responses and must involve a struggle to transform the whole basis of work and industry in capitalist society.

Parity begins at home...

by STEVE JEFFERYS

AEF Shop Steward, Chrysler, Linwood

TRANSPORT WORKERS' union shop stewards at British Leyland's Cowley Body Plant, Oxford have rejected a £1 an hour offer in return for Measured Day Work being introduced.

After its introduction MDW pays car workers less than the Payment by Results system because wage rises tend to be only once a year. And wages are no longer related to the speed and effort involved in a job.

This has resulted in workers at Ford, Vauxhall and Chrysler all getting much lower wages than workers on equivalent jobs in British Leyland factories where PBR operates.

Unity

But there is another side of the coin. Since the magnificent fight at Ford in 1968, MDW has lost some of its flavour for the bosses operating it.

Before then there was little unity within the big factories on MDW, let alone shop-floor unity between factories.

Today the spirit among workers in the industry has largely changed. Horizons have been lifted. To the bosses' dismay, shop stewards and workers are now looking to the best wages and conditions, not to the worst. Car workers under MDW have united around the general demands for:

- 1. PARITY:** Equal pay for equal work. The same wages should be paid in Ford for the same job done in British Leyland.
- 2. EQUAL PAY FOR WOMEN:** Men and women should be paid the same money. Cheap labour is damaging to all workers whether they wear skirts or kilts.
- 3. NO PENAL CLAUSES:** We must fight the government's and employers' intentions to impose penalties on workers struggling for improved wages and conditions.
- 4. MUTUALITY:** No changes in work standards, track speeds or any other aspect of working conditions unless agreed to by the workers involved.

This is the background to last week's claim for a £14 a week rise lodged by the union negotiators at Ford and to the rejection of a £4 10s offer with strings at Chrysler's Linwood factory.

The fight for these demands is one which threatens the whole purpose of MDW - low wages plus considerable management control.

Chrysler deliberately stalled the negotiations on the new deal to stockpile and to bring the inevitable deadlock that much closer to Christmas. They then rejected the shop stewards' terms of reference, which included most of the points above, and offered a £4 10s a week rise to bring Linwood production operators up to 15s 8d an hour (as against 19s 1d at Ryton, Coventry).

The rise was conditional on selling all the conditions that had been sold before and much more besides.

Contempt

The shop stewards treated the offer with the contempt it deserved. After a long debate on how and when to defeat the company and win their demands, they decided by a four to one majority over a call for a one week's notice of strike action to impose an immediate and complete ban on overtime. Further action will be considered later.

Chrysler's Linwood shop stewards, who previously had taken the initiative in the formation of a local Paisley Action Committee for the Defence of Trade Unions, are showing that the struggle today against the employing class takes many forms.

And parity, to coin a phrase, begins at home.

1926: magnificent solidarity of the rank and file was

betrayed by TUC

Black Friday, 15 April 1921, is remembered in the trade union movement as the sad day when the railway and transport union leaders called off at the last minute their strike in support of the miners.

The Triple Alliance collapsed and its failure was regarded throughout the movement as a cruel desertion of the miners at their time of need.

The miners struggled alone until the end of June, when the executive of the Miners' Federation of Great Britain capitulated and ordered a return to work on the coal owners' terms despite a majority in a ballot vote for rejecting them.

The miners suffered a heavy defeat which was followed by a serious decline in their union membership. Their lock-out was a blow struck against the whole labour movement.

It was the beginning of the general employers' offensive against the wages and conditions won since the war. The employers' demand for wage cuts now spread rapidly from coal to other industries, and gave rise to a general decline in wage rates.

Shipyard workers, faced with serious unemployment, had also been bullied into accepting wage cuts. Engineers tried to fight back, but in July were forced to agree to similar terms.

The same happened to wages in the building trade. In the cotton industry, the workers were also driven to accept substantial wage reductions after a general lock-out in June.

During the remainder of 1921 after Black Friday, there were a series of defensive rearguard actions which were stubbornly fought but proved unable to contain the employers' offensive. This attack was pressed home throughout industry, and in section after section wages came tumbling down.

Attack

By the end of 1921 six million workers had suffered wage cuts averaging 8s a week. This general attack on wages occurred against the background of steadily rising unemployment.

By the end of 1921, there were nearly two million out of work, the unions having spent at least £7 million in unemployment benefit since the start of the depression.

In March 1922, there was a general lock-out in the engineering industry. Engineering workers had rejected the employers' demand that the allocation of overtime should be the sole prerogative of management, and had demanded instead that, except in emergency, overtime should be worked only by mutual consent.

Against the background of unfavourable trade conditions and rising unemployment, the AEU leaders had recommended that their members accept the agreement demanded by the employers. The struggle continued until June, by which time the immense funds of the AEU had drained away and they too had to accept defeat.

During the first part of this period of defensive struggle by the working class, the big post-war gains in union membership fell by over two million, a higher number than the increase in union membership gained since 1918.

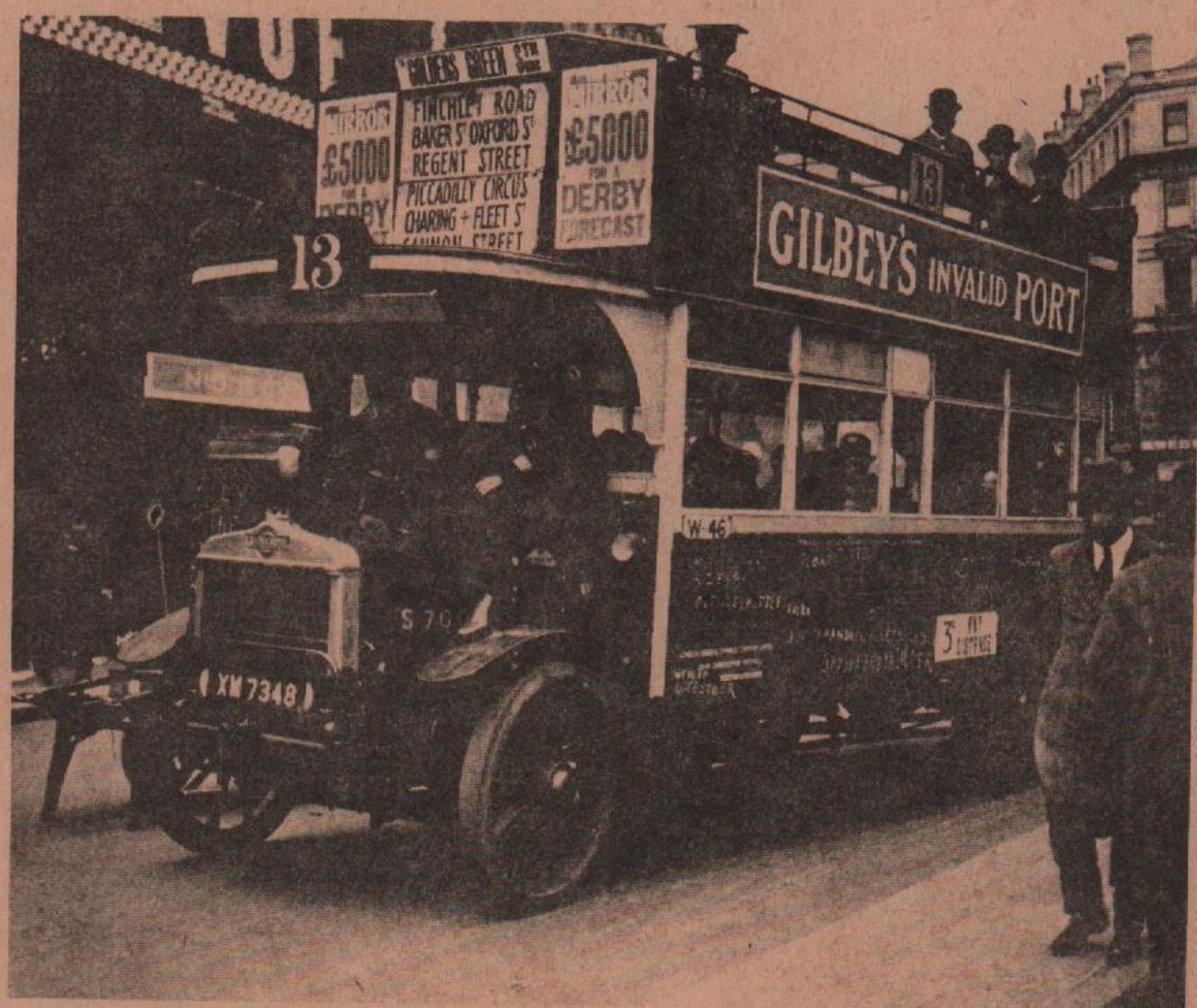
Disappointed

Throughout 1922 and 1923 wages continued, on the whole, to fall. There was some sign of recovery, however, by the middle of 1923.

The first part of the year had seen a series of strikes, many unofficial, among builders, agricultural workers, seamen, boilermakers and dockers. These strikes were not all of a defensive character.

The unofficial dockers' strike in July was for higher wages and only ended when the TGWU promised to launch a national wages movement.

In January 1924, the first Labour government under Ramsey MacDon-



A blackleg bus driven in London during the General Strike

Part two of a series by SABBY SAGALL

ald took office for the brief term of one year as a minority government dependent upon Liberal support. It brought the working class none of the benefits which its supporters had hoped for.

On the contrary, it deeply disappointed many trade unionists and contributed to the developing left-wing trend in the trade union movement.

The clearest expression of this was the founding in August 1924 of the National Minority Movement dedicated to the quest for workers' control.

The attitude of the 1924 Labour government to strikes was summed up by J R Clynes, one of its ministers, who said that it 'played the part of a national government, not a class government.'

In May 1924, the threat of a national miners' strike won increases which raised their wages well above the minimum level fixed in 1921. Nationally the number of strikes rose from 628 in 1923 to 710 in 1924, and the number of strikers from 405,000 to 613,000.

Large numbers of workers had started negotiations for improved conditions, but they met with indifferent success. The miners were able to achieve a temporary success as a result of the French occupation of the Ruhr which gave the mines a short-lived prosperity.

During 1925 two things became clear: first, that the leftward trend in the unions was accelerating, and second, that the mines were to be the centre of an even more crucial struggle than before.

The economic position of the coal industry was deteriorating once again, and the owners presented new demands for drastic wage cuts, for the abolition of the principle of a minimum wage, and for an increase in working hours.

The unions were threatened with renewed attacks on their wages and conditions. The slight upward movement in the economy in 1924 was over and trade was once again on the decline.

British capitalism was in the throes of a desperate struggle to rehabilitate its economy and re-establish its international position. Employers were everywhere claiming that labour costs were too high and demanding reduced wages.

The miners found themselves once again in the front line of the capitalist offensive. They realised that economic conditions were against them, that the owners, in the face of dep-

ression and falling prices, would not object too strongly to a strike.

The Miners' Federation appealed to the TUC General Council for help. A special committee was set up by the TUC to organise support.

Assurances of support were received from the leaders of the railway and transport unions. Plans were drawn up for an embargo on all coal transport in the event of another lock-out of the miners.

The government were unprepared for such a development and beat a hasty though temporary retreat. They stalled the miners with another Royal Commission, the Samuel Report, which when it appeared in March 1926, made vague references to state intervention in the coal industry but precise references to the need for the miners to accept longer hours or lower wages.

The half-heartedness of the General Council's support for the miners was apparent from the start. They believed that the miners should accept wage reductions on condition that the industry was 're-organised'.

Pushed

The miners, however, were undeterred by the signs of weakening on the part of the General Council. The evidence they had suggested that masses of trade unionists would rally to their support when the crunch came.

The General Council was pushed into action against its will after the coal employers had again demanded drastic wage cuts and had provocatively posted lock-out notices in May 1926. Despite an enthusiastic response from the rank-and-file to the call for a General Strike, the TUC leaders, collapsed after nine days.

Up to the last minute, they had hoped to avoid any trouble, and had not made any preparations for the strike. The government, however, treated it as a revolutionary challenge to its authority and were fully prepared.

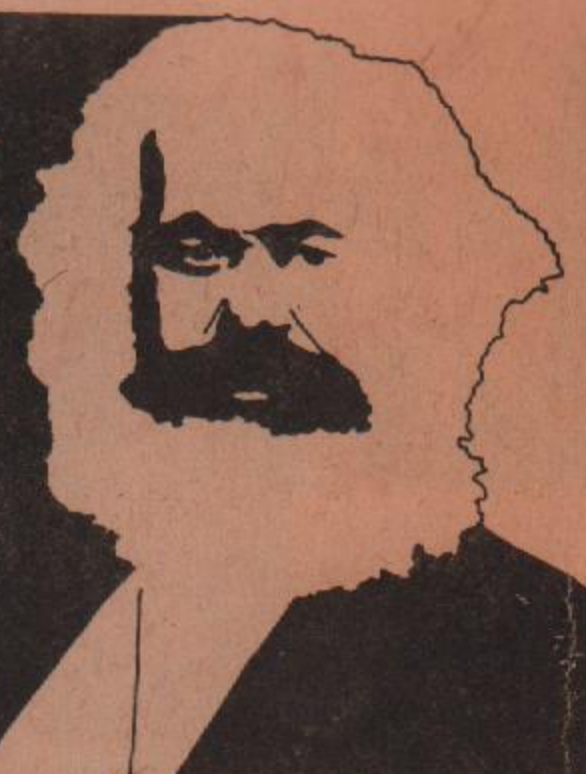
During the nine days of the General Strike, there was never any sign of weakening. Local Councils of Action were consolidating themselves, there was mass picketing and a tremendous growth in local propaganda activity.

In spite of the General Council's claim that the strike was purely industrial its political character was growing. The working class was clearly beginning to feel its real strength and to sense what united, mass action could achieve.

By the end of the first week, the General Council were concerned not with leading the strike but with negotiations to end it. Their abject retreat left the miners isolated, and they were eventually defeated with the rest of the movement.

THE MEANING OF MARXISM

A weekly column by Duncan Hallas



IN 1870 MOST OF AFRICA was still ruled by Africans. By 1914 the continent had been almost completely carved up by the European powers. Only the US puppet state of Liberia and the precariously independent Kingdom of Ethiopia survived.

In Asia the remaining independent states were either conquered like Burma or effectively partitioned into 'spheres of influence' by the great powers as in the case of China. Such nominal 'independence' as remained to states like Iran or Turkey was due entirely to the conflicts between their would-be conquerors.

So too with Oceania and South America. The powers of Europe and North America ruled almost the whole world.

These were the peak years of imperialism in ideology as well as in fact, the years of Kipling's 'white man's burden', of Taft's 'manifest destiny', of Rhodes' 'I would annex the planets if I could'.

They were also the years in which European and US capitalism was undergoing profound structural changes. 'Laissez-faire' capitalism was giving way to monopoly capitalism.

In Germany by 1914 'less than one-hundredth of the total enterprises utilise more than three-fourths of the steam and electric power... small enterprises, representing 91 per cent of the total, utilise only 7 per cent of the steam and electric power.'

Vengeance

In the USA, 'John Moody in 1904 cited 318 trusts, most of them formed after 1898, as evidence that control of business and capital was rapidly concentrating into fewer and fewer hands.'

Similarly, though in varying degrees, with every capitalist society, Marx's prediction that 'one capitalist always kills many' was coming true with a vengeance.

That these facts were connected with one another was the essential argument of Lenin's theory of imperialism. 'Under the old type of capitalism, when free competition prevailed, he wrote, 'the export of goods was the typical feature. Under modern capitalism, when monopolies prevail, the export of capital has become the typical feature.'

In order to safeguard the investments of their ruling classes the governments of the imperialist powers were forced to impose direct foreign rule over the 'backward' countries. Other factors driving them in the same direction were the struggles for control of raw materials and for markets protected against competitors. But monopoly and the export of capital were the key features.

The evidence for Lenin's case was impressive and at the time it was written it undoubtedly had a large measure of truth. Take the case of Britain.

The pioneer investigator of British imperialism, J A Hobson, showed that 'British foreign and colonial investments increased from 1883 to 1893 at the rate of 74 per cent per annum. In 1899 the profits on these investments totalled between £90 and £100 millions sterling; in 1909 they had risen to £140 millions and in 1915 to about £200 millions, that is to about 1/4 of the income of the upper and middle classes, since total incomes subject to tax were about £900 million.'

Export

The same tendency was, in varying degrees, present in all the imperialist countries.

The relative stability of late Victorian and Edwardian capitalism rested upon this export of capital. A way had been found of alleviating the inherent instability of the system — for a time and at a terrible price.

In purely economic terms the problem for the capitalist class is that accumulation of capital, which is forced on each capitalist concern by its competitors, drives up the demand for labour power and hence its price — wages. This in turn eats into the surplus value and the resulting erosion of the rate of profit checks accumulation and precipitates recession.

The white man's 'burden'

Unless, of course, the connection between accumulation and the rising demand for labour power can be broken. This is exactly what the export of capital to 'backward' areas helped to achieve from about 1880 onwards.

The Indian jute mill workers, the African miners, the Chinese cotton spinners could be and were paid even less than the 'historically determined price' of their labour power. With the disruption by capitalism of the traditional pre-capitalist economies, a great mass of pauperised labour was available in the colonial and semi-colonial world.

Hence the 'super-profits' of imperialism. And if 'the natives are restless', the whole force of the imperialist power is available to prevent them obtaining even the most elementary democratic rights.

No socialist agitator ever expressed the essence of imperialist politics better than the US Major-General Smedley D Butler:

'I spent 33 years and four months in active service as a member of our country's most agile military force — the Marine Corps... And during that period I spent most of my time as a high class muscle man for Big Business, for Wall Street, and for the bankers. In short I was a racketeer for capitalism...'

Unmolested

'Thus I helped to make Mexico safe for American oil interests in 1914. I helped to make Haiti and Cuba a decent place for the National City Bank boys to collect revenues in... I helped to purify Nicaragua for the international banking house of Brown Brothers in 1909-1912.'

'I brought light to the Dominican Republic for American sugar interests in 1916. I helped to make Honduras "right" for the American fruit companies in 1903. In China in 1927 I helped to see to it that Standard Oil went its way unmolested.'

The price of imperialism was paid by the super-exploited workers and peasants of the colonial world. It was also paid, contrary to Lenin's view, by the workers of the developed capitalist countries.

Again, taking Britain as the example, real wages rose irregularly but considerably until the middle 1890s. From 1896 to 1900 they were fairly steady. Thereafter they began to fall.

'Between 1899 and 1913 real wages actually declined by about 10 per cent.' The export of capital was taking its toll.

A far greater price was required. In 1914 the rivalries and conflicts of the great robber powers exploded into the greatest organised slaughter the world had yet seen.

Tens of millions of working men fought for their masters. Millions died. The high noon of capitalism was over, the 'century of wars and revolution' had begun.

NEXT WEEK: Tories seek their revenge



and radio

HOW the old greybeards at the BBC must have loved Tuesday, the no-union-laws strike and the power workers' dispute. Not since 1926 and the heavy-handed rule of Lord Reith have the corporation bureaucrats had such a chance to oil and run the lie machine.

Distortion, ignorance and sheer barefaced untruths were the order of the day. They got off to a good start on Radio 4 with the Today programme.

Jack de Manio, who is paid a great deal of money to get the time wrong several times a day, snorted and grunted when a heart-rending tale was unfolded about a lady and her artificial lung machine which was on the point of sabotage because of the work-to-rule.

'I hope the power workers were listening to that,' he growled. And the bosses, Jack, and the bosses.

Then his sidekick John Timpson took over with an interview with Kevin Halpin of the Liaison Committee for the Defence of Trade Unions. No smarm, no kid gloves, none of the usual 'hail-fellow-well-met' stuff. Here was a 'red', so get stuck in, John.

'You're unofficial - who elected you?' grated Timpson. And who elected you, Mr Timpson? Who chose you to be the conscience of the nation, bullying and intimidating instead of attempting to give a fair and reasonable presentation of a complex and desperately human problem?

A few hours and one power cut later and Radio 4 came up with the World at One, the news programme that attempts - with some success - to recreate the newspaper style of 1948. Here we had Mr Ian Ross of the industrial staff getting his sums wrong

'It looks as if there are only 50,000 out in the whole of Britain,' his pleased smile oozed from the transistor. He then told us there were 20,000 on the march in London, the docks had stopped, most of the car industry, thousands were out on Merseyside.

The BBC realised the mistake. The afternoon's hourly bulletins stopped mentioning any figures for a while, until they agreed the press agency figure for the London march of 6000. 'Excuse me, constable, I've lost 14,000 marchers between 1pm and 3.30. Can you help me?' 'I should go and see Lord Hill, sir, if I were you.'

By the six o'clock Radio 4 news, Mr Ross had disappeared (sent back to school to learn how to count?) and another joker with vowels like running butter was telling us that the countrywide figures added up to a miserable 20,000. He then ran off a list of industries affected that made any self-respecting profiteer blanche with fright.

Then it was time for the one-eyed ogre to take over. 9pm and there was old Dogged Dougall taking us through a 10 minute dirge about power cuts and the government standing firm and the dreadful affects on kidney machines before a scrappy, badly-edited film of the London demonstration.

The BBC brass had sorted out the figures. Now it was official. 200,000 had stopped work through-out the country.

Right, blow out the candles, time for bed. Or should we just check with the 10pm news on ITV? 'Good evening, something like 400,000 workers went on strike today in protest against the government's union reforms....'

David East

Serge-report of a participant

VICTOR SERGE's Birth of our Power (Penguin 7s) deals only incidentally with the Russian Revolution even though this one event dominates the whole book.

In what is really a fragment of autobiography, Serge brilliantly leads the reader through the failed workers' uprising in Barcelona of early 1917, his grisly experiences in a prisoner of war camp and on to what he fervently believes will be the fruition of all his vivid hopes and dreams - the Soviet, socialist workers' republic of Russia.

The power and beauty of the novel (as in all of Serge's work) derives mainly from his role as an active participant in the world-shaking events he is describing.

Through Serge's eyes we are shown that the revolts and revolutions with which he is involved are born from men's deepest hopes and desires.

Sorry mess

Not for him the theoretical ramblings of drawing-room revolutionaries - his heroes are working men - Dario, El Chorro, Faustin the Negro.

For these men, the future - when a society full of beauty will have been constructed out of the sorry mess that is capitalism - IS reality.

Serge expresses this in a very moving passage:

'Tomorrow is full of greatness. We will not have brought this victory to ripeness in vain. This city will be taken, if not by our hands, at least by others like ours, but stronger.

'Stronger perhaps for having been better hardened, thanks to our very weakness. If we are beaten, other men, infinitely different from us, infinitely like us will walk on a similar evening in 10 years, in 20 years (how long is really without importance) down this street meditating on the same victory.'

Made possible

'Perhaps they will think about our spilt blood. Their blood too will flow. But they will take the city.'

Such were and are the feelings of millions of workers throughout the world. It is for his ability to express this that it is important to read Birth of our Power rather than for his actual description of Soviet society.

It was the struggles of men like Serge and his comrades that made the Russian Revolution possible.

Despite all that has occurred in Russia since then, the battle was well worth fighting for. That is the message of this fine book.

Martin Tomkinson

NOTICES

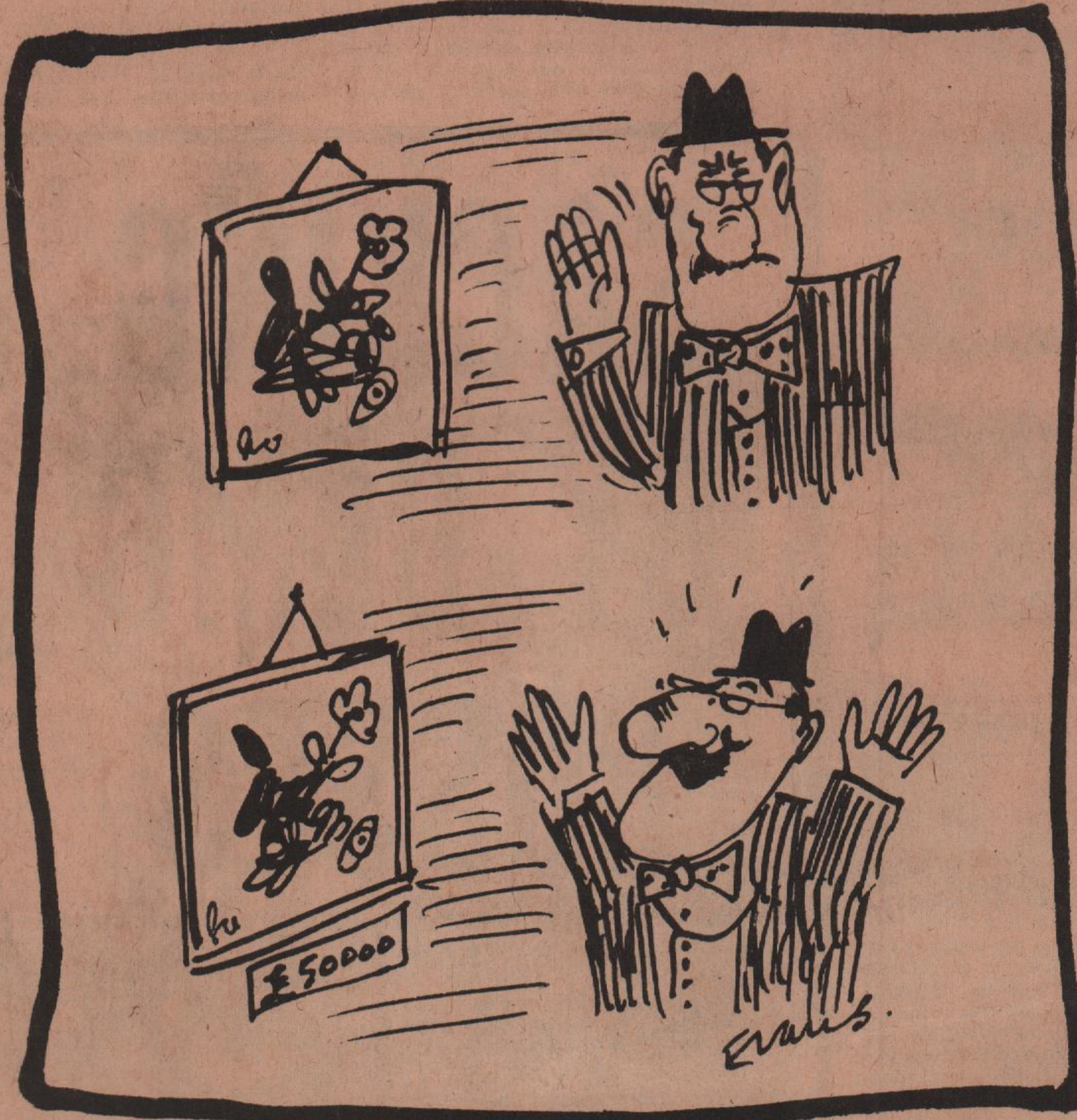
NORTH EAST REGION IS weekend school. This Saturday and Sunday (12 and 13 December) 10.30-5pm each day Dunelin House, New Elvet, Durham City. Chris Harman on Capitalism in the Seventies and Internationalism. Duncan Hallas on Revolutionary History and Building a socialist party in Britain.

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INTERNATIONAL SOCIALISM 45 now out. Jim Higgins on the Minority Movement, Ian Birchall on Sartre. 356p pp from 6 Cottons Gardens E2 8DN.

DAGENHAM IS: Tony Cliff on the revolutionary party. Marsh Green school South Close, New Road, Dagenham, Monday 14 December at 7pm.



COTTONS COLUMN

STRANGE THINGS are happening at the Daily Mirror. It is becoming a very 'left-wing' paper. The Tories are denounced and ridiculed and columnists like Keith Waterhouse are given a free hand to pour scorn and abuse on the government.

On Monday 'writer of the year' John Pilger visited Newcastle-upon-Tyne and wrote a ferocious feature on the life of £16 a week factory workers who are angry and bitter about their dreadful living and working conditions. Such expressions as 'there's a class war here' hit the startled reader's gaze.

What's going on? Has there been a paper palace revolution? Has King Cudlipp been deposed by the militants of the journalists' union?

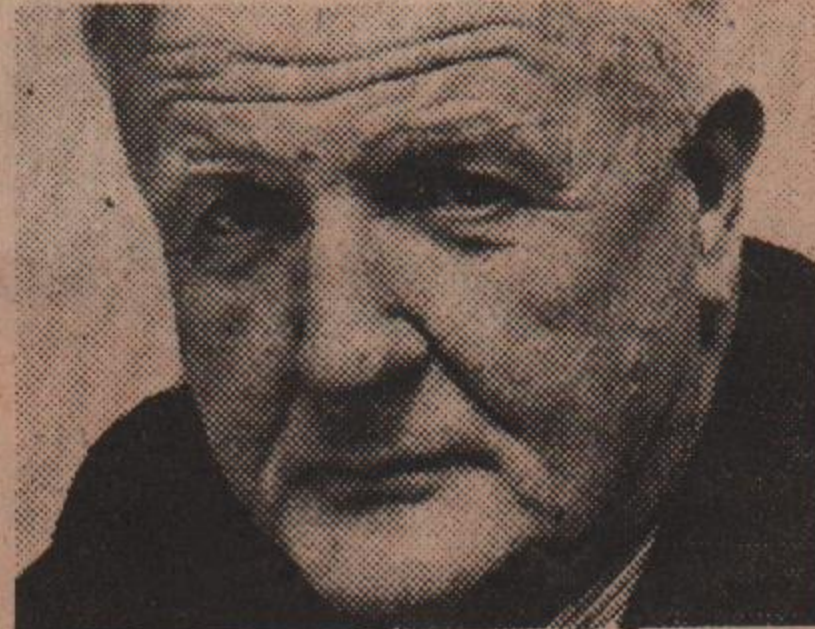
Alas, no. It's just the Mirror bosses making their traditional, cynical left swing to mop up working-class discontent and channel it into safe, parliamentary directions.

Cecil King, the ex-Mirror boss, showed how the operation works in his recently published memoirs. During the last war the Mirror became, in his words, the rank and file servicemen's paper, campaigning against the excesses of the top brass and war-time profiteers.

A famous cartoon lashing the oil firms for risking the lives of British seamen led to angry scenes in the Commons and a move to ban the paper. The move failed but the Mirror bosses knew they had gone too far and immediately became respectable again.

The paper's most vital role came in the post-war period. According to King, ruling class circles were worried in case there was a repetition of the near-revolutionary upheaval that followed the First World War. But the worry disappeared when wise counsels said: 'Leave it to the Mirror'.

It worked. Radical, tough talking, the Mirror appeared - and still appears - as the voice of the little man who gets a raw deal. But underlying all the tough talk is the siren



KING: 'Leave it to the Mirror'

song: Leave it to us, leave it to the Labour Party, leave it to the trade union leaders and, whatever you do, don't strike.

How nice that on Tuesday print-workers ignored that song and shut down the bosses' Daily Safety Valve.

STANLEY SIMPSON, managing director of a Newbury, Berks, printing firm, has a simple - not to say simple-minded - approach to life. He has asked his workers to leave their unions and stop demarcation disputes.

Demarcation disputes, he says, are making it hard for his company to make a profit. How about Stan resigning instead and handing over the firm to the workers? His presence is making it hard for them to earn a decent living.

Co-op that!

FIERCE COMPETITION, according to the Tories, is the answer to all our problems. Never mind the lame ducks, lads, just get stuck in with your profiteers' bover boots and the country will soon become buoyant again.

No one, least of all the top monopolies and financiers, take them seriously. Price fixing and secret deals between 'competitors' is the modern hallmark of big business.

A few weeks ago, all the big banks announced increased charges for customers. There was one exception - the tiny Co-Op bank - and the big

banking brothers turned on it savagely

The Co-Op is not a member of the magic inner circle of clearing banks. It has been annoying them for some time with its eccentric behaviour. Its charges are lower, it offers interest on current accounts and its branches are open on Saturdays.

In other words, it is acting just as a textbook capitalist is supposed to behave: undercutting its rivals, exploiting its workers and reaping the benefits in increased business.

Its rivals are trying to hound it out of business. The first step was to slap a 3s charge on any cheeky Co-Op customer trying to cash a cheque at one of their branches.

They are considering further sanctions but are prepared to give the Co-Op a chance if it drops all the silly talk about competition. If it steps into line by adopting their charges and opening hours, they might even allow it to become a fully-fledged member of the clearing banks.

Cross my palm...

TOP FIRMS back the Tory Party. Latest donations revealed by company accounts show the following donations:

Plessey Co, in their last financial year, gave £10,000 to British United Industrialists, which collects funds for anti-nationalisation bodies, including the Tory Party, plus a straight £1500 to the party itself. Plessey are keeping their fingers crossed that Heath will hive off the profitable parts of the Post Office.

The property firm of Slater Walker Securities gave the party £5000 last year. A director of the firm is Peter Walker, current Minister of Pollution.

And Scottish and Newcastle Breweries gave £3000 to the Scottish Tory Party, £2250 to the English version, £348 to the Economic League and £100 to Edinburgh Progressive (ie Tory) Associations.

Socialist Worker

Militants hammer out policy to defeat the Tories

MORE THAN 250 delegates attended a successful industrial conference held in Birmingham last weekend by the International Socialists. Militants from engineering, mines, motors, transport, printing and electricity plus white-collar workers from the teachers', draughtsmen's and supervisors' unions spoke at the conference.

Moving a resolution on the fight against anti-union laws, Roger Rosewell of the IS industrial committee traced the background of the current Tory offensive from the moves of the last Labour government to hold down wages, introduce productivity bargaining and change the balance of power on the shop floor.

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section of workers. Councils of Action would have a vital role to play in such a situation by organising solidarity action.

Labour dropped its anti-union proposals when the TUC agreed to act as industrial policemen. But the problems had not been solved.

The Tories took over to find themselves faced by a so-called 'wages explosion' by the lower paid and key unions led by left wing leaders.

He went on to analyse the role of the unions. The TUC has condemned strikes against the government and is confining its opposition to rallies and schools for union officers.

'There is no doubt,' he said, 'that if the TUC were to call for action that they would get a terrific response.'

Difficulty

The left union leaders have the power to defeat the Bill. If Jack Jones of the Transport Workers was to tell every branch and factory where he has members not to co-operate with the laws, not to cross picket lines, not to accept ballots or cooling-off periods with the full backing of the union, the Tories would be in great difficulty.

'Let them arrest Jack Jones and see what the response is,' Rosewell said. 'But although some of the union leaders don't like the laws, they don't like shopfloor militancy either.'

This means that rank and file workers will have to do the job. Local Councils of Action should be built in every area to link and spearhead the fight.

He said that the Liaison Committee for the Defence of Trade Unions had issued the call for the 8 December strike, but it was a bureaucratic organisation. It had to be democratised and made into a fighting organisation. Councils of Action, when they were set up, should seek affiliation to the Liaison Committee.

Refused

The Communist Party, which organises the Liaison Committee, was facing a crisis, he stressed. Some leading industrial party members had refused to call their members out on 8 December and in London Communist Party teachers had split several ways on the strike issue.

He ended by warning that the government and bosses would not rush to use the new laws. They would wait to choose their time and attack a weak

A resolution on trade union democracy spelt out a policy for putting the unions under the control of the rank and file. It called for the regular election and accountability of all officials and that their wages should be geared to the rates in their industry.

The resolution was moved by Jim Higgins, a lay member of the executive of the Post Office Engineering Union. He described the trade union leaderships as a special social group used by the employers to keep the workers under control and to check any threat to the rights of profit and privilege.

But he stressed that it was not possible for the union leaders to sell-out the members completely and openly go over to the side of the employers. There was a direct link between the members and the officials that maintained some check on them.

Turning to the role of the Communist Party, Higgins said that it acted as an auxiliary of the left union leaders.

'For the CP', he said, '8 December is a move to impress the left leaders that the party is still a force to be reckoned with and deserves its place within the union machine. The party doesn't want to turn the anti-union campaign into an all-out political fight.'

Accept

'But there is growing opposition to the party line by their industrial militants. The movement has forged ahead of it and the party leaders have had to accept demands such as Councils of Action.'

Higgins said that the key question was turning the unions into instruments of the membership. The officials hide behind the excuse that the membership is apathetic, but apathy can break down rapidly, as had been seen in the post office following the sacking of Lord Hall and the fear that the post office was going to lose its profitable parts to private firms.

In a lively discussion, the main point of dispute was between the majority of speakers who supported the call for the election of all officials and members of DATA who felt that the vital question was the annual election of a lay executive which could be allowed to appoint officials.

We hope to publish the two main resolutions in future issues.

Action councils get under way

MILITANT trade unionists in Waltham Forest, East London, last week formed a Council of Action to fight the Tories' anti-union laws.

At the meeting were delegates - mainly shop stewards - from the NUR, TGWU drivers, TGWU docks, SOGAT Division 1, NUT and NUFTO.

They unanimously condemned their union leaders for not supporting the 8 December strike. They decided to go back

to their branches and move resolutions criticising their union executives and demanding official backing from them in the fight against the laws.

Members of the Councils of Action will visit local factories to argue their case and organise mass leafleting. A rally will be held in the area in January.

MANCHESTER:- Four rank and file trade union committees have joined forces to

call for a Council of Action in the area.

The Electricity Supply Stewards' Combine, NUPE (Hospitals) Stewards, Manchester Rank and File Printworkers Committee and the DATA (AEI) Joint Office Committee are to sponsor a conference to launch a Council of Action.

All trade unionists are invited to attend the conference on Tuesday, 15 December, 8pm, Chorlton Town Hall, All Saints, Manchester.

SACKING THREAT BY BLMC BOSSES

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BIRMINGHAM:- The 5000 sackings announced by the British Leyland Motor Corporation last week will mean a gloomy Christmas for many car workers. The cuts will hit BLMC's Austin-Morris division and will include the closure of two complete factories in Coventry and heavy sackings at four other centres: Longbridge, (Birmingham), Cowley, (Oxford), Swindon and Llanelli.

BLMC is determined to ruthlessly accumulate more profits. The sacking and 'reorganisation' are an essential part of the company's campaign to increase

profits at the expense of workers' job security and living standards.

BLMC is attempting to replace piecework with speedup and Measured Day Work. In mid-November the company presented proposals for MDW to its Pressed Steel Fisher plant at Cowley.

Attached to the proposals was a so-called 'stable earnings' pay plan. One of the most important demands of car workers is guaranteed earnings for lay-offs during strikes.

Using the demand, the company has linked a proposal to guarantee 75 per cent of earnings in the first year to the acceptance of MDW.

BLMC has tied this 'guaranteed earnings' plan to penalties against strikers. The scheme will be suspended if disputes occur either at Cowley or at any other BLMC plant that affects production at Cowley.

Part of attack

At Pressed Steel Fisher Castle Bromwich in Birmingham, the company has warned that the plant may have to close unless earnings are reduced or checked.

The aim is the same: BLMC wants to introduce MDW.

The redundancies are part of this offensive. By sacking 5000 workers and closing several factories, the company hopes to blackmail its other workers into accepting MDW.

And if this initial offensive is unsuccessful, BLMC hopes that the government's anti-union laws, which chairman Lord Stokes has been campaigning for, will intimidate workers into accepting the pay plan and sackings.

It is vital that the redundancies are opposed militantly. They mean the dole for 5000 workers, but more than that, they are a threat to every worker in the BLMC combine.



SU Carburettor banner from Birmingham on the demonstration

FROM PAGE ONE

Huge demonstrations were held in major centres. 15,000 marched in a lively parade in LONDON from Tower Hill to Hyde Park behind the banners of SOGAT Division A.

One of the biggest marches ever seen was held in LIVERPOOL. Police estimates put the numbers at 20,000. 2000 marched in MANCHESTER and demonstrations ranging from 500 to 1000 were held in other towns.

8 December was an important step forward for the organised labour movement. Faced by savage attacks on their union rights, hundreds of thousands refused to be intimidated by red scares and empty nonsense about 'threats to democracy'.

But the fight isn't over. Most of the unions remain hostile to militant action to kill the Bill. More than eight million trade unionists stayed at work on Tuesday.

In the coming weeks we must redouble our efforts to rouse the rank and file to the dangers ahead, to work for bigger stoppages on 12 January and after and to lay the basis for a powerful rank and file movement to transform the unions into real fighting organisations.

MORRIS SAY YES BUT PSF STICK OUT

OXFORD:- British Leyland's determined attempt to replace piecework with Measured Day Work is aimed at two factories.

In the car assembly plant (formerly Morris Motors) workers from the old Morris Minor 1000 line were to form the basis of the work force on a new model, code named ADO 28. But the management wrenched on two agreements in the factory, concerning who were to work the new model and the interim payment on the line pending the negotiation of new piece rates.

They said also that they wanted a 'new payment system' on the ADO 28. The new system turned out to be MDW.

A five week strike - the longest in the history of the factory - was the result. The management eventually gave way over the movement of labour and the interim payment issues. It was agreed to discuss the new payment system 'as soon as possible' and work was resumed.

But before the new payment system came up, the management appealed over the heads of the shop stewards to selected workers who were to man the ADO 28 line offering them a £37 a week interim payment. About 100 accepted and the matter was put to a mass meeting of the factory. The meeting decided, against the ad-

vice of their stewards, to accept the interim payment and instructed the stewards to start negotiating the new scheme.

In the car body works (Pressed Steel Fisher) the management presented the same deal. It was thrown out by the union branch, and a new deal, offering £40 a week, substituted. This was again rejected.

The management's proposals are totally unacceptable. Piecework is to be replaced by a flat rate payment - top rate £40 a week - with work to be at 'an average piecework effort' (measured by work study).

BLMC is determined to get the deal through in one form or another. The danger is that many workers will feel attracted by the prospect of £40 a week and the local leadership might be isolated.

To stop this it will be necessary to fight for demands that expose the hollowness of the employers' offer, in particular:

1. A proper guaranteed wage - five days' work or five days' pay.
2. A guaranteed cost of living bonus to be paid annually.
3. A recruitment guarantee - no running down of the workforce.
4. Full mutuality over all changes in work practice, work study and movement of labour.

MDW is slavery says boss - page 5.

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